

Interview with Sam Meter

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Interviewer: Michael Maniscalco

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Maniscalco: Today is August 9th, 2008. We're sitting in the junior livestock building, and we're sitting with Sam Meter. How are you doing, Sam?

Meter: Pretty good. How are you today?

Maniscalco: Pretty good. Thanks for asking. It's really great that we could meet you here and do this interview with you. It's kind of an interesting setting, lots of things going on and lots of people around. Let's ask you some of the easy, easy questions first. If you could start off with your age and date of birth?

Meter: I was born July 17, 1989. I'm nineteen now.

Maniscalco: You're nineteen now. Okay. Where were you born?

Meter: Here in Springfield, Illinois. I've lived in Central Illinois my whole life.

Maniscalco: Now, where you grew up, did you have a lot of family around that area?

Meter: Yeah, I've lived on a farm my whole life. I grew up, my family's always been around, and my dad actually owns an agricultural manufacturing business. So him and his business is like a half mile up the road from my house, and that's where my grandparents live, and my uncle lives right down the road as well. So everybody's pretty close knit together there.

Maniscalco: Great. So what kind of a childhood was it?

Meter: What's that?

Maniscalco: I mean, what kind of childhood was it? Now that you're nineteen looking back on it, what would you say?

Meter: Well, I mean, I probably had a better, what I think, of a work ethic and outlook on how to try to succeed at life. I mean, growing up on a farm, you

really get to see the kind of aspects of how to do things, how to work, what you need to do to make yourself better.

Maniscalco: So you mentioned doing a lot of work and having a work ethic. What sorts of things did you do on the farm?

Meteer: Well, my family has raised show pigs for years and years and years, and over the past few years, I've kind of taken that on by myself, because my dad's been really busy with farming, which I help him with as well, and his business, and the show pigs operation has kind of been my deal for myself. So that's one of the major things that I've taken on here lately especially.

Maniscalco: So I imagine with that, you have quite a bit of chores.

Meteer: Yeah. A couple of years ago, I had well over 100 pigs on my farm, and that was kind of the first time I'd ever had more than two or three, so you really get to see how you need to work hard and how you need to succeed at what you're doing. And then I've kind of gone back down and I just have a few show pigs again, but I really enjoy working with them. It's not too much of a chore to take care of them when you enjoy doing it.

Maniscalco: That's good. So when you have a couple hundred show pigs at your home, what's the normal day like for that?

Meteer: Well, I was in high school then, and it was like I'd wake up and I'd go to school, and then I got home I'd go out, and as soon as I started outside, I'd start working, and then it got dark, and I'd have to go in and do my homework from high school, and then just go right to bed. It was kind of like a never-ending cycle like that. But it was an enjoyable thing to do, though, because I mean, it was something that I really loved doing, and something that I've always loved doing.

Maniscalco: Great. Well, having all of these chores and everything, when did you have time for friends?

Meteer: Well, on the weekends and stuff, I'd usually be able to go out with them. And then I'd hang out with them at school and stuff too. But I have really made a lot of friends through my project too as well, like coming out here to the state fair and different fairs, I've met a lot of people that raise pigs as well. And I've made quite a few friends just doing that as well.

Maniscalco: Really? Now, you've mentioned a project, I'm imagining it's FFA?

Meteer: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Okay. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Meteer: Yeah. I have been in FFA now for five years. I actually last year was the state vice-president for Illinois, so last year, I spent—I actually took a year off of school in between high school and college, because when you're a state officer, you travel around the state for a year, and you're probably on the road over 300 days out of the year that you are a state officer, and you get to kind of spread the word of how you can get involved in agriculture, and how it's a great industry to really be involved with.

Maniscalco: So how did you end up as an officer?

Meteer: Well, two years ago, I guess, I ran for sectional president in my area, which was three and a half counties put together. They formed the section that I was in charge of. And then at the end of that year, I decided I'd like to run for state officer, and I went ahead and there's an application process you go through, and it kind of narrows it down to the top ten in the state. And then at the end of the year, the Illinois FFA has their annual convention, and there's usually about 3,500 people that attend it, and the top ten get to go in front of everybody and kind of give their speeches on why they think they should be a state officer, and then there's a vote by about 400 or so delegates that are chosen by the schools that vote on who should be the state officers, and I was lucky enough to get one of the spots.

Maniscalco: So what are the attributes that they're looking for through the application process?

Meteer: Well, they want somebody that can, they think, speak to a lot of different people, and somebody that can speak in front of crowds comfortably, and not be too worried about trying to wow anyone. Just try and be kind of a down to earth sort of person, and just like an all-around kind of knowledgeable of agriculture and things like that.

Maniscalco: Now I know like through FFA, you said you were involved for around five years. Through FFA, you do projects, correct? Can you kind of explain some of the projects you did?

Meteer: Well, when I was younger in high school, one of my projects was I worked at my dad's business, which was like an ag-mech project. And then also my swine project here that I still do. That's been my major project that I've done, but there's actually over fifty areas that are available for FFA members to take part in.

Maniscalco: Well, I imagine you've seen lots of those different areas. What are some of the more memorable ones?

Meteer: Well, there's a lot of variety. I mean, one of the ones that always has kind of interesting things is there's wildlife production and management, and that could be anywhere from working out in like a conservation area or something like that. So I mean, there's a lot of variety everywhere, from food service,

which could be cooking food at a restaurant, all the way back to like poultry production, where you could raise chickens.

Maniscalco: Do any of those projects that you've seen, do any of them stick out in your mind?

Meteer: Well, there's a lot of different projects that I can kind of remember and stuff, but I've seen so many, because each FFA member has one, and it's just kind of, it's great to see that all the FFA members have different projects that they worked on, and it's really good for me, I know, to have had my swine project.

Maniscalco: Great. Can you kind of explain your swine project a little more in depth, like what kinds of pigs did you raise, or what was the purpose of what you were doing?

Meteer: Well, like I said, my dad and my brother, my older brother, have always been raising show pigs and going around the state and showing them around different fairs, and I just kind of kept with the tradition, I guess you'd say. I've always enjoyed doing it. It's not as much for me about going and winning everywhere I go, but I enjoy just kind of the social aspect of being able to go and kind of see some of the friends that I've made throughout it and kind of talk to them, and get to exhibit, I've always enjoyed showing pigs and stuff. So I'm really interesting in the judging aspect of livestock, because I'm actually going to be on a livestock judging team in college. So it's always been something that I've really been interested in and passionate about.

Maniscalco: Cool. Can you tell me a little bit about livestock judging?

Meteer: Well, in livestock judging, we'll go around and judge swine, sheep, and cattle, and maybe some goats before the year is over. And you just kind of look at some of the attributes that make them a good animal, like the muscle shaping, how well they walk and everything. And you'll probably go around and judge ten or so classes, and you'll give reasons, like you'll speak to the judges on why you think that this animal is better than the other, and they kind of grade you on what you think you did the best. Our team will be judging against different colleges from around the area and around the country at these different contests.

Maniscalco: Where are the contests held? Are they parts of fairs?

Meteer: There are some that are at different fairs, and some that different colleges just host that will bring everything together, and they'll hold like an invitational, I guess you'd say, and invite a bunch of people to come and take part in it.

Maniscalco: You said this is part of your college experience, so you're doing it as an extra-curricular activity, or do you get credit for it?

- Meteer: Well, it's kind of an extra-curricular. I got a scholarship, actually, to be on the team, so I mean, it's something that there's a lot of people that are interested and wanting to do that, so it's a pretty big deal.
- Maniscalco: Well, since you got a scholarship to be on the team, I guess you kind of already know a little bit of the attributes that swine should have. Can you kind of describe those things? What are you looking for in the perfect swine?
- Meteer: Well, in a perfect pig, I guess you'd say, you're looking for big, kind of heavy muscled, especially in like the different, like what you would kill for the meat for pigs. You look for heavy muscled, big, like they've got big hams and everything in them, and you want them to walk smooth. Just kind of be almost like what you'd think of like a bodybuilder of a person; you'd kind of want that in a hog.
- Maniscalco: Interesting. Now, what breed of hog have you raised exactly?
- Meteer: Well, I've always raised, they're called Chester Whites my whole life, that's kind of what my family's always been into, and it's not really the most popular breed, I guess you'd say. But it's kind of making a little bit more of a comeback, I guess you'd say. A long time ago, it was one of the biggest breeds. But it's kind of gone down in numbers a little bit, but I've raised a little bit of everything. But mainly it's just been Chester Whites.
- Maniscalco: So why do you think the popularity of Chester Whites has gone down?
- Meteer: It just kind of like goes in waves, really. I mean, right now the Yorkshire breed and the Hampshire breed and the Durocs are really way up, and have a lot of numbers around the country and stuff. It just kind of goes in waves. Right now, Chester Whites are really on an uphill climb again and starting to become more popular.
- Maniscalco: Interesting. Now, you're going to a university, you're going to be on a livestock judging team, you got a scholarship for that. But what are you going to school for?
- Meteer: I'm going for agriculture education. I'm hoping to become a high school ag teacher, actually. So I mean, after my last year with the FFA, and traveling throughout the state, I really kind of became interested in wanting to do something like that.
- Maniscalco: That's interesting. I mean, what are your hopes and dreams as a high school ag teacher?
- Meteer: Well, I've always enjoyed like the FFA projects and everything, and I'd like to kind of be on the other side of helping out the students, and helping them try and become officers within the FFA, and help them have successful FFA projects.

Maniscalco: Great. As an FFA member, I'm sure you've seen tons and tons of different types of agriculture out there within the state of Illinois. Are there some sorts of things that you're more partial to, other parts that—?

Meteer: Well, I've always been interested in like the production agriculture, like raising corn and soybeans, and raising livestock and things. But I mean, you'll go, I've been around the state and seen a whole of the different ag science projects and different things like that. I mean, the actual biggest FFA chapter in the state is Chicago High School for Ag Sciences, up in Chicago. And they are all focused on agriculture sciences, and kind of applying those sorts of things. So I mean, there's a huge variety just in the state, here in Illinois.

Maniscalco: That's cool. So I imagine you've visited that program in itself.

Meteer: Yeah.

Maniscalco: What was it like?

Meteer: It's just a huge, huge complex up there. There's well over—I think there's over 500 students that are going to the school, and you have to go through an application process to even go to the school there.

Maniscalco: That must be very impressive.

Meteer: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Very cool. So you're raising these pigs, you're raising swine. Are you raising a lot of swine now?

Meteer: No, not so much now. I've really kind of gotten out of it since I'm going into college, I'm going to be really busy with some other things, like my livestock judging, and going to school. So this last couple of years, I've just bought a few show pigs at sales in the spring. So I really haven't had too much of an operation here in the past couple of years.

Maniscalco: So tell me, you're buying these show pigs in the spring. What's the process? What are you doing to them throughout the year?

Meteer: Well, you buy them in the spring, and then you'll take them home, and there's special kinds of feed you've got to live to them, so they'll try and grow it up to become a good show pig. You'll kind of walk them around and break them to be able to show. So it's a lot of work try and get it all put together, but it's a really good project.

Maniscalco: Cool. Are you thinking that maybe in the future, you would get back into the swine?

- Meteer: Well, I'm kind of hoping, so that once I get through college and everything, and maybe get an agriculture teaching position somewhere, that I could be able to get back into swine and try and become more active in it again.
- Maniscalco: You know, things are really changing in agriculture now. The price of corn has gone up incredibly. What are some of those things that you see?
- Meteer: Well, like you've said, the price of corn and soybeans have really gone up here lately. It's really great for the production crop producer, and it's kind of hard on the livestock producer, though. I mean, either way you look at it, it's good for agriculture as a whole, because there's a demand for it in so many different places, between the ethanol and between food and between raising livestock, there's always some place for it to go. It's really great to see that people are finally seeing that agriculture is such an important part in our nation's industry.
- Maniscalco: What do you see for the future?
- Meteer: I think it's going to keep getting better, with different things like ag science, you've got like aquaculture, where you have fish hatcheries, and all sorts of different things now. So I mean, it's really looking bright for agriculture in the future.
- Maniscalco: What about, you know, there's a lot of family farms, you come from a family farm, but it seems like they're kind of disappearing, little by little?
- Meteer: Yeah, the family farm, we're one of the few that are even around in my area still. It seems like you can't really get into farming, because it's not like there's more land just showing up to buy. So between urban sprawl kind of going out and taking over farmland, and then a lot of just different family farms aren't really able to make it, and there's a lot of big operations that are coming and taking the land away. It's really bad to see that happening for family farms, because there will be families that have had a farm for generations and generations, and now here recently, there's big operations that are coming in and taking away the land. It's kind of a bad thing to see that, and the fact that the average age of a farmer has just gone way up here lately, and it's hard to get anyone interested in wanting to do that, and it's hard to, if you are interested, even become involved in doing that.
- Maniscalco: What's the future for your family farm?
- Meteer: Well, my family's got our farm pretty good, I think. I mean, I think me and my older brother will be able to take over it after my dad, and be able to continue with raising all the things that we have over the years. I think our farm is going to be all right. I don't see us having any problems here in the near future.

Maniscalco: In your opinion, what's that process going to be like, taking the farm over from your dad?

Meteer: Well, me and my brother have been helping for years and years, and helping out on the farm, and driving the combine and different things like that, driving tractors. It's kind of going to be a gradual process. I mean, it's not like my dad's anywhere near wanting to give up the farm to us, because he still really enjoys doing it, and we've always enjoyed helping him out and things. But I think my brother will really be the one that will probably take over it mainly, and kind of be the main manager, I guess you'd say, of the farm. But I'm going to be interested in hanging around and helping out still, though.

Maniscalco: Well, that's great. Well, I have one last question for you, and it's the normal question that I always ask, and then maybe we can look at your pig and kind of explain some things about that. But this is going to be an oral history interview; it's going to be archived forever and ever and ever. And maybe one day down the road, somebody that knew you now, maybe somebody that knew you through your FFA, things like that, will say, "Hey, there's Sam Meteer's interview in there. I wonder what he said." What would you like to put in this interview for them?

Meteer: Well, I just like to always promote agriculture. I mean, that's one of the main things I do, because a lot of people, they really don't know how important it is to our state. There's a lot of people that just aren't really even in touch with how important it is. I mean, it's the largest industry within our state, so it's really kind of coming around now, between ethanol and the soy bio-diesel, and the different things that ag science is accomplish, how important is really is to our state.

Maniscalco: Well, great. Thank you very much.

Meteer: Thanks.

Maniscalco: Can you give us the guided tour of your pigs?

Meteer: What's that?

Maniscalco: Can you give us a guided tour of your pigs?

Meteer: Sure. (laughter)

(end of interview)