Interview with Stephen Scates

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Interviewer: Mike Maniscalco

Maniscalco: Today is June 5, 2008. It is just about one o'clock and we're sitting in the office of Stephen Scates in Shawneetown, Illinois. How are you doing, Stephen?

Scates: I'm doing fine.

Maniscalco: Great. Great. Thank you very much for letting us come down here and doing this interview. It's going to be a lot of fun and it should be really great. Let's start off with some of the easy questions and that's kind of date of birth and where you were born and that sort of stuff.

Scates: Okay. My date of birth is May 8th, 1937. I was born in Shawneetown. I was born at home. In fact it is this place that I live today.

Maniscalco: Oh wow. Really? You were telling us earlier your family has quite the history here in Shawneetown, and this area of Illinois. Can you explain some of the history?

Scates: Well my great grandfathers came to this area in the area between 1850 and 1860, somewhere in that general timeframe, and they owned land where I live today and where my brothers—some of them live as well—and the one of them, Patrick Colman, purchased some land in the 1850s and started farming in the general area here north of Shawneetown. And we do have that parcel that my grandmother, Lula Colman, inherited from her dad and then my father ended up with that property and at the present time that property is part of what my brothers and I owned.

Maniscalco: Great. Now do you know when—you know the date when they came to Illinois, but do you know where they came from prior to that?

Scates: Most of them came from Ireland. The Irish side of our family. My great grandfather came from Germany and that is where we got the name Scates

from and the rest of them were McNally, [Duffy], Colman, the Irish names.

Maniscalco: That's great. So, now, looking at where you grow up in this area, you grew up just right here in Shawneetown. And did you have your grandparents around...

Scates: Yes. My grandparents lived in this area. My grand—my dad's mother and dad owned the farm that we live on now and my brother, Mark, lives in the house that my grandfather built.

Maniscalco: Oh wow. Okay. So you've kind of grown up with all your relatives just right around you.

Scates: They've all been in this general area, yes. And between here and Pond Settlement. Which is about ten miles north of here.

Maniscalco: Okay. Do you have any memories of going to visit cousins or aunts or uncles and things like that?

Scates: I can remember going to visit my grandfather, grandmothers, and uncles and aunts over the years and we did do a lot of visiting.

Maniscalco: What sorts of things would you do when you'd go visit?

Scates: Well, we'd play ball, do other things, whatever, we were kids, and always had something to do. It was never anything that was very expensive. Most of it was made up doing things and whatever we could be creative as or in later years whenever, probably, in the thirteen, fourteen year old range, why, my brothers and I and cousins and neighbors would ride horses and play cowboy and Indians in the hills.

Maniscalco: Well, cool. Now, were you getting back and forth to your different relatives homes on bicycle? Were you—what was it as a kid to transport?

Scates: As a kid I think it was mostly walking or riding a bicycle to the nearby neighbors. If we went to my mother's dad and mother, why we would—drove in a car whenever we went there. Whenever I was a kid we were right at the end of the time that you used teams and buggies and horses and that type of thing, though I can remember using a team to cultivate corn and using the team to shuck corn and things of that nature and I did a little bit of it but certainly nothing like my dad or my grandfather did.

Maniscalco: Well that brings up a great point that you kind of grew up on this farm and of course your father was working on the farm. How about you as a kid? Were you doing chores and stuff like that?

Scates: We all had chores. Mark, I know, he used to always be the one that fed

the hogs and throw the ear corn out to them and help break corn for the cattle. We had milk

cows, we had chickens and the whole gamut, whenever we were kids growing up.

Maniscalco: What was your favorite chore?

Scates: I don't know that I had a real favorite one (laughing), but I guess, probably, cultivating corn with a team was probably one the favorite things that I would do.

Maniscalco: What about the one that you just hated?

Scates: Well, we had a strawberry patch, or I had a great uncle that had one, and I always hated to have to go and hoe it and pick strawberries. (laughing) That was never one of those fun tasks.

Maniscalco: Great. So you've got lots of chores and things that you're doing but the farm at that time when you were a kid, can you describe what it looked like at that time?

Scates: Well at the time I was a kid, of course, we had horses, we had milk cows there, we had a barn that we brought the cows in to milk, and we had a cream separator, and we would send the cream off to Pana, Illinois, they used to ship it by rail and we'd do that and, then, we had a few acres of—we had acres in the very localized part of where we farm—we had acres that were in corn, some of it in hay, and we had a small beef cow herd. We also—Dad rented land in the river bottoms from—and we would plant corn up there in the spring and harvest that or pick it with either a two row picker or sometimes it was shucked by hand and hauled out your corn out of the bottoms.

Maniscalco: That's very interesting. Now what about your friends around here around the farm? Did you have a lot of friends or...

Scates: Well we had a lot of cousins that lived in the neighborhood. At the present time where I live there were probably four or five different families that lived in that general area and [where] we went to school. The school house is within baseball throwing distance of where we lived and there was usually always thirteen to fifteen in school there and out of that thirteen to fifteen there were probably ten of them that were cousins or brothers and sisters that were going to school there and I went [to]—[My] teacher was, except for my second grade, was always an aunt and aunt Evadeen, Colman, Aunt Lucille, Lawler, Aunt Ruth McGuire, Resina Drone. And I'll fool around forget one of them there, but they were my grade school teachers that at the one room school.

Maniscalco: So how did you get away with anything bad, then?

Scates: If you got in trouble at school you were in trouble at home. (laughing).

Maniscalco: Wow. Now, what about other outside organizations. Like 4H and FFA and

other outside of school organizations. Were there any sorts of—

Scates: Well we had a 4H club at our school was Maple Grove and we had a Maple Grove 4H club and brother Mark and Joe and Hugh David and Tom and I all belonged at one time or another to that 4H club. We went to high school here at Shawneetown. And we were all FFA members at high school, myself and my brothers and Pat Junior who is since deceased were all active in 4H. And Pat went to 4H congress in Chicago when he was about fourteen or fifteen and my Aunt Evadeen Colman was always our leader in 4H and she, I think, had thirty-nine years as a 4H leader so she was a big influence at school for us and encouraged us to go on to school and to do whatever we could do to move forward.

Maniscalco: What sorts of projects did you do in 4H and—do you remember any of them?

Scates: Some of the later ones I think had some livestock. I think we had dairy cows. We took some—brother Pat took a dairy cow, I know he had a horse that he rode in the county fair in the gaited division. Probably a gamut of things and, of course, we also did some demonstrations of several things in 4H and went to the state fair and either got blue or red ribbons, I don't remember which they were.

Maniscalco: No, that's great. And there's one other organization I'm kind of curious about and that's kind of church. Were you very active in going to church? Was your family...

Scates: I think my grandmother, Lula Colman, my mom, Geneva, and—were all very influential and we—they had always gone to church and they went to Pond Settlement, Saint Patrick's church, my mom did, and then they were married in Shawneetown. At Saint Mary's, I think, so we've always been very active in church and I know that when we were growing up that mom and dad saw to it that we didn't miss a Sunday to go to church.

Maniscalco: So going to church every Sunday and everything, did you go just to go to church or did you go and see the community and enjoy picnics and things like that on Saturday too?

Scates: Yes. We did all of those things. Of course they used to have a yearly picnic and, then, were very involved in going more than that.

Maniscalco: Well, great. Now, if you want to start talking about your farm career, I guess we could say it kind of started when you were born. I mean you started working on the farm right away.

Scates: Well I think that's a way with myself and all my brothers and even my sons and nephews that were involved in riding around with dad driving probably a tractor when maybe they have been too young but certainly it's different today because the machinery was much less complicated back whenever I was a kid

compared to today.

Maniscalco: So what are your earlier memories of working on the farm, then, with your dad?

Scates: Well, I think that Mark and I, especially, remember driving teams and driving John Deeres and M Internationals and then, I think, the ones that were a little bit younger like Joe, Hugh, and Tom, they probably were a little more modern tractors at that time. I can remember driving a Model L Case and that was—you laid all over the fenders trying to find a cool spot on it because the fan blew all the heat right back between the fenders and it was not a real fun tractor to drive, especially if you have to cross a little ditch and you end up with a thumb getting jammed on the steering wheel.

Maniscalco: Well, you got to do lots of fun stuff as a little kid on the farm and I'm sure there were kids in town, in Shawneetown, that didn't have parents who owned farmed or didn't get to work on farms. Was there any—I don't want to say animosity—but any stories about farm kids and town kids and kind of the differences between them.

Scates: I'm sure there might have been. I don't remember a whole lot of that. I had some good friends that you got to know. We used to go to religion classes on Saturdays and maybe Saturday morning so we associated with the ones that were in town and the country at that time.

Maniscalco: Interesting. Did you ever have your friends from in town come out to the farm and help?

Scates: I think they more came out and played. We used to have cousins that would come and stay for four or five days and also have gone to visit them and I had a cousin in Fort Branch, Indiana that was my dad's sister and we used to go over there and we'd stay a week over there or they'd come over here and stay a week.

Maniscalco: Okay. So the farm has kind of changed over the years from your childhood to the present. Can you kind of explain what it looked like—you've explained what it looked like then—can you explain how it's changed and gotten to the point where it is now.

Scates: Well, I think that it was a gradual change for my brothers and I as we grew up. Why, we were fortunate then in that our father always looked forward and mom, she was the one that held it all together, but they were willing to share and I know that I see an awful lot of individuals that hold on to their farming operation until they die and dad was willing to share with us and each of us in the older generation had been willing to share with younger brothers, nephews, and sons and I think that that's one of the important things that—to try to get a good transition. And I'm not saying it's easy. It's a difficult transition.

Maniscalco: Can you tell us a little bit about that transition at least with yours and your father maybe?

Scates: Well, it probably ended up being a little bit different with dad simply because he did have a heart attack and got sick for a period of time that he had to kind of—was kind of restricted in what he could do whenever I was probably twenty-three, twenty-four and Mark was twenty-one and some of the others were still in their teenage years and, so, we kind of formed a partnership and whenever, at that time, and worked together to buy equipment to—and we also, then, rented the more land and were doing crop share more at that time and as time went on as we developed enough assets we made some timely purchases of farm land that let us get where we are today with the purchases of land that we've had.

Maniscalco: And you've purchased quite a bit of land. Can you tell us how big is the farm now?

Scates: Well, at the present time we're in the—a little over 13,000 acres of actual farm land. We probably are somewhere in the neighborhood of 15,000 if you count everything.

Maniscalco: Now on that land, what sorts of things are we growing? What sorts of things...

Scates: Well it kind of varies a little bit from year to year, but, of course, corn soybeans and wheat are our big crops and they—corn and soybeans—make up the major part of our acres. The crops that we grow besides that over the years we've grown vegetable crops some years. We've been quite a bit heavier in vegetables than other years kind of depending on what the market looks like that we've raised green beans, pickles, sweet corn, cucumbers, cabbage, and depending on the profitability of it, why, kind of determines what it is. We have a farm market here that we sell some produce out of here whenever we've had those products and it gives the chance for some of the younger grandkids of mine and others—of brothers—a little bit of something to do and some of them have spent a summer selling sweet corn and we have a variety that we call Shawnee Sweet that is a good sweet corn and we've kind of got a pretty good reputation of having that particular corn and people come here and want to buy that particular variety.

Maniscalco: Oh that's cool. So if you could kind of help me see. Let's say we're in the spring time, we're getting ready to plant stuff, what's the process that you go through in sitting down and deciding, This is what we're going to plant on this much land this year?

Scates: Well one of the standard things is we've got hill ground, we've got flatland, we've got some land that is next to the river as we farm both on the Ohio and Wabash and we'll plant corn and soybeans in any of the flooded acres that will flood in the early spring and hopefully from this time until harvest we don't

get any of those floods and over the years we've been pretty fortunate that it hasn't, though, certainly, there has been years whenever—there's been a few sleepless nights because of it. Right now it's probably passing from my generation to the next and we try to sit down and talk about what we're going to do as far as crops go. Our corn soybeans will stay in the range of sixty percent to forty percent and corn, some years, may be fifty percent other years maybe sixty and beans the other. We usually try to plan about, at the present time, about 2,000 acres of wheat and then we follow that wheat with either—most of the time with soybeans and occasionally we'll put green beans or another vegetable crop in after that wheat if the contracts for that are there.

Maniscalco: So, you mentioned that we're in the process of changing the farm to the next generation. What kind of process is that, exactly, for you?

Scates: Well we have already included the next generation in the partnership and they have come into the partnership gifted through the previous generation and we have got an unwritten agreement that each of us gave the same percentage to our kid—each one that's in the partnership. So, I, even though I'm the oldest or Mark has been in it longer or as long as I have, we don't have any more percentage of the partnership than the one that is thirty years old. So that was how we transitioned into that was by gifting that part of it. We also have a land trust that's set up under the Illinois land trust that is at the present time owned by the five older partners and that is the next step that we have to go through a process of how we're going to do that because the—at the present time, the partnership leases from the land trust the farming operation in order the acres for the farming operation.

Maniscalco: Now how many individuals are in this next generation?

Scates: Well there are seven, right at the present time, there are seven in the next—the next generation. I have to kind of add up because it does—it can change. But at the present time there are seven in the next generation.

Maniscalco: Now, have all these people—

Scates: Can you hold—are you needing some? Are you all working down there still? You need to go over to get to that tank up there, go over and wet that down and then—I'm sorry—wet that down and then scrub off all of that over there. Suzie's. Because I'll have to be there when you do that other, but make sure you do it the same way that I told you on that other. Okay?

Maniscalco: So now is that the next generation or is...

Scates: No that's the next one.

Maniscalco: That's the generation after that.

Scates: Yeah. (laughing).

Maniscalco: So that's how you start them off. Is everybody in the family getting an opportunity to be a partner in the farm or is there a conversation, do you want to be, do you not want to be...

Scates: Well, so far all of the, well what I would say, our grandsons—my grandsons and my brother's grandsons with the exception of one has—and he was a partner—so everybody has had an opportunity to be a partner. At the present time we don't have anybody on the female side that has chosen that that's what I'd like to do.

Maniscalco: That's interesting. Now, let's just talk a little bit about your crops and everything. Do you know—can you give us a rough estimate how much corn you produce a year, how much...

Scates: Well we'll produce about, on corn, about 1,400,000 bushels of corn. Anywhere from 1,200,000 to 1,400,000. Soybeans we'll produce about 200,000 a year. Wheat we'll produce about, probably, 140,000 bushel a year. Somewhere in that...

Maniscalco: And, then, if you are growing vegetables in that year what sorts of—what are we looking at in terms of how much, for vegetables, is it?

Scates: Well, the vegetable side of it usually will—gross dollars—is probably going to come out somewhere in the 500,000 to 700,000 dollars range. Somewhere. It really depends on how many pickles, how many cucumbers, how many green beans. I mean, we have grown as many as 2,000 acres of green beans in a year but that was several years ago and the normal number is from zero to 200.

Maniscalco: Now, you've got tons and tons of crops in there. Are you using fertilizers on them, or...

Scates: Yes. We use fertilizer on all of our crops. With some of the light soils that we have here, certainly, we have to apply a nitrogen, phosphate, and pot ash. Some of the soil we have to apply lime too to keep the pH at a proper level and so we do use fertilizer.

Maniscalco: You're talking about the different types of soil and pH levels and things like that, it can get kind of complicated. How do you decide what's going on where and...

Scates: Well, of course we use soil tests to determine what we need and then we also look at the yields that we have and the crop that is planted there to determine the amount of fertilizer that it needs in the NPNK.

Maniscalco: How do you control weeds and stuff like that?

Scates: Well that's one of the joys now of farming as far as that goes that we do now

have some products available to us that help us control weeds and I know that we've gone through an evolution on that from fertilizer and pesticides that we've used over the years from the time that I remember that we didn't have anything other than a hoe and, certainly, that might be one of the things that I did enjoy least but I probably was a little older and that was pulling giant ragweed out of soybeans and I'm sure that all of my kids and nephews certainly remember that as not being a very fun thing because giant ragweed can become pretty prevalent in some of the bottom area, but we've also gone from the period of whenever maybe too much chemical was used in the seventies to the point that people talk about using too much chemical but with the price of chemicals we don't want to use any more than we absolutely have to and I think with the safeguards that we use today we're a whole lot better shape, environmentally, then we were fifteen, twenty years ago. I mean, I know I see a lot more owls around now and some of the other animals that kind of disappeared or got in a smaller supply a few years ago.

Maniscalco: It's always interesting to kind of find out what sorts of insects and problems with insects and infestations have you had?

Scates: Well there's quite a few different insects that you can get and I guess one of the more devastating ones that you can always—is the black cut worm. In years past I can remember before the days of chemicals that you had no choice but to go out there and replant and when you replanted you probably had about as many cutworms cutting the corn down as before but they would, in certain areas, they would just completely eliminate a corn crop and I can remember one of the sloughs, in the bottoms that we planted corn in it three times one year and you'd go out there one day the corn would get up about four or five inches high and they'd just clip them all off so being able to get rid of it and beetles and some other insects like that is certainly one of the benefits that we've had and been able to have the food supply that we have in the US and the world now.

Maniscalco: You've mentioned "the bottoms" a bunch of times and you've even mentioned flooding down there. How do you deal with drainage and things like that?

Scates: Well the drainage isn't too bad. When you get the flood you just have it. You don't have much control over it. You hope that it's just not going to be there but I can remember back in probably sixty-eight sixty-nine we had everything planted in corn and about the middle of May, why, the river came up and we had corn that was knee high and it just completely eliminated it and we went back in and replanted on the twentieth of June and still had a pretty decent crop that year and that was before crop insurance and that's one of the advantages today that you do have more things that are available for you for risk—for risk management.

Maniscalco: You have to have some things to deal with drainage on your farm. I mean, do you have ditches...

Scates: Oh we have ditches, we have our own hydro-hole that we clean out ditches with. We have tiled a number of acres to get that water out and over the years, why, it's something that's a never ending process that you have to go through. We've also used land levels and used some dirt scoops to level out some areas to try to reduce the amount of ponded out areas that we have.

Maniscalco: Now, looking at the complete opposite side, and I think your family's involved a little bit with irrigation.

Scates: That is correct and we, especially, in our white county farm that's on a light soil that's got a hard pan under the area, we used to have corn that you would look at it about the fourth of July and you would think you were going to have a good crop and you go through a two week dry spell with no rain and the temperatures kind of like today, maybe up around ninety or ninety-five or even a little warmer and the humidity is out there but you just don't get the rain and the crop would just pretty well fold up on you. That you'd come out and look at a sixty or seventy bushel yield of corn and, of course, today that's certainly is something you can't afford.

Maniscalco: What types of irrigation systems do you employ?

Scates: The irrigation systems that we have are center-pivot irrigation systems. We put our first ones in in about seventy-five, I think it was, and then we've added a quite a number since then. We've become Valley Irrigation Dealers and we service our own irrigation systems as well as we also have the irrigation business that services an area here in the tri-state area: Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois.

Maniscalco: We've kind of been talking about how you deal with a lot of these problems—flooding, insects, and everything else—what about when you can't deal with them. As you've said, when it floods, it floods, there's not much you can do about it. Do you remember some times when there were some, just, really bad disasters and...

Scates: I think we probably had more bad disasters from drought than we had from flooding overall affecting us. With the flooding we've been fortunate that we—some of the areas hasn't flooded and in certain areas that we have had flooded over the years, sometimes we kind of—we go the rainfall that fell right on that the part that we did have yielded a little more and didn't hurt as bad as it could have.

Maniscalco: You mentioned crop insurance. Is that your best way to deal with some of these problems, or...

Scates: Well, of course crop insurance is one way of dealing with some of your cost. I mean, that's the main thing that it deals with and, of course, the reason that that becomes important is because whoever your banker is, they like to know that there's something out there that's going to help protect them, also.

Maniscalco: Now, you mentioned that you have a small market somewhere down the street here where you sell vegetables and things like that. So that's one place that you're selling your products through. Where are you selling the million bushels?

Scates: Okay. The larger grain amounts we're really lucky that we have Bunge on the river. That's on the river here in Shawneetown. It is a major elevator on the river. We also, in our White County farm, we have Cargill. And Consolidated which are at Mount Vernon, Indiana, which is only about six or seven miles from our farm there. So we really have an advantage because we have elevators that are export markets that can load the barges and go to New Orleans and, so, over the years we've had a little advantage on the basis of, say, a central Illinois.

Maniscalco: So do you truck your grains...

Scates: We truck our grain from the field and from our storage here to the elevator. We move part of it in the fall whenever we're harvesting and then we'll put the rest of it in storage and we move it out, usually, in December, February, March.

Maniscalco: Now do you call the elevator and say, I have X amount of bushels coming out, or...

Scates: Usually what we do with our grain is we'll have a certain amount of it that we will forward contract and maybe we've got a contract for 20,000 bushel for October, November delivery. And, so, it's already priced ahead of time and then we'll deliver that grain on that contract. We have other times where we'll make a contract with one of the elevators for a January delivery and then we'll take it out of storage here and deliver the grain at that time.

Maniscalco: Now what about the vegetables? Besides selling it through your stand?

Scates: Well the vegetables, besides what we go through our stand, has to go through—it depends on which vegetable it is. If it's green beans or pickles, they are contracted. So whenever we plant them, they're going to a cannery. And so that we know what the price of those are the day that we plant them. We don't know what the yield is, but we do know what the price is. And, so, those products—but if you go to sweet corn or you go to any of the fresh market, you're at the mercy of the market on the day that you deliver. So usually you work through a broker and a broker talks to a Wal-Mart or to Jewel or Kroger or somebody of that nature and they will tell you on Thursday, "We want x number of boxes of corn on Tuesday morning and we will give x price for it." Now that doesn't mean that you'll get the price that they'll tell you because if the market goes soft over the weekend, they usually will not take that corn on Tuesday, they'll say, "Well, we've got problems, we're not going to be able to take it 'til Thursday," or something of that nature.

And the fresh market is a very difficult market to deal with. A supplier that is from Florida or California, probably being able to do it the year round can kind of have a better opportunity than someone from an area that only has product for a short period of time. Unless you have a hurricane come through and wipe out, then everybody wants it. (laughing).

Maniscalco: Now, you mentioned in the early firm, when you were a child that there was livestock here. And I may be wrong, but it doesn't seem like you have livestock here now.

Scates: The only thing we still do have a cow herd because we've got some pasture land and we've got a few horses around but that's pretty well as far as animals. We probably haven't had any swine for, oh, probably twenty years now or I would say somewhere in that neighborhood. We had them in the eighties probably was whenever we didn't really go to the confinement side of the hog operation.

Maniscalco: The herd that you have, is that for dairy...

Scates: No, it is beef cows. We had a beef cow herd—our beef cow herd has varied from 150 to seventy-five and we used to feed out some grain to the beef herd, cut some silage, did hand feeding of it never had a—Harvestor silo or anything of that nature, and, then, we've kind of now, at the present time, we just sell them off of about 400 to 500 pounds calves to go somewhere else to go to feed lot.

Maniscalco: What breed?

Scates: Well, they're kind of a mixed breed. A little bit of Hereford, a little bit of Angus, a little bit of Simmental. And we've kind of crossed them up to, I guess we don't know what we have got now.

Maniscalco: You've got a little bit of everything. Great. Now, I mean, this is a pretty sizeable farm, you've got to have quite a bit of equipment out here. What types of equipment do you have...

Scates: Well, we've got about, I assume to do any kind of grain farming, we've got about whatever kind of equipment you need. We've got the tractors all the way from the small tractors to the large type tractors of four—two wheel drive front assist, we've got the track tractors that are the challengers that we use and we've got disc, we've got field cultivators, planters, we've got a sprayer that is a John Deere Sprayer—I've forgotten what the number is—eighty nine, ninety, or twenty or something of that nature—but it's got a boom on it that's probably 120 feet wide and we do all the spraying with it. And, then, we've got, of course, your combines that are certainly quite a bit different from the corn picker that we used to have that would be a two row picker that fit on an M that was mounted to—today that we've got a combine that will do twenty four rows of corn and have a forty foot grain—soybean table on it—but

you've also seen the price change dramatically in equipment.

Maniscalco: This equipment, as you just said, the price has changed dramatically and it's very expensive for somebody who uses this equipment. What's the process for you to decide, Okay, I'm going to go out and buy a 100,000 dollar combine or something like that.

Scates: Well it's almost to the point I wish I could buy a 100,000 dollar one (laughs), but, well, we just kind of—from experience we kind of know where we are and we also know after a combine has been used for—how many times your breaking down, what the value of it is on a trade-in, and what we've got to have to be able to get those crops out.

Maniscalco: Now, I know you've had quite the career with some politicians and some different political positions and things like that. Can you explain some of the different positions that you've had?

Scates: Well, I've really only had one position and that was with the ASCS or FSA during the nineties. The rest of the time it's all been volunteer or supporting individuals that I feel like have the good of the country and the good of the people. I was fortunate in knowing Paul Simon and getting to be a friend of his and, then, through him, Senator Dick Durbin, certainly, was able to get to know him and Loretta and, then, of course, right now, to know Barack Obama and Michelle. It's certainly a thrill to see them where they are and, of course, we've supported a lot of losers through that stretch, too (laughs), but that's part of it. It's been a lot of fun and it's one of the pleasures of seeing, really, democracy in action and I know that the politicians catch a lot flack in Washington about what they do but during the nineties I was out there enough that the bureaucrats that are there, I'm sure there are some that may slack off, but the ones that—most of them that I saw were there late at night and got there early in the morning and put in a full days work.

Maniscalco: Can you explain to me what ASCS stands for, again?

Scates: That's Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service. And I've forgotten what year it went out but I think it was in ninety five or six, they changed it to the Farm Service Agency. So that is the agency that deals with all of the farm problems. And the position that I had was to administer them in Illinois. We didn't really set up—the rules were made in Washington. It was our job to implement those rules.

Maniscalco: So there had to be some rules that you didn't agree with at certain times...

Scates: Oh there's always rules you don't agree with and once in a while you're able to—I remember there was one rule that especially bothered me and that was that you had to keep ownership of grain to receive a payment. If you didn't do it correctly, you could lose that payment and one of the things that always bothered me about it was that they're always talking about the little person and

making sure that they get a fair shake out of it but all of the big producers knew what the rules were and the ones that always lost out were the ones that—they didn't have that much so they didn't spend that much time reading the rules and I got it changed by going to the Secretary of Agriculture with it whenever I was in there, but whoever was in the bureaucratic position in Washington that wrote that rule to start with was very unhappy that I went to him and as soon as I was replaced when the administration changed that rule went back into effect (laughing). But, I mean, that's just the way things go.

Maniscalco: So through politics and your position kind of hand in hand, farming—you were able to work with it very well. What were some of your successes that you see from those times?

Scates: I think one of the biggest successes is that you had individuals that we worked with like my mom, our wives, Kappy, Nancy, Wanda, Geetsie, that—one of the things that somebody told me early on is that the biggest problem you have with most partnerships is the extended family and certainly they have all been very supportive and have worked well through all of this so I think that a family being together—we used to—mom and dad had a swimming pool and you could almost count on everybody being there at sometime or another on Sunday afternoon and we probably transacted as much business at that time of what we were going to do and that type of stuff whenever we were at some gathering like that and I think that's a main thing about it that you don't get too selfish with it, that you are willing to share and—kind of like all of life.

Maniscalco: Now you mentioned something about your wife being involved and others' wives being involved and farming—is there certain jobs that women are supposed to do over what men are supposed to do or...

Scates: I don't think so. Frankly, my wife taught school for some thirty years. Mark's wife taught school for a good number of years. Hugh David's wife was a nurse and has worked through that. Geetsie. Has worked doing things. Now Joe's not married so I can't give him very much credit (laughing), but—and our mom stayed at home and worked with the family all the time but I think that early on whenever you're young and in farming I think that the salaries that those individuals contributed was very meaningful because I don't think that we could have amassed what we have in the farming operation if we had had to draw every dollar out to live on that they helped contribute to and one of the big things that I think is very important and I've always said that I only want my kids to go into farming if they have the same advantages in life that somebody does that's in some other job. I mean, we can talk about—and it is wonderful to live on a farm—but if you can't have a lot of the part of life that makes it easier, I don't think you want that.

Maniscalco: Yeah. Now through your position in the FSA or ASCS, I'm sure you met lots of farmers throughout Illinois. Could you kind of explain to me in your opinion what you see the gender balance being in kind of just across Illinois.

Did you come across women that were farmers?

Scates: Come across a few. But in general there's not a lot of individuals that are in farming. I'm not saying that there aren't wives that are contributing as much as their husbands do to farming, but in general I'd say that it's overwhelmingly male.

Maniscalco: That's interesting.

Scates: It is also very—you don't find very many, whenever it comes to nationalities, being in farming. You don't find much diversity there. I mean it's pretty limited in Illinois. I could probably count you—count on my hand—close to it the number of black farmers that we have in Illinois.

Maniscalco: Do you have any idea why that might be? Any speculation on it?

Scates: I really don't know why that is. I just think most of them migrated toward the city. I can remember whenever I was a kid there were two or three in this county and today, as far as I know, there isn't any.

Maniscalco: That's interesting. What about farm subsidies and some of those things?

Scates: Well, of course that's always a sticky issue. It is one that I think that has helped us through hard times. It's one that is difficult to administer it and it's difficult to administer it when it's needed. Whenever there's a surplus out there we hate to see farms continue to get fewer in number. At a time like now whenever prices are high you have a difficult time trying to justify it, but a farm program is written for seven years and even though we've got high prices on corn and soybeans at the present time, I'm not sure what it'll be like seven years from now, but I do know that even though our crop prices have increased, that our cost have gone up tremendously and that—I know that we all talk about fuel prices and they're up and we use a lot of fuel in farming, but our fertilizer prices are up more than the fuel prices are so—and we don't see anything slacking off in that area.

Maniscalco: What do you see in the future of farming, then, with the prices-wise and...

Scates: Well. I guess I'm an optimist or I wouldn't be in farming (laughs). I see that if we're not able to keep farming somewhat similar to what it is, that I hope that we can keep everybody in farming that, roughly, what we have now. I would hate to see the day that we go into five or six companies controlling agriculture. I think that we see what can happen with that in other industries and we always feel like that we don't want to be beholden to some other country to produce our food. I mean at the present time we're fighting the issue of oil and where it's coming from and certainly food would be even a bigger issue as we know that happens in some other countries.

Maniscalco: Your life blood is the land here and I'm kind of interested in your opinion on

conservation issues. Farming and...

Scates: Well I think that that's one of the most important things and one of the issues is always the type of farming that we do to be able to conserve the soil. I think that before we learned some bitter lessons from that back in the twenties that if the land wasn't taken care of that the wind would blow it away and we would have fields that were washed down below the top soil area and that that land is not productive and, so, any time that we can with no till—with other things to not disturb the soil any more than we have to, certainly that's what we try to do. It used to be you could plow—mowboard, plow hills and things of that nature and today we don't even think of doing that because of soil erosion and, of course, with the soil erosion you get the water quality issues.

Maniscalco: There's all these things that go on with farming that make it so difficult. You have droughts, you have water quality issues like you just said, so what's making you come into work everyday? (laughing).

Scates: Well, I guess it's the same thing that everybody else does is try to make a profit today so that we can pay the salaries or the draws of everybody that's here in the partnership and the payroll that we have and I enjoy it. I think that every one of us that are involved enjoy—there's nothing more enjoyable than planting that last row of corn or harvesting that last row of soybeans or coming in with a decent yield crop-wise and feeling that you've done a pretty good job.

Maniscalco: Now, you have a huge operation here and I don't think you could do it by yourself or just with you and your brothers. How many people do you have working here?

Scates: Well we've probably got, all together—we have part-time help and, then, we have our full-time help and we've probably got ten full-time and, then, we've got probably another twenty-five or so part-time.

Maniscalco: And we discussed it a little bit before but you do have migrant workers that come here.

Scates: We do have. We have some workers that come and help to harvest some of the crops and, certainly, they are good help and without them we probably would not be in the business of doing that, not because of the cost—the labor cost—but because of the types of work that individuals that are normally in the employment area here just choose not to want to do it.

Maniscalco: Now you mentioned earlier there's a certain type of migrant labor that's coming here. There's a certain status that they have is that—

Scates: Well there's an H2A program that if you get it set up and you get it—go through the Department of Labor that those positions can be filled. You have to stipulate the timeframe that those jobs are available and you have to

advertise locally and also with the employment bureau before you can do that.

Maniscalco: So where are your workers coming from?

Scates: Well most of our workers that we have that are full-time are from this area here and any of the migrant help that we get do come from—most of ours come from Mexico.

Maniscalco: And where are they living? (laughs) You've got twenty-five people coming in and...

Scates: Well we have to furnish housing for the individuals that do come in and that's one of the costs associated with that program.

Maniscalco: So do you have tenant housing or do you get apartments for them?

Scates: Most of the ones that come in are single or—anybody that comes in under the H2A program cannot bring a family with them so they're only here for six to eight months so we do have individual housing for them.

Maniscalco: Now are they usually male, female?

Scates: 95% of them are male.

Maniscalco: And you said they are hard workers so what types of wages are being paid for a job like that?

Scates: The average wage rate for Illinois is $9.92 an hour.

Maniscalco: That's pretty good. And we're getting kind of closer to the end so you're running a big family farm here. What do you see in the future for the family farm?

Scates: Well I think there's lots of future for the family farm and I guess you say you're running a family farm—as a group we are running the family farm. Somebody always asks me who the boss is and well we don't really have one. (Laughing) It depends on what area and what—who's there. And I think we kind of do it collectively so I think that the future is there as long as the individuals are willing to work in it and are willing to compromise and do those types of things.

Maniscalco: What about the future of farming in general?

Scates: Well I feel much more optimistic and, of course, I don't know how you could fail to feel optimistic with the prices that corn and soybeans are now, but I also know that I can remember back in the days that we had a Secretary of Agriculture that told us we could plant fence row to fence row and a few years later we were selling corn for eighty nine cents a bushel. So I know that we've

got to have somebody somewhere else in the world that is able to use the produce that we're able to grow and, yet, on the other hand, we don't want some of those other countries to have so much of ours that they're able to buy everything that we have here and I certainly am concerned about the deficit that we have that somebody may decide, Maybe farm land is what we need to buy in the United States. But I really feel optimistic about it and I think over the long pull I—we're going to survive it.

Maniscalco: Well, great. I have one last question for you and then I'll let you go. This is kind of the largest question, a question that I ask everybody. This is going to be an oral history, it's a document that's going to last for a long time, and one day down the road one of your great great grandsons or your great great nephews might walk into the Illinois State Museum and see that, Hey look there's great grandpa Stevens interview there on the shelf, I want to hear it. And what's the thing that you would like to be in this interview for them?

Scates: Well, I think that the main thing that this interview is to go from Pat Colman and from my grandpa's got this Scate side of the family that if you work hard and that if you're willing to share such as we've done in the past Scates and sons, that you can make a goal of farming and that with the families that have been involved that there is a real future in agriculture and a future in Gallatin and White County.

Maniscalco: Well, great. Well thank you very much, Stephen.

Warren: (unintelligible)

Scates: (laughing) I guess I never did really say it before hand but that's one of the things that you get into whenever you talk about a partnership and we get family members all involved and, I don't know, John was here—John's a little bit concerned. He's a nephew. And everybody always wonders, Is somebody else doing something that isn't inclusive enough. So you always get that type of thing and whoever's out in front is, if you've got anybody in front, is always got to give credit to the others because there's no one cog that is any more important than the next and if you take one of the cogs out, the operation doesn't work and it doesn't matter which cog it is.

Maniscalco: That's very true. Thank you for that.

Warren: Well let's get you unhooked here. (unintelligible) any more. And let's see. (unintelligible). We might just leave this on you—

(End of Interview)