

## Interview with Paul Shuman

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, September 22, 2008. My name is Mark DePue, and I'm the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And I'm here with Paul Shuman today. Paul was a former district director, as I understand, with the Illinois Farm Bureau. And maybe to anchor this one, as a reference point, we talked to your sister, Janet Roney—is that how you pronounce her last name?

Shuman: That's correct.

DePue: And had a fascinating discussion with her this morning. And as the family historian, she filled us in from all the way to the late 1700s up to the present. And obviously, we spent a lot of time talking about your father, Charles Shuman, and we'll want to ask you a few questions with that as well. But let's start with our standard intro and ask you when and where you were born.

Shuman: I was born in 1937—December 10—in Decatur, Illinois, in Decatur and Macon County Hospital.

DePue: But you didn't grow up in Decatur, did you?

Shuman: No, I didn't. I always lived in Sullivan.

DePue: And you grew up on the family farm?

Shuman: Yes.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about your parents.

Shuman: My parents were Charles and Ida. Ida was a schoolteacher in Sullivan—how far back do you want to—do you want any of this historical..?

DePue: What's Ida's last name?

Shuman: Her maiden name was Wilson, and she came to Illinois from a small town in Indiana, where she became the high school teacher. She met my father, and they were subsequently married. He was a farmer at that time. Mom was a graduate of Indiana University, and Dad was a graduate of the University of Illinois.

DePue: You said 1937 is when you were born?

Shuman: I was born in 1937.

DePue: So you don't really remember much about the Depression years at all.

Shuman: No, (laughter) other than that life on the farm wasn't all that prosperous, (laughter) even into the thirties and forties.

DePue: What kind of a childhood did you have on the farm, then?

Shuman: Oh, we had a lot of fun on the farm. There were lots of things to do. And Dad was something of an entrepreneur. He was in the seed corn business, he raised purebred Duroc hogs and purebred Angus cattle. He just had his finger in a lot of things. And we liked working around the livestock and working on the farm. And he did have a hired man, and he was an agreeable sort. So farm life was pretty good for young children.

DePue: Well, describe the farm if you could.

Shuman: At that time, there was probably over around 420 acres in the farm that Dad was farming, which we called the home farm, and then besides that, he owned some land of his own, which amounted to another forty-five or fifty acres. So he had close to 500 acres that he was farming, which was a big operation in those days, when he started farming in the late twenties and then into the early thirties.

DePue: And you say only a small part of that land was land that he owned. So he was farming his father's land, or he's farming with his father?

Shuman: Yes, he was farming his father's farm. When he first started farming, which would have been in 1928, I believe, he farmed with his father, but my memory—which doesn't start, obviously, until after 1937—was that Grandpa Shuman was not involved in the farming operation in a management or operations way. He lived in town and came out and did a few things on the farm, but mostly just observed and did his own thing.

DePue: Now, tell me a little bit more about your brothers and sister, as well.

Shuman: I'll start with my older brother, Charles. Let's see, I was born in '37, so he was born in '35. All of us—all four of us—went to the University of Illinois, all graduated—happily. (laughter) And after he graduated, he came back and started farming on what we called the home farm, which included all of the land that Dad had farmed. And he had help; he had a hired hand that helped him somewhat, who

was one of his high school classmates. And when I graduated from college, I came back to the farm, also, which would have been in 1959, and have been farming since. John transferred to Southern Illinois University and got his degree down there. I said earlier...

DePue: Is he your twin brother?

Shuman: He's my twin brother. And he got a degree from Southern Illinois University. And he first went to Minneapolis to work for I believe it was Swift and Company, but one of the big hog-packers up there. And it was like two years after that that he came back to the farm. Janet graduated—let's see, I graduated in '59, so she graduated in '64, I guess—probably in there sometime. And she taught for a while and then was married—I don't think she taught after she married—and became a farmwife.

DePue: Let's take a very quick break here.

Shuman: Okay.

DePue: Paul, tell me a little bit about growing up on the farm, in terms of what kind of chores you had.

Shuman: Well, (laughter) that was maybe the downside, because (laughter) we did have to do a lot of work, and some of it was more than a little bit unpleasant, of course. As I said, we had livestock, and even after Dad became involved in the IAA, the livestock that we dealt with was the Angus cow herd, and then a few hogs that we raised for 4-H projects. And then I had some chickens. But anyway, we were responsible for taking care of those livestock, even though we were relatively young. And we did have some help; one of Dad's tenants would help us occasionally with the cattle herd, and Dad would help on weekends. So the usual kind of things that you do with livestock—making sure they had feed, mucking out the pens, so to speak. And then with the chickens, of course, we had gathering the eggs and feeding those things.

DePue: What was the routine before going to school, for you?

Shuman: Before going to school? First thing, of course, get up in the morning, get dressed, go outside and do chores, which was the routine with the livestock, and then back inside, eat breakfast, and get ready for school. And when I was younger, my mom drove the school bus some, which wasn't really a school bus; it was a large—well, no, not a large—a small limousine that the school district had purchased. So we rode that to school. And eight years in rural schools, and then four years in high school in Sullivan.

DePue: At what time did you become aware that your dad wasn't just a regular farmer?

Shuman: (laughter) Well, that's just been about as long as I can remember. Even when I was very young, I can remember Dad coming home from some meeting—either

an REA meeting or a Farm Bureau meeting, or a Market Association meeting. They had something they called Serum Association, which was—their goal was to provide vaccines for cholera, which was one of the most devastating diseases that could occur in livestock, particularly hogs. So he had a lot of things on his plate, and he worked late at night, and lots of times on the tractor. And there was always a lot of things going on. And Mom was very involved in activities, as well—the PTA, that kind of thing. Women's groups.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about the religious foundation you received from your parents.

Shuman: Dad and Mom both were very faithful members of the Methodist church in Sullivan. Dad taught Sunday school his entire life—well, his entire adult life—until just a few years before he passed away. And Mom was involved in the—well, she died in 1954, but until that time, she was involved in the women's groups as well as the other activities of the Methodist church. Dad, although he was not a Methodist lay speaker, was often asked to preach at not only our church but other churches when their pulpits were empty for one reason or another. He was a natural speaker—a gifted speaker—and did those things quite well. And very devoted Christian—devout Christian—and I hope I (laughter)... I probably don't reach their standards, but they set pretty high standards for it.

DePue: I suspect your dad would be pretty proud. I'm amazed though—I read someplace he taught Sunday school for sixty-five years.

Shuman: That's correct.

DePue: (laughter) That's a long time to...

Shuman: That's a long time to teach Sunday school.

DePue: How about some of the family holidays? Was there anything special about Christmas or Thanksgiving in your family?

Shuman: Well, of course Christmas and Thanksgiving were always special, but one of the things our family did probably a lot more than others was take a spring trip. And this happened really more after Dad got started as Illinois Farm Bureau president. Around Easter time, we'd take about a week—and he'd actually take us out of school sometimes—and go on a trip generally to the South, or the Southeast, or the Southwest, toward warmer weather. Particularly if we went southeast, we did a lot of visits to Civil War sites in that area. And that was kind of unique.

And as far as the family get-togethers, Dad had two sisters and Mom had one sister, and their families would get together with ours, either at their places or our place, or with my grandparents until they passed away, at Christmas and Thanksgiving both. We had pretty strong family connections.

DePue: So an extended family, when you had Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Shuman: It was very extended. (laughter) And we just had a wonderful time. We had lots of cousins. It was good for the kids; we just had a big time.

DePue: Any special traditions you remember?

Shuman: Gosh, I don't recall that there were any special traditions.

DePue: Did the cousins eat with the adults?

Shuman: Oh, yes.

DePue: So one big table?

Shuman: One big table. And if we had it at our house, we had a table that was built in such a way that you could extend it out, and it would get—gosh, I have no idea how many people could sit around it, but it was a big table. And of course, cooking went on all day. And fried chicken was wonderful. It was easy to get chickens because (laughter) they were right outside the door.

DePue: So you had chickens instead of turkey for Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Shuman: Well, you know what, I don't remember for sure, but I wouldn't be surprised but what we had chicken a lot of the time. We may have had turkeys, too, but we didn't raise our own turkeys.

DePue: Well, a little bit more challenging or difficult question for you, perhaps, but I'm sure you remember when your mother passed away.

Shuman: Oh yeah. That was a tough time for everyone.

DePue: Was it a surprise? Was it a sudden...?

Shuman: No, she had been ill for some time and in declining health. She had—they call it—when she was a young girl, they diagnosed it as St. Vitus's dance, but they determined later was a form of rheumatic fever. And she suffered some heart damage from that, so years later, after that event in her childhood, she became weak and had some heart attacks. And finally went to Chicago—can't remember the surgeon's name—and this was in 1954—and went under the knife and had open-heart surgery in an attempt to remove the scars from her heart. And she died on the hospital table. So for 1954, it was pretty radical surgery in an effort to try to save her life. Because, as I found out later, the prognosis they knew she was not going to be able to survive very long with this kind of serious heart damage. And that was a tough time for my father, and my sister Janet, too, being the youngest. My older brother Charles was already in college, so... It was just as tough for him, but then he wasn't there for the next year and a half or so, when he was in college. Anyway.

DePue: And how old were you when she passed away?

- Shuman: I was a junior in high school, or between my junior and senior years, so I had one more year of high school, which would have made me I guess seventeen, probably.
- DePue: Now, we know from our conversation with Janet earlier that your father, by this time, had already been president of the Illinois Farm Bureau for several years, and he was just about ready to become president of the American Farm Bureau, and in both jobs, he was traveling up to Chicago during the week, and he would only be home at the weekends.
- Shuman: That's correct.
- DePue: So there's a year or two years, perhaps, that you and your brother and Janet are at home, and your dad's on the road all the time. Was that an especially challenging time for all of the children?
- Shuman: (laughter) It was difficult at first, but we learned how to survive. And Dad was fortunate in finding a housekeeper that could help. I don't want to say she took care of us, but she actually did. She cooked our meals and cleaned the house and lived with us for those years. And her name was Mrs. Robinson. She was from down close to Shelbyville, and she was just a sweet—well, at that time, I thought she was an old gal, but she wasn't all that old. But she, of course, didn't take the place of mother. But Dad was devoted to his family; there's no question about that. He called us on a regular basis during the week and talked to every one of us that was around, at least, at that point—because of course, we were involved in school activities. It wasn't probably as bad as you might think it was; the grief—the loss—was the main thing, losing your mother. But Dad was there, if not physically, his influence was still quite strong. And we had things that we were expected to do, and we did them to the best of our ability. (laughter) And if we didn't, we suffered the consequences.
- DePue: Well, I'm curious, with Janet being quite a bit younger, or at least a couple years younger, how discipline was sorted out. Who was the boss, so to speak, when Dad was up north?
- Shuman: (laughter) Well, of course, there was a pecking order. Charles was bigger than the rest of us, so I guess...
- DePue: But he wasn't around that much, from what you said.
- Shuman: Well, during the summers, he was. That was our cross we had to bear. Don't repeat that. (laughter) But he was there a good bit of the time and did come home on weekends, as well. Of course, Dad was home every weekend, so if there were problems, Dad heard about them. And he called during the week, too, so he knew what was... He kept in touch. And it's not like he walked away and didn't pay any more attention to us. And I know there were times for all of us when we were pretty lonely, and it was hardest on Janet than anyone. But I think we came through it pretty well. (laughter)

- DePue: So the three of you—the younger ones—got along pretty well, or you had your typical, normal...
- Shuman: We were pretty typical. We had disagreements. (laughter) Janet could be a pill, but then John and Paul could be pills, too, so...
- DePue: Well, you seem to have all weathered it very well.
- Shuman: We have. I feel very close to all my siblings.
- DePue: I wanted to talk a little bit more about your father, because of the importance of his role in the American Farm Bureau and the issues that were being addressed at that time. And I talked quite a bit, as you know, with Janet about this already, but I think you wanted to have an opportunity to express in your own words some of your impressions of your father's work. How would you describe his personality? Let's start that way.
- Shuman: Oh, his personality. (laughter) Oh, jeepers. I don't think I've ever met a man that had the combination—I'm sure there are others out there—that had the combination of qualities that he had. He was very intelligent; he was very articulate; he had a phenomenal memory for people, and faces, and places, and events; he was very self-confident. He knew he had these skills, but on the other hand, he was just as common as an old shoe. When he came home—and I think Janet told you this—when he came home from Chicago or wherever he had been that week, the first thing he'd do would be put on his bib overalls and want to get out and get busy doing something on the farm—and many times, to help with the cattle herd, because we had like thirty or forty cows that we had to take care of. So he liked to help with that. Anyway. And he had a drive to succeed, I think, and to accomplish things. When he first got involved in Farm Bureau, it wasn't so much Farm Bureau, it was what Farm Bureau was doing or needed to do. And I think I mentioned the Serum Association and the Shipping Association. Well, he wasn't so involved in supply side—the supply coming in—but... And helping to organize the Rural Electric—REAs in the county. And let's see, what else? Oh, and school issues. He was very—and Mom was, too, Mom being an ex-math teacher. Anyway. (laughter) There was always something going on around home.
- DePue: And again, we talked quite a lot about this with Janet, but wanted to get your own opinion about his philosophy about farming that he took into his role on both the Illinois and at the national level.
- Shuman: Well, in Illinois, when he was first elected to the board of directors... And in agriculture in the forties and fifties and sixties, the issues that they were facing were polarizing—you were on one side of an issue or on the other side. Very few times was there any room, actually, for compromise; either you had to go one way or you had to go the other way. And mostly it revolved around federal government involvement in agriculture and what folks would either call the Brannan Plan or Freeman—Secretary Freeman was a proponent of some of these

things. But it amounted to strict government control of both production and price. Whereas on the other side of the issue, there was the position that it's better to leave all of these kinds of decisions to free markets and let the participants in the marketplace make those decisions. During the Depression, Farm Bureau was a firm supporter of I believe they call it the Agriculture Adjustment Act, or something like that. But anyway, it was the...

DePue: Triple-A.

Shuman: Right. The proposals that set prices for agricultural products, told you how many acres you could produce, and was the buyer—they used to think it was buyer of last resort, but they would actually take title to your crops. Or I guess you retained title and you got a loan on the crops. And prices were for all practical purposes set by the federal government.

DePue: Why was the government so involved in those things?

Shuman: They didn't want agriculture to collapse. During the Depression, when you're only getting a penny or two per bushel of corn and just a few cents a hundred for livestock, not many farmers are going to survive those kinds of times without some kind of assistance. So in the beginning, Farm Bureau was a strong supporter of these kinds of programs, and for better or for worse, Dad was as well. He told me once that... (laughter) He says—talking about President Roosevelt—he says, "I voted for the man once, but I never did again." (laughter) And as you know, Roosevelt served several terms, (laughter) so he had a few more opportunities to vote for him. But the reason that he voted for him at the time was because agriculture was under such stress, and the reason he supported strong government interference in agriculture was it was just the last resort.

But there came a time when he and a lot of other leaders in agriculture became determined that the government had gone far enough, and we needed to turn this back to a free market system. And that discussion took years and years to resolve, and it isn't entirely resolved now, because we still have a government farm program in place that makes direct payments to producers around the country as well as what they call counter-cyclical payments; both are forms of income support. And it's hard to believe that we can still have those in times when agricultural prices are as high as they are now. But I digress.

DePue: Well, no, that's fine; that's why we wanted to talk to you. I would guess that it was 1932 that your father voted for FDR.

Shuman: The first year he ran.

DePue: I've been dying to find out the answer to this. Did he get involved with some of these government programs himself?

Shuman: He didn't have any choice in those early years, because if you farmed, you were involved with them. So yes, there was. But as long as he had the choice, to the



best of my knowledge, he never participated in a farm program. Now, that changed several years after... When I first started farming, it was still the same way.

DePue: Where you had no choice but to participate?

Shuman: When I first started farming, Dad would not participate in farm programs, and he was one of our landlords, so we didn't participate either. But as time went on, in the fifties and sixties, the government had such huge inventories of grain that to survive, you really had to get under the umbrella of the farm program.

DePue: So as I understand it, the crux of the problem, then—the reason government was involved so heavily from the thirties on—was because of the overproduction?

Shuman: Well, it was called overproduction, but it could also have been called underutilization. But actually, there were years during and after the Great Depression when drought was a huge factor, particularly in the western states, and they continued these strong price supports programs back then. And overproduction was not a problem, because they ran out of wheat. But then it soon got to be a problem. You know, if you're driving west through Topeka and along that interstate, you see these huge, huge elevators out there that, for the most part, were built using government loans for the ever-normal granary and that kind of thing, to build those huge structures, which were essentially used to store government stocks of wheat, in those cases.

DePue: This might be a question that's unfair to ask you, but do you know if there was something specific that happened in your father's case in his relationship with the government when he had to be involved that really soured him on the whole notion of government involvement?

Shuman: No, it wasn't any one thing. Well, I guess I probably didn't make myself real clear. But he never was a fan of government involvement in agriculture, unless the situation was so extreme that agriculture wasn't going to be able to survive without it—agriculture as he knew it. So when it became obvious that government—obvious to him, at least—that government had overplayed their hand, it was time for government to terminate their involvement in agriculture. And the Wheat Referendum which occurred in, I guess, '61 or '62 was kind of a watershed event, I believe. Well, let's see. Who would have been Secretary of Agriculture? Freeman, maybe? Who was president in '62? Was that Kennedy?

DePue: Kennedy was president at that time.

Shuman: That was during the Kennedy administration, I believe. But anyway, Freeman was Secretary of Agriculture, and they came up with this notion to have a wheat referendum, which would set the direction for wheat programs for the future. And what essentially they did was wheat producers voted on an issue that was more or less defined—and I'm oversimplifying—more or less defined by a decision of whether you wanted strong government intervention with high government-

supported prices and strict controls on acres of production as well as how much you could sell at these high, supported prices, and then on the other side, it was more or less a free market. You could produce whatever you wanted to.

On our farm, we had not been in the habit of producing wheat, and at that time—not that wheat would have been a real strong alternative, but it was an alternative crop in the sixties—we could not grow wheat because we did not have a wheat base. So we could not grow wheat. And I've always thought it was a turning point in agricultural policy when that Wheat Referendum came to a vote and Farm Bureau was on one side, advocating a 'no' vote in opposition to the terms of the referendum, whereas the administration and the other farm organizations were advocating a 'yes' vote.

DePue: So that would have been the Grange...?

Shuman: The Grange, Farmers Union, NFO was involved at that point—those were the principle ones. There may have been some others, but...

DePue: Who was voting? Was it Congress?

Shuman: No, the producers were voting. This was a producer referendum. So you had to be a wheat producer to vote in this thing.

DePue: That was quite unusual in its own respect, was it not?

Shuman: Only happened once. (laughter)

DePue: They said, "That was a bad idea" after that.

Shuman: Hasn't happened again. (laughter) Yeah, it was very unusual.

DePue: But this was Congressional legislation that was being voted on by individual farmers?

Shuman: No, Congress authorized the referendum and put these proposals on the table as being the ones that—"Which one do you prefer?" Well, obviously, Congress had the option to do anything they wanted to, but the upshot of it was that the referendum did fail, and the direction of farm policy more or less changed to... And it's still evolving to where we're at and the situation we're in today. We don't produce—you want me to keep elaborating?

DePue: Yeah, sure. Yeah, absolutely.

Shuman: We don't produce for government warehouses any longer in agriculture. We still have farm programs out there, but they're structured in a way so that large surpluses don't—essentially purchased by the government at inflated and unrealistic prices—are not accumulating in warehouses. We still have carryovers, but that's a different thing; they're owned by individuals or private enterprises.

The second thing we don't have are these unrealistically high commodity prices that are set by legislative activity as opposed to market activity. But we do still have some remnants laying out there. The program that we're operating under now, which I think started in '95—has it been that long? I don't recall. Anyway, the program we have out there now provides certain producers with direct payments, and those producers have to have a record of producing a specified commodity, and those commodities, in the case of Illinois, are, generally speaking, wheat, corn—I don't think soybeans are involved. Wheat, corn—is that it? I guess that's wheat and corn.

DePue: You said soybeans isn't?

Shuman: Yeah, but soybeans has never been a supported commodity, so I don't think that's in the mix. But there may be a soybean fraction in there, too. So you get those direct payments, and that's not based on anything that you produced this year; it's based on what you have produced in the past. And then the second thing you may get is what they call a counter-cyclical payment, which is average price this year, compared to a historical average of prices. And soybeans is involved in this. That ten-year average or five-year average or whatever—again, the details kind of escape me—but if your average market price here in Moultrie County is so much less than the calculated price should be—that average historical price—then you get what they call a counter-cyclical payment. It's not the whole difference, but it is a portion of the difference. Same thing's true for corn and wheat. Tobacco and dairy still have some programs involved. Dairy programs, as I recall, don't take any federal funds to run them; they're all paid for by the producers themselves. Tobacco is on the way out, but...

DePue: The other crop that historically has gotten a lot of subsidies and federal involvement—obviously it doesn't play a role around here—but that's cotton.

Shuman: Cotton. Right. And cotton programs are kind of off there by themselves. They're not a feed grain; they're cotton. And that's one of the things that's caused dissension across the organized agriculture—the different associations—as well as within associations. When Dad was first elected to the IAA board, which was many years ago now, in '48, the difference between the two candidates, who were both farmers from central Illinois, had similar backgrounds in terms of experience and education, both probably very qualified to be elected to that board, but their principle difference was their difference of opinion on what government's role in agriculture was. Do you want a lot of involvement of government in agriculture, or do you want minimal involvement? And Dad won that seat, and then when he was elected IAA president, the battle lines were drawn—which was in—that was '48 he was elected as the IAA president...

DePue: (inaudible speech) '48 though '54.

Shuman: And I don't remember when he was elected to the IAA board. It was a few years before that. Anyway, in '48, that was the same question, and in '54, when he was

elected AFBF president, it was the same issue was out there. And then the next issue was the Wheat Referendum that the producers actually got to vote on. And since that time, the tide has somewhat shifted. And if you don't mind a personal editorial...

DePue: Sure.

Shuman: It's a mystery to me why we need a federal farm program now when commodity prices are at all-time highs and the benefits of the farm program are mysterious to a broad range of the United States population. Why do we insist on continuing those? But we do, and Farm Bureau continues to support at least portions of them.

DePue: Well, I know your father, back in the forties and fifties, through the entire decade of the sixties, was a strong advocate for government to get out of involvement with the farm markets. And you began to address this a little bit: the controversy that was going on within the state of Illinois when he and another gentleman were both running to be president, and that controversy continued on to when he was at the national level with the American Farm Bureau—you talked about the qualities he brought to the job. Do you think he reflected the opinions of the majority of farmers in the American Farm Bureau, or did his force of personality convince people?

Shuman: You're a pretty good interviewer, you know? (laughter) That's a pretty good question. Actually... Well, I graduated from high school in 1955 and then spent the next four years in the University of Illinois studying agricultural economics—well, that was one of the things I studied, but anyway...

DePue: While your Dad's living agricultural economics.

Shuman: And had the opportunity to go to a few IAA annual meetings and hear the discussions going on on the floor at that point. And by the way, those discussions, when they talked about agricultural policy issues, were—for the most part, for the biggest part, the most heated discussions had to do with federal government's role in agriculture, along the divisions that I described earlier.

When I became IAA director myself, which—gosh, when was I elected? Ninety-five? Maybe '95—1995—we were still having those same kinds of discussions. Not so much in Illinois, because Illinois is pretty solid about current farm policy and the way it's headed—I'm talking about Illinois Farm Bureau. But within AFBF, you still have remnants of that old policy debate affecting what goes on with the organization and that organization's policies. So there are (laughter) I don't want to say this in a wrong way, but a lot of folks have not—no, I shouldn't say 'resigned,' either—accepted the notion that we're better off without a lot of government intervention in agriculture. That debate still goes on in some ways or another. So it's not over yet.

DePue: But you certainly expressed how well your father was able to articulate things. I've got to believe that he was able to sway people's opinions to his direction to it.

Shuman: There was no question that he could sway people's opinions, but that didn't mean that there weren't other people out there that weren't swayed. (laughter) And the votes were sometimes very close, particularly in the years after the Depression, within the Farm Bureau. Those votes in the forties and fifties that divided along federal policy issues, they were heated discussions and very close votes. But within Illinois Farm Bureau, that's not so much an issue anymore.

DePue: Okay. Let's go back to you and that personal decision. You already mentioned you went to the University of Illinois. Your major, again?

Shuman: Agricultural economics.

DePue: Following in your family's footsteps in that respect.

Shuman: Pretty much.

DePue: Did you have any doubt growing up in high school that farming was what you wanted to make as your avocation?

Shuman: Well yeah, I did. I started out thinking I wanted to be a veterinarian, and then after I got (laughter) to the university, I decided, well, maybe a veterinarian isn't all that great. You can hire a veterinarian. (laughter) You don't have to do that yourself. So I decided that I thought I'd probably look for a career somewhere else. And I didn't really give a lot of thought about whether I wanted to come back and farm. I knew that I could if I wanted to, but I did play with the notion of doing some other things but decided that farming was probably the best alternative at that time.

DePue: And when did you graduate from college?

Shuman: Nineteen fifty-nine.

DePue: I believe there was a draft at that time, although there was a lot of people—the Army didn't need to be as big as the pool suggested in the first place.

Shuman: I joined the U.S. Army Reserves in—it was while I was still in college—maybe '56 or '57. And then during my college years, they give you a deferment. You don't go to meetings and stuff when you're in college. Well, yeah, I did too—I went to meetings.

DePue: Were you in the ROTC?

Shuman: Yeah, I was in ROTC.

DePue: You would have had to been to have gone to University of Illinois.

Shuman: I was in two years of ROTC, and that was required, so it would have been probably '58 when I joined. It was right after that that I joined the Reserves. And

so I started going to meetings—weekly Reserve meetings—as well as going to summer camp. And I spent six years in the Reserves, so would have gotten out of the Reserves about '63 or '64 if I have my dates right. But by then, Reservists were subject to call, but they didn't call us. Actually, my older brother was closer, he actually had his Reserve enlistment extended by a year, so he served seven years. That was Charles. That was because of the Bay of Pigs thing down in Cuba. So yeah, there was a draft, but I guess that was my way of getting out of the draft. I didn't serve—well, I did serve six months' active duty right after I graduated from college.

DePue: Well, getting an agricultural deferment would have been the norm rather than the exception, I would think.

Shuman: Yeah, it would have been. Agriculture was considered a critical profession.

DePue: And you went right into agriculture shortly after you graduated. And your father is at the pinnacle of his success at the time—seeing him on weekends—but were you proud of what he was doing?

Shuman: Oh, yes. Very proud of him. (laughter) You couldn't help but be proud of him if you ever had the opportunity to hear him speak. Particularly when he was giving—not a prepared speech, but his speech when he goes—just talks there on the podium. He might have an envelope up there, or he might have a paper or two, that he wanted to make sure he got a quote right, but he just stood up there and spoke. And he was good. (laughter)

DePue: Let me ask you a little bit different kind of question.

Shuman: It was pretty incredible.

DePue: Was it difficult to be your father's son?

Shuman: (laughter) At times, yeah.

DePue: Expectations of what you were supposed to do or be?

Shuman: Oh, not that so much. Dad never pressured us to do anything, just to do what we wanted to do. We knew that he wanted us to go to college, so we went to college. You know, after high school, went on to school. But I wanted it, that's what I wanted to do, too. I knew enough about it, and we had gone up to see Illinois football games and that kind of thing, and it just looked like a fun place to be. (laughter) You know, you might even get an education. (laughter)

DePue: Yeah, it was fun then, and it's fun today, right?

Shuman: I'm sure it is.

DePue: Is that where you met your wife?

Shuman: Yes, we met at the University of Illinois. She was actually a home economics major, and they had some kind of a—I forget what they call it—*Student News and Information Bureau*, which was an ag college kind of a newsletter they wanted to publish or we were trying to publish. And she happened to be there one time when I went to a meeting, and I asked her out, and that's about the end of that story.

DePue: What was her maiden name?

Shuman: Her maiden name was Hill. Artis Eleanor Hill. She was from Ellsworth, Illinois, a little community north of Le Roy, Illinois. And very small high school class. She was a sophomore, I think—no, she was a freshman when I met her, I think, and I was probably a sophomore. Maybe I was a junior. I don't recall that.

DePue: Did you wait until you were both out of college to get married?

Shuman: Yes. Married in 1960. I got out of University of Illinois and almost immediately went six months' active duty, and then came home and started farming the following March, as I recall, which would have been the March of 1960. And we were married in June of 1960, right shortly after she graduated.

DePue: And now I assume when you came back and started farming, you were working your dad's land at that time?

Shuman: Yes. We didn't start farming this place here until a few years later. So yeah. The Corps of Engineers hadn't bought—the Corps of Engineers bought a substantial party, about eighty acres, off Dad's property, which was mostly pastures. So that hadn't happened yet when we were married, as I recall.

DePue: And they purchased that for what reason?

Shuman: To build the Lake Shelbyville Reservoir. The Kaskaskia River runs through the south part of that—or did run through the south part of that farm, so they needed it for the Shelbyville Reservoir to control navigation on the lower Mississippi River. That's why.

DePue: I suspect you have an opinion about that. You think that was necessary?

Shuman: (laughter) No, I don't think it was necessary. But on the other hand, at the time, they were paying reasonably well. They paid what the land was worth. The land that we had that they wanted, which was I think almost exactly eighty acres, was either all river bottom or very steep. It wasn't suited for anything but pasture, and not so much of that. So.

DePue: Now, you mentioned that you farmed some of your dad's land, but you also—in this land, is what you referred to it. I wonder if you can walk us through the process of how you ended up having this land. I assume you own this property now.

Shuman: No. Well, I own the house that you're in here, and three acres. But actually, Dad bought this land from another family member back—gosh, I don't remember when he did buy it. It was before 1954.

DePue: The reason for my question is I'm curious about how land ends up in some people's hands—about land ownership practices, land tenancy, and especially how—we'll get back to the government—how inheritance laws sometimes affect how these things occur, and how farmers make decisions about how they pass land down to future generations.

Shuman: Well, I expect it varies a great deal from family to family on the generational transfer. Two ways you can acquire land for agriculture: you can buy it and own it yourself, or two, you can lease it. So leasing practices—would you care? You want to discuss leasing practices?

DePue: Sure.

Shuman: Leasing practices now are of two general types: cash leases and crop share leases, in this area of the country. Where livestock's more pleasant, you can have—some still operate, I'm sure, on livestock share leases, which is essentially the same thing as a crop share, only with livestock. Most cash leases and most crop share leases are renewable every year—terminate and renew every year. But in crop share leases, they generally don't get into a bidding contest over them. Cash leases, on the other hand, which they renew every year—which most of them do—you either have a discussion with your landlord about the terms of the lease—in other words, how much am I going to pay—or (laughter) you don't. (laughter) Or someone else comes in and rents it away from you.

So as far as building an operation, you are more stable with a crop share lease, because over time, that's been a pretty stable way, and a fair way, of distributing the income between the landlord and the tenant. Cash share leases tend to give an advantage to more aggressive landowners who want to get the absolute most they can for the land—highest return they can possibly get. Over a period of time, there's probably very little difference between the returns that landowners get from crop shares versus cash basis. I personally prefer the crop share, but we also cash lease some land, too, so we use both instances.

This land here was owned by my—I got to get this right. It was owned by a relative, and I don't recall which it was, and Dad bought it in the forties—somewhere in the forties, after he was married and before he took on the AFBF. So the family owns this farm as well as the—it doesn't exactly join this—but the one to the west. And then I own some land of my own that I've bought since I started farming. And we have made an arrangement with my sister—she was the part owner of this farm as well as the one over there—where we've exchanged some land—tax-free exchanges. She and I have, as well as my twin brother John. So I own a larger portion of this farm than my other siblings do. Janet doesn't own any of it anymore. She has title to some of what I used to own. So it's kind of



a transition arrangement. You can do all kinds of those things. Well, Dad did something—are we about out of time?

DePue: No, you go ahead.

Shuman: Dad did something back in the fifties with a trust with his sisters about acquiring their share of the land to the east of us—the home farm, which is now about 300 and some acres; at that time, it was close to 500. And he bought it from his parents, and then his parents turned away and gave money to the other sisters to compensate them for the loss in value of what would have been their estate. So there's all kinds of little things you can... You can make arrangements.

DePue: And it gets more complicated with each generation, it sounds like.

Shuman: Yes, and the estate tax is going to go up again here shortly, if it hasn't already. The tax rates are going to go up, so there's going to be some more creative work need to be done.

DePue: This is probably a natural place for us to take a break, and then we can pick up about your personal involvement with the Illinois Farm Bureau and your views on some issues.

Shuman: Gosh, I've already given you all my views.

DePue: Uh-oh. We'll find out some more.

## **Interview with Paul Shuman**

AIS-V-L-2008-067

Interview 2: September 22, 2008

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Okay, we took a quick break here, but what I want to do now—this will get a little bit different direction for us. I'm going to ask you a series of questions about the kinds of changes that have been occurring in farming over the last few decades, and I want your reflections on each type of change. And we'll start with mechanization. Now maybe you started—when you were just getting into farming—you already had tractors, and the day of the horses was gone. But how much change have you seen in mechanization?

Shuman: Okay, well, mechanization, that's one of the drivers of what we look at as modern agriculture today. When I started farming, there were still a few teams of horses in the neighborhood other than the ones that the Amish used—our Amish neighbors had. But they were mostly there for sentimental reasons, not for reasons of production and agriculture. So I'm totally a product of mechanized agriculture. The main change, the really important change, that has come through that mechanization is, number one, if you want to talk about mechanization, larger and

larger machines and more sophisticated machines to do agricultural work, and as a result of that, the requirement that you have more and more acreage to put that much more expensive machine across or through, or through that expensive machine, so that you can pay for the thing. So it's been one of the primary drivers for larger farms and for producers to leave agriculture. So if you can't make that transition, haven't been able to make that transition to the larger and larger operations, as a producer, the only other choice you have is to leave agriculture and go to some other type of employment or retire. So that's one of the essential movers—one of the essential technologies that has changed radically since I began farming.

DePue: Tell us about the first tractor. How much did the first tractor you purchased cost? (laughter) Have any idea now?

Shuman: Well, it was like 3,000 or 4,000 dollars, and that was an International Harvester 450 tractor, which could, on a good day, pull a four-bottom plow, which was actually a pretty good-sized tractor for 1959. A lot of the neighbors had two-bottom or three-bottom plows.

DePue: Fifty years later, how much would you be buying a tractor for?

Shuman: Well, we bought one this spring, which was not a huge, large tractor, and it's a two-wheel drive tractor—93,000 dollars, and that was one that had a few hours on it.

DePue: A used tractor?

Shuman: Well, it was a demo, and it had a few hours—not very many.

DePue: How much can that pull?

Shuman: Well, it would be probably a five-bottom—five plows. We don't rate tractors by the number of bottoms anymore; they go strictly by horsepower. PTO or drawbar, so...

DePue: Did the mechanization cause farm fields to get much larger, as well?

Shuman: Yes, it has, but... Well, yeah, it actually has. A lot of fences have disappeared. We've converted from a grain and livestock agriculture economy in this area to almost entirely grain, so the need for fences—boundary fences or field fences, pasture fences—has certainly gone down. We still maintain a small cattle herd, so you can see fences around here. But we use electric fences for the most part now because they're easier to maintain and cheaper to install, and very effective about keeping the livestock where they belong.

DePue: Well, that's the perfect segway to my next revolution in farming: electrification.

Shuman: Electrification? Oh, oh, my goodness.

DePue: And I know your father was big into that.

Shuman: Well, yes. But of course, that, for the most part, predates my memory. But I can remember when I was quite young that we still had an icebox on the back porch, even though we had a refrigerator of some type in the kitchen. And we did have, oh, for as long as I can remember, we had running water in our homes. But all the neighbors did not. So electrification allows us to do things farmers hadn't dreamed of doing in the past. And again, it was one of the drivers for allowing farms to get larger and to become more efficient. If you could elevate grain from a wagon to a storage bin with electrical horsepower as opposed to horse-driven horsepower, it was in the long run cheaper and it was faster. And you didn't kill yourself with a scoop shovel.

DePue: (laughter) I imagine that would be very important after a while.

Shuman: That would be very important.

DePue: That's just the kind of thing you want your kids to do as chores instead of you doing yourself, huh?

Shuman: (laughter) Well, they've had their fair share, but I hope...

DePue: How about plant genetics and the increases in yield we've seen because of that?

Shuman: When I first started farming in 1959—actually '60, when I got back from the Reserves—we probably would have some fields of corn that would average 100 bushels to the acre. Last year, we had a 200-bushel average over all of our acres of corn, which was something like 800 or 900 acres of corn, I guess. Which is the first time we've ever had a 200-bushel average, by the way. Probably two thirds of that is due to improved genetics, but... And it's hard to make that calculation because the improvement in machinery, for instance corn planters, has been spectacular in the last few years. We can plant now with the planter we currently have in almost any soil conditions and get good seed-to-soil contact, plant at a constant depth and a constant spacing, and that's a huge driver in improving production.

Management skills are another part of it. You've got to make sure that the corn plant has the right kind of fertility present. Mostly we depend on Mother Nature for moisture, but things have to fall in place all the way around. So management is improved, machinery is improved, genetics is improved. Genetics improved with livestock, too. We've got better quality cattle to choose from for our breeding herds than we did many years ago.

DePue: When you first started farming in 1959, or thereabouts, were you buying seed corn? Were you just pulling some of the...?

Shuman: Oh, yeah, we bought seed corn. Actually, when Dad started farming, he had a degree in agronomy, and one of the things he did was start a small seed-corn

business. And I've got a seed corn sack back in the back room that has his logo on it. So we've been using hybrid seed corn on this farm for a long, long time.

DePue: Did the introduction of hybrid seed corn, though, and other grains, come in in the 1930s?

Shuman: Yes. Hybrid seed corn was available in the late twenties when Dad started farming and they were produced. That's when all the big genetics companies got their start—the Pioneers, the Dekalbs and all those big names. And it's been readily available since, for as long as I can remember, I guess.

DePue: Well, the next big category is fertilizers, herbicides, other chemicals.

Shuman: Well, we couldn't farm... We could probably farm without herbicides, but you'd hate to, and we could probably farm without insecticides, but you can't farm in this modern world without proper fertility. And that's one of the things that the early Farm Bureaus did, arrange, was put farmers together to buy limestone—cars of limestone—deliver them to the railroad society in Sullivan, and then organize the crews to come in and literally scoop that stuff off the cars and put it on wagons, and then scoop it again to put it in the little tiny spreader they had in the back of these wagons that drug around the fields. So.

DePue: Was this high acidic soil around here?

Shuman: For the most part it will require—particularly if you use relatively high rates of nitrogen—it will require a limestone application every probably eight to ten years. And somebody's going to jump my bones on that by saying, "You're not right," but by my experience on our farm. We farm, we test all our soils on a four-year rotation, and most generally, you can make an application of lime if you get it on accurately, and it will last the first four years and probably the next four years, and then after that, you're probably going to be thinking about another limestone application.

DePue: I would imagine when you started—again, I could be dead wrong on this—but you know, you had these diverse kind of farms where you had a lot of livestock—had hogs or cattle or both—that you're getting the fertilizer on there with manure as much as anything.

Shuman: Yes, (laughter) you certainly were. (laughter)

DePue: You're laughing because that wasn't your favorite job to do?

Shuman: Well, you had to scoop the stuff out and get it in the spreader, so... (laughter) It's what you had to do. And we had a fair amount of livestock. But with a beef cow herd, they don't spend a lot of time confined in a tight pen, so they spread most of the manure on their own, and generally on the pasture. But the hogs and the feeder calves, which we used to feed, you pretty well had to take care of that by

hand, until we got a tractor with a loader on it that we could get in there and do it mechanically.

DePue: But you're a long ways from those days, are you not?

Shuman: Well, we don't feed our cattle out anymore; we sell our calves. So the cattle manure generally gets dropped in the pastures, so we don't have to spread that by hand. And we don't have any hogs anymore; we're pretty much grain. And if we did have a livestock facility, I'd have—there's all kinds of mechanical ways you can handle that now. Some of them even—of course, as you probably know—some of them use a center-pivot irrigation system to spread the stuff around, and all they have to do is open a valve and push in the button, and the thing...

DePue: So how are you fertilizing to get 200 bushels per acre?

Shuman: By commercial nitrogen and, in our case, it'd be anhydrous ammonia. Diammonium phosphate is a source for phosphorus and a small amount of nitrogen, and the potash is a source of potassium.

DePue: Do you mix those and spread them at the same time?

Shuman: Anhydrous ammonia is a liquid under pressure. It vaporizes at atmospheric pressures, so you have to confine it in a pressurized tank, and we inject that, generally speaking, in the fall, through a dedicated machine for that purpose.

DePue: That you're renting?

Shuman: We own our own applicator, but the tanks that they deliver to the farm with are owned by the cooperatives, so we have to pay for the use of those tanks as well as for the anhydrous ammonia. And just parenthetically, I might add... Oh, and let me finish on the discussion about how we apply it. The dry fertilizer, which is the DAP—the diammonium phosphate—and the potash— $K_2O$ —potassium oxide—are applied by commercial spreaders through our cooperative, F&M Play Service Company give them a plug. So they apply the fertilizer for us based on the analysis that we want. And then the—what was I going to reflect on?

Oh. This fall, to the best of my knowledge, diammonium phosphate, one of the dry ingredients, is priced at 999 dollars a ton. Potash or potassium oxide, the potassium source, is 795 dollars a ton, and the last I checked, anhydrous ammonia is 1,111 dollars ton. Substantial increases over last fall. (laughter)

DePue: How much does that have to do with the cost of a barrel of oil right now?

Shuman: Just about everything.

DePue: For all three of them?

Shuman: Well, transportation is a huge cost for all those ingredients. But in the case of anhydrous ammonia, it's manufactured from natural gas. Natural gas can be transported by a pipeline, and there is an anhydrous ammonia pipeline that has, I think, two terminals here in Illinois. Potash, potassium oxide—potash's largest deposits are in Canada, so it has to be railed to central Illinois. And I think the most extensive phosphate, which is a source of diammonium phosphate, is down in Florida, so again, it's a long haul to get it all here.

DePue: Well, this is all a far cry from hog manure and spreading it in the fields, isn't it?

Shuman: Yes, it is, but you wouldn't want to have to rely on hog manure for all your nutrients now, because there's not enough hog manure to do that.

DePue: Are you applying this varying the amounts that you're applying as you go through fields?

Shuman: Oh yes.

DePue: How does that happen?

Shuman: There's two ways of doing that. For the most part, we spread a uniform rate over the entire field, with the exception of limestone. And whenever I take soil samples, or whenever we have soil samples taken, I try to have as accurate maps as you can get. And then to raise pH requires in the neighborhood of thousands—to tons of limestone per acre; you spread that at a very high rate. On the other hand, the DAP and potash rates are like 300-350 pounds per acre, total, tops, and that would be a high rate. I can miss a little ways with the limestone and not worry too much, but you don't want to go wrong on... So I can go out and direct them, say, "Soil sample number one, number two, and number three need three tons per acre; the rest of the field, a ton and a half per acre or two tons. But on my soil map—and my soil sample maps aren't accurate enough that I just take by hand. There's technology out there now using GPS that enables you to draw the sample from the same spot, within a couple of inches, every two to four years, or however often you sample. And we've used that technology some, and they can put a chip in the little computer in the truck, and that will spread a variable rate, depending on what that chip tells that it needs, in every portion of the field. So it could vary the rate from essentially nothing to 200-300 pounds per acre. And that variable-rate technology—there's a moniker for that: VRT—we've used that some, and with the increasing price of fertilizer, we're going to have to be using it more in the future. That's just one of those things that's changing, and we're going to change. Even us graybeards can change.

DePue: Yeah, there you go. Of all these incredibly important ways that the farms in Illinois and throughout the entire country have been changing—we've talked about mechanization, electrification, we talked about genetics, we talked about the application of fertilizers and all of the technology that goes along with that,

you mentioned management skills and importance of that—which one do you think has had the biggest impact?

Shuman: The biggest impact on productivity or on yields?

DePue: The way the farmer's life has changed.

Shuman: The way the farmer's life has changed. (laughter) I think people are still the most important ingredient in virtually any enterprise, so the management skills—if you don't have the management skills—and happily, most farmers do—you're not going to have a very good life on the farm. And acquiring those management skills is a process of education and then experience, and then more education and then more experience. So (laughter) if anybody's looking to this for advice, which they probably shouldn't, go out and get your education and then build your resume with experience if you can, and especially working alongside someone that's done all these things. And that's one of the things that I've been fortunately able to do.

DePue: So what all does it take to be a successful farmer today? What are the skills that you have to bring to the job?

Shuman: Well, I should have mentioned financing. (laughter) You'd better have a friendly banker or marry a wealthy woman or...

DePue: That always helps.

Shuman: Some source of funding. It's going to cost our operation—and I haven't calculated what it's going to cost for the fields we're going to have to take soil samples on, because I don't know how much we're going to put on—but just for the nitrogen, the phosphorus, and the potash, this fall, it's going to cost our operation 154,000 dollars.

DePue: For how many acres?

Shuman: Well, this is applications on about 1,700 acres. Some fields don't require any; some require substantial amounts; some, just a little bit. The reason I can remember that is I just figured it up. (laughter)

DePue: That's why the financial side is so uppermost in your head right now.

Shuman: You need to find somebody that—either a source for the financing—either you're going to self-finance if you've been in the business long enough—and we're fortunate; we can mostly self-finance. But the price of nitrogen, prices of seed—which one seed company has already sent me a letter; they're going to have to increase their—they didn't say how much—the price of their seed substantially this year because of the demand for their seed has increased so much, we're going to have increase our production capacity. So now I'm wondering if they're going to send me some stalk when I pay for (inaudible speech) seed. And all the

inputs—and fuel. Actually fuel, in percentage terms, has gone up probably less than the other inputs that we rely on so much. Electricity hasn't gone up all that much—some, but... No, I said that wrong. Chemicals have gone up less than fuel and seed and fertilizer and any of the other inputs.

DePue: I would guess, though—you're stressing the importance of having a good banker and having a good sense about the finances of things, for running the business—but you also have to be real smart on the opposite end, and when you can market and how you market your grain. (laughter) Hopefully you're better than Wall Street's been lately.

Shuman: (laughter) I don't pretend to be very smart about it—a very smart marketer. But it certainly helps, especially when you have volatile markets like we've had this year. And unfortunately—well fortunately or unfortunately—there are a lot of advisory services out there that are willing to help a farmer decide...

DePue: For a fee.

Shuman: For a fee. And I don't have the privilege of seeing all the advisory services' recommendations, but unfortunately the ones that I have seen have not done real well about pricing the 2008 crop. Most of them missed a lot of the price increase because of their desire to get crops—which is not unnecessarily bad—to price your crops ahead of harvest—which is not a bad strategy. But in 2008, they did not foresee what turned out to be a very, very strong bull market—the strongest bull market (laughter) since I started farming in 19... And I'm not bragging about myself either, because we didn't do as good a job as we could have done, or should have done—or would have liked to have done—that's it.

DePue: Well, again, this is an interesting time, because right now the stock market is definitely in bull market territory, but as we know, the commodity prices for almost everything to include grain, soybeans, and corn and those kinds of thing that you worry about and deal about—that's what you're saying is quite the bull market right now.

Shuman: It is. Corn and soybeans, to some extent, are a product of what's going on—and I don't think we realize that as much as we should have—a product of what's going on in the crude oil market—or product. They follow the crude oil market.

DePue: Well, I wanted to change gears here and talk a little bit about your experience with the Illinois Farm Bureau, and once we get that territory established, then we're going to go through some of the issues that you've dealt with. So how did you come to start working with the Illinois Farm Bureau? (laughter) Maybe that's kind of an obvious question with your dad's background.

Shuman: (laughter) It was inherited. Actually, you kind of get motivated to do things. That's one of the advantages, or maybe disadvantages, in getting a little more education, and one of the advantages I have in a family that's been out there doing things for generations, actually. So I never even gave it any thought. I had an



opportunity to serve on our farm supply company board of directors early on. Probably started in 1963 or '64, and I think I stayed on that board probably longer than I should have. I know it's over ten, maybe fifteen years. I was elected president at one time.

I decided I had been there long enough and retired from that board, and it wasn't too long after that that my township—County Farm Bureau township director passed away, and someone asked me if I would be interested in a job. And I said, "Yes," and stayed on that board several years and was elected—I think I served as secretary and president for several years. And once you get elected president of the County Farm Bureau, you kind of move up a step because you get invited to go to and are expected—or they hope you'll attend statewide meetings that involve other County Farm Bureau leaderships. And that's not counting the annual meeting, which they hold in either Chicago or St. Louis. It turned out that when I got involved in this County Farm Bureau president that I already knew a lot of people because of associations I'd had either through my involvement with the local service company or through college—people that were already involved in Farm Bureau work. And it wasn't hard to fall in, be attracted to (laughter) those activities. And when an opportunity arose to run for district director, I decided I'd run for it. Had the good luck to (laughter) be elected director. Probably some of my constituents wondered what they had done. (laughter) Anyway, I got elected director in I think it was '95, but I'm not sure.

DePue: And how long did you serve in that position?

Shuman: Ten years.

DePue: So it hasn't been that long that you stepped away from it.

Shuman: No, it hasn't been all that long ago.

DePue: Well, I wanted to go through some of the issues that were especially prevalent during that time, and I'm sure they continue on today, and give you an opportunity to discuss some more issues that I might have missed. Mandatory livestock identification?

Shuman: ho, (laughter) you're starting with a goodie. Country-of-origin labeling, or COOL, is that what you're wanting to...?

DePue: Yeah.

Shuman: Yeah. Oh, boy. (laughter) Nothing like starting with a hard one. I'll talk about Illinois first, briefly, and the situation in Illinois' regard to COOL or mandatory livestock—whatever you want to call it.

DePue: What does COOL stand for again?

Shuman: Country-of-origin labeling—COOL. Mandatory COOL, I should say. Illinois is not the huge livestock state that other states are, and Illinois does not have, in particular, a huge beef cattle herd. So in the Illinois Farm Bureau, it was relatively easy to get—I don't want to say 'consensus'—but a majority in favor of supporting mandatory country-of-origin labeling. And I support it, too, even though it's an intrusion into agriculture of the federal government, essentially. But the problem we have in livestock in Illinois and around the country is maintaining and growing our export side of our livestock as well as maintaining a safe food supply for our own population.

So when there are diseases out there like foot-and-mouth and a whole variety of other diseases that can negatively impact your ability to export livestock or to feed your own population, you need some way to have traceability back to the farm where the disease started. And in the United States, we're far behind the curve that other countries have established and require, so we really need to catch up. And it's one of those things that government can do that no one else is going to be able to do in an effective way, or do it as cheap as the government can do. That said, we in Illinois, we have some language—and I forget exactly how it goes—but we support country-or-origin labeling. I think the language does not specify mandatory or voluntary, but we support it. And AFBF, there has been and continues to be a huge discussion, and the last I knew, mandatory COOL is opposed by AFBF. I don't recall whether that's still the fact or not.

DePue: I know there's huge markets that are at play here. There's the Japanese and the Korean market...

Shuman: (laughter) Certainly are.

DePue: ...where they're not producing a lot of beef of their own. It's the perfect target market, and yet right now, Korea is really objecting because if there's one or two cases of Mad Cow Disease, and we don't have the country-of-origin labeling process going on, they're blocking out everything. So here's my quick question for you: what would your dad's opinion on this be?

Shuman: Well, I'd like to think that he would agree with me, that this is a role that federal government can handle and do better than anyone else can do it, and that is to congregate all that information that COOL would provide—could provide—and that said, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association is the strongest opponent of mandatory livestock identification in this country.

DePue: Why?

Shuman: For reasons that I fail to understand, except that most of those folks are from west of the Mississippi River, and they consider themselves free and... (laughter) We're cattlemen; you can't mess with us. And probably a lot of...

DePue: The government doesn't need to be sticking their nose into our business?

- Shuman: I don't want them looking around in my pickup truck, and I don't want them knowing how many cattle I've got or (inaudible).
- DePue: Well, and everything you've told me and Janet's told me about your father, those are echoes of your father's voice in getting government out of the market forces.
- Shuman: But see, that's not part of the market forces. The way I look at it is that COOL—and by the way, I never said I didn't want no government involvement in markets, I don't think. What I do want is government to provide the regulation that is required to have a free and open market, and in the case of livestock, I think COOL is part of that question. In the case of, say, the mortgage market, (laughter) I think the government needs—obviously—the government needed to play a more active role than they did in the regulation and oversight. So government does have a role, and I think Dad would agree with that. Let's see, tuberculosis vaccinations are a requirement for the dairy industry as I recall. If you're going to sell dairy products to a dairy, you've got to have a TB-free herd, right? So the government's there in that case, but anyway.
- DePue: Well, let's get to another controversy here, and I apologize for perhaps painting with too broad a brush there.
- Shuman: Okay.
- DePue: Federal crop insurance?
- Shuman: Well, federal crop insurance wouldn't exist were it not for the federal government—obviously. Look at the name. They do provide a subsidy. Those subsidies are, at this point, probably necessary, or no farmer would buy them. There's two kind of separate issues that are kind of bumped together here. The federal government is subsidizing crop insurance; they're also providing subsidies for agriculture through the counter-cyclical price payments and through the direct payments. You know, when's enough enough? We should have a requirement in there that requires if you don't buy federal crop insurance, you don't get direct payments. You need to link those kind of things and cut down on the amount of government intervention in that way. We take federal crop insurance out on our operation every year, and more and more people are going to be doing it, because of the very thing I talked about earlier—how much it costs to put in an acre of farmland.
- DePue: And remind me of exactly how the federal crop insurance works if you have a crop fail.
- Shuman: I go to an agent; I tell him he want federal crop insurance. He quotes me a price, and that price is based upon a subsidy that the federal government provides the insurance company to get the price down to a certain—to whatever rate it happens to be. The insurance companies actually end up collecting the subsidies; I, however, benefit from the subsidy because I get the crop insurance at a lower rate. And I can't recall what it is. There is a regional bias built into the crop subsidies

as well. In Illinois, we pay more in relation to the benefits we get through federal crop than, say, Kansas or Nebraska, some of the western states. They get a heavier subsidy out there—a bigger subsidy than we do. So there are some inequities involved within the federal crop system as well as kind of the inequity of getting federal payments on one end and then getting a subsidy to insure your crop on the other end.

DePue: Is the difference because there's a greater volatility in Kansas and Nebraska for some of the crops?

Shuman: Political power in the House and ag committees has more to do with it than anything. The folks that were in power at that time that this legislation was written wanted to make sure their folks came out well, and they did.

DePue: Let's talk about Freedom to Farm legislation—first of all, what it means, and what would the Illinois Farm Bureau's position on it be?

Shuman: Freedom to Farm? Well, you've stumped me. Let's go on to number C.

DePue: Okay, well, let's move right on. I saw that someplace. Okay, set-aside?

Shuman: Oh, well... (laughter) We don't have set-asides anymore. It's one of the things that went by the wayside. We can produce anything we want anywhere we want nowadays. And if we do have ground that's set aside, there's something out there called CRP—Conservation Reserve Program—that you might call set-aside, but that's a permanent contract, and the land has to meet certain requirements as to erodibility or other fragile characteristics. So...

DePue: So that land that's now underwater might have fit that category earlier—or today.

Shuman: Probably not. (laughter)

DePue: Oh, okay.

Shuman: What would generally meet that category is land like you see out my dining area window there to the southwest where there's a slope down the hill. That's permanent pasture, so we're not putting that in the CRP program. If we had ever tilled that ground and then taken it out of production, it would be eligible for CRP. And if we were to decide to plow it tomorrow and farmed it for a year, then we could come back—or maybe it's two years—and put it in the conservation reserve program and get a payment for it.

DePue: Can you think of any other controversies that you'd like to discuss that you dealt with quite a bit during your years with the Illinois Farm Bureau?

Shuman: Well, there's a lot of internal issues (laughter) within an organization like Farm Bureau. You're always dealing with those. And sometimes it's between the state organization and the AFBF, and sometimes it's within the state organization

itself. Illinois Farm Bureau, like many other Farm Bureaus, owns an insurance company, I'm sure you're aware. As a member of the Illinois Farm Bureau board of directors, I was also a member of the Country Insurance and Financial Services board of directors. And sometimes there are conflicts that arise because of our involvement in that—essentially what is a profit-making venture. But those are more internal conflicts, and we try (laughter) pretty hard not to get a lot of publicity when you have some of those (laughter)—keep them kind of quiet. But you've hit... The country-of-origin labeling in my view is the nut that's going to be awful tough to crack, based on my knowledge of the players that are involved in that issue.

DePue: Did you step down in 2005 then from being a district person?

Shuman: I think it was. Well, no. See, I would have been elected at the IAA annual meeting, which is held in December of every year, and my replacement would have been elected in December of 2000 and... I think I was elected in December of 1995, so my replacement elected in 2005. So it was December of 2005, so actually, 2006, '07, and this year have been...

DePue: Well, and I hope I get this right. I understand that you are—or were, after you retired from this position—the chair of the Governor's Advisory Council of Farmers and Farm Families. (laughter)

Shuman: Oh, why did you bring that up? Yes, that would be correct.

DePue: And that works at the governor's guidance, if you will?

Shuman: There's what we thought it was going to be and what it's actually turned out to be are two different things. Julie Curry—you may remember her, or some people may remember her—was my state representative and then later senator for a many years, and a good friend. And she knew I was interested in agriculture, and she got a job with the administration and retired from the Illinois Senate and became one of his administrative folks.

DePue: "His" being Rod Blagojevich?

Shuman: Rod Blagojevich. I'm sorry. Yeah. And shortly after that, she called and asked if I would be interested in serving on an agricultural advisory committee for the governor. And I jumped at that chance—thought it would be a good idea. But since, we've sometimes met twice a year, sometimes met once a year, and last year didn't meet at all. (laughter) I don't expect we'll be called in to meet again. And Julie Curry is no longer working for the governor's office, so...

DePue: So not necessarily the most effective or efficient organization?

Shuman: No. And they never really asked for our advice, although the last meeting we had, we offered lots of advice, which I presume the governor heard, but I have no firsthand knowledge that he did.

DePue: Well, let's just finish off with a couple broader questions that maybe will be more fun for you to gnaw on a little bit. What do you see as the future of farming in Illinois?

Shuman: I'm very optimistic about farming in Illinois. We've got one of the best climates for agricultural production anywhere in the world; we've got some of the best soils available anywhere in the world; we've got a strong infrastructure in place—not that it doesn't need improvement in places. And that's one of those issues that we used to talk about in Farm Bureaus—the locks and dam issues in Illinois. And we've got an educational system that, through both Extension and through the local education, can provide an education for our citizens—our farmer-citizens—that is probably second-to-none anywhere in the world. So if we can't make a go of that, something's going to be pretty wrong in the future. All we've got to do is to make sure that the folks that have the skills and the resources to make a farming operation run are the ones that get in place to run those farm operations.

DePue: Well, we didn't talk much about your children. You have children in farming?

Shuman: I have two sons, Eric and Scott, Eric being the oldest, Scott a little younger. Scott, my youngest son, came back to the farm this June, and he's starting his—(laughter) hasn't finished a full year as a farmer. He spent several years after graduating from college working in the grain trade as well as a livestock packing facility. And has recently been married and has a stepdaughter, and they live right across the road. Just delighted that they're back. And my older son has actually been involved in this farming operation since he graduated almost entirely. For a while, he worked as a hired hand, I guess, and now he's a partner in the operation. And we operate a family partnership. I'm retired, officially, by the way. I haven't been retired for quite two full years yet, (laughter) but I am retired. So I used to farm with my twin brother and I farmed together, and then Eric came into the operation, and now Scott is in the operation. And before Scott showed up, I had actually retired. So there's...

DePue: Do you have any grandsons yet?

Shuman: I have one grandson. He's a freshman in high school.

DePue: What happens when—what's his name?

Shuman: Chance.

DePue: Now maybe this conversation has happened, maybe Chance has a future in mind, but what happens if four years from now, he comes to you and he says, "Grandpa, what do you think about going into farming. Would that be a good idea for me to do that?" What would you tell your grandson?

Shuman: I'd tell him yes, it would be a good idea. He'll be driving up, by the way, in this Corvette that he wants. (laughter) So you got to watch that, but...

DePue: And then the next question is, “But what do I need to do to get ready to do that?”

Shuman: Oh, well, I’ll go back to what I said earlier—first you got to finish your education. The more of that you can get, the better off you are. I digress. How much time do we have left?

DePue: Go ahead.

Shuman: I want to tell you about my two uncles—or my two aunts—Dad’s sisters and their husbands. Dad had two sisters, Mildred and Bernadine. They both went to the University of Illinois and graduated. Both of them were excellent students. Bernadine married a fraternity brother of my father, named Homer Curtis. Bernadine, by the way, was probably maybe the smartest person I ever knew, even exceeding my dad’s intellectual abilities, probably. And Aunt Mildred was just as smart, I think. And she met and married a man that was at the University of Illinois, also a fraternity brother of my father’s. And then they both moved back to their farms. Uncle Homer farmed in northern Illinois, in Jo Daviess County. Uncle Earl, Mildred’s wife, farmed near Woodstock in McHenry County—couldn’t think of the name of the county. Of course, Dad farmed down here, and he married a gal—Ida, my mom—who graduated from the University of Indiana. So here’s these three siblings. Dad has a Master’s degree. Bernadine—her husband didn’t have a Master’s degree; he had a Bachelor of Science degree—nor did she have a graduate degree. But Mildred’s husband eventually earned a Ph.D. from—oh, darn, I can’t even think of the name of the school. One of the eastern schools.

DePue: Well, we can get that in the transcript later.

Shuman: Well anyway, these three siblings, all three of them—all six of them, the spouses—had good educations, and some of them higher education degrees. I mean, it was just a remarkable achievement.

DePue: At a time when that wasn’t happening at all.

Shuman: Yeah. And Uncle Earl and Uncle Homer were both very successful farmers in their own right, and they just fit the pattern for what’s needed now.

DePue: So this grandson would be getting advice: make sure you finish your school because that’s what it takes to be a successful farmer?

Shuman: That’s what I would tell him. The more education—the better you can use this equipment up here, the better off you’re going to be as a farmer. Not that I’m any example, but we’ve had some limited success. We’re doing okay.

DePue: I’d say it looks like you’re doing just fine. You get to retire and enjoy life now.

Shuman: (laughter) Yeah, well, some of it. (laughter) I still work just as hard as I ever did, even though I’m retired.

DePue: Well, I'm not surprised you say that. But you come from a family of hard workers, too, don't you?

Shuman: Pretty much, pretty much.

DePue: What final comments would you have for us then?

Shuman: Agriculture, as you observed, has been good to me, and I hope I've been good to agriculture. I like to think that the place is just as good or better than the farm when I found it when I started farming, and I hope it will continue to be productive in the future. We won't do anything without the land. That's the important part.

DePue: Well, thank you very much, Paul. It's been a real pleasure to talk to you and hear about your own personal story and a little bit more about your father as well.

Shuman: Thank you.

(end of interview)