# Interview with Cavan Sullivan

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Interviewer: Mike Maniscalco



Maniscalco: Today is June 19th, 2008. We're sitting just outside Petersburg, Illinois with Cavan Sullivan. How are you doing today Cavan?

Sullivan: I'm doing very well.

Maniscalco: Great. It's been a lot of fun being here with you, walking around the farm and seeing the different animals you're growing. Let's start out with some of the real easy questions for you.

Sullivan: That's a good place to start. I can't guarantee you pass the easy questions.

Maniscalco: We'll get you warmed up. How about your age and date of birth.

Sullivan: I was born in April 1983. April 10, 1983. And I am 25 years old.

Maniscalco: Where were you born?

Sullivan: I was born in Springfield at St. John's hospital.

Maniscalco: And you've grown up pretty much here your entire life?

Sullivan: Yep. They brought me home from the hospital and I haven't left.

Maniscalco: You've been here ever since? Great. Now, we know that this is your mother and father's home as well as where you live. Do you have any other relatives in the area, around here?

Sullivan: Many. This timber joins most of my dad's brothers and sisters. He has 7 brothers and sisters and all but one of 'em, I guess all but two of 'em live connecting to this property. I have 36 cousins that live in Menard county. So yeah, there's a lot of us. I guess all 36 of us have grown up within a 3 mile radius. So they're all around here. So we have many, many Sullivan relatives.

Sullivans, Zimmermans, and the Turks, and the Grownwalds and the Joneses. They're all kind of related in here.

Maniscalco: Do you know any of your family history? How your family got to this county and everything?

Sullivan: I know some of it, yeah. I guess it would be my great great grandfather Peter Sullivan. They moved up into the Macomb area. And that's where he lived and he purchased some ground where the Western University golf course is, right now is their family farm. And they lived there. And then his son started farming there, that would be my great grandfather. He was killed in an accident. He was mowing along the roadside with a team of horses. And a car came around the bend and scared the horses and pulled him out in front of the car. He died. Now my grandpa was 12 when that happened. And my grandpa started farming their farm in Macomb at that point, until he was of age to go to school. His sister encouraged him to go on and further his education at Western. And he was just a phenomenal athlete. He has 16 varsity letters at Western for: football, basketball, baseball and track. He had 4 varsity letters for 4 years for all the sports. And he actually went on to play professional baseball for the Baltimore Orioles. It was when they were the St. Louis Browns. It was before they moved to Baltimore. He was a fantastic athlete. And he farmed all the time while he was in school all the way until the farm ended up getting sold.

And they moved down to the Petersburg area when my dad was, I guess they lived in Oquawka, Illinois along the Mississippi for awhile after they left the farm and my grandpa and grandma got married. And they moved to Petersburg in the '70s. My grandpa took a job down here with the Illinois Principal's Association. And he was actually the head of the Illinois Principal's Association and he was one of the founding members of it. So that's kind of what brought them down in this area. My grandmother's family is from the Monmouth area. They have farmed there for, I don't know how many years. I don't know what the family history is there but my grandpa Cavanaugh, my namesake, where Cavan comes from, is from, he was born in Monmouth. He lived there long time. My grandma said when my great grandpa was a young kid his dad used to come home with big bags of nickels. Buffalo Bill Cody would come through and buy hay from them. So that kind of tells you how long they've been in the Monmouth area.

Maniscalco: Well, that's great. So I mean you really have your entire family is all around here. You have tons of cousins. Tons of family members. What kinds of family stories do you have about having family around here?

Sullivan: Man, there's tons of them. Not all of them that can be shared on the web here. Maybe I shouldn't have signed that release form. Not everything should've been checked off on there. Some stories we've got, growing up back here. We

have all been outside, since we could, since there are so many of us. I mean, Chelby how long are we apart, a year and six months a part. So Chelby was just a little baby when I was a year and six months old. So when I was about two years old, I kinda got booted outside. And said “Alright take care of yourself.” And we had boundaries. Like we couldn't go near the pond, and we could as far as the river. We couldn't ever cross the river or get into the river. And DCFS probably should've been called on us a bunch of times because, I mean, we'd just roam all over here and that's where a lot of these arrowheads that we found. But that's really where all of us have gained this love for the outdoors and wildlife and nature. Just spending so much time out in it.

When I was three my mom had this whistle that she gave me. That I, if I was supposed to, if I ever got in trouble or I got in any problem I'd start blowing this whistle. And I was out in the back pasture and that's when we used to have cows. And the cows came and surrounded me at this waterhole, I was playing down in the creek and I climbed up in this tree and I started blowing on this whistle. And I think, Chelby you were with me, weren't ya? And oh we were terrified. And Mom came running. And the cows were surrounding us. That's there's I mean, there's just tons of stories. We've got, oh there's just tons of them I could keep going on about.

One of our neighbors here had some ostriches he used to raise and he was getting rid of those and he told me I could have all of his fencing if I would get rid of the ostriches somehow, find somebody who would buy them. And this guy from Wisconsin came down and bought them and we thought “okay we'll get these ostrich caught for him and then we'll get the fencing.” We got two of the five caught. No problem. Got 'em corralled up got 'em into the trailer. It was just lickity split. I thought, “Oh this is pretty good.” Well the other three kind of learned what we were trying to do and they didn't want to do that. So we chased them around for awhile. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Couldn't get 'em. And one of the hens got kind of worked up and she ran into the fence and she tripped and fell. And I mean, I was a junior in high school and full of vinegar and I jumped on it and held it to the ground and got this hood and put it over her head and rolled her up into the trailer. So now there's two left. Second hen we got her to run into a fence, she went down, got her into the trailer. No problem. The last one that's left is this big male. And he's probably this 250-300 pound ostrich. Redneck male ostrich. And he did the same thing, ran into a fence and tripped. I jumped on him, but I'm not heavy enough to hold him down. He stood up. He starts running around with me on his back and he's kicking and squawking and the joint in his leg is so they kick forward. And I was trying to trip him to make him so he couldn't run so I kept trying to put him in this half nelson so I was putting, I wrapped my leg around his leg and finally got him so I got one leg trapped, then I got the other leg trapped and we him rolled to the ground and my cousin Casey, who's my age, helped me roll him up into the trailer. And he we got him up there, caught in the trailer. And luckily nobody got hurt. That's the end of a lot of stories. Luckily

nobody got hurt. There's about 15 stories I could tell right now that ends in with luckily nobody got hurt.

Maniscalco: So now is most of your family, are they involved in farming, in agriculture?

Sullivan: Actually not. A majority of our family now is in education. Both of my parents are school teachers. My dad teaches driver's education in Athens. He actually just retired this year. My mom teaches elementary and middle school p.e., is that right Chelby? She taught high school P.E. some, now it's more the younger children at Greenview. And my dad was at Athens high school. Like I said, my grandpa was a principal. They've all been involved with agriculture, though.

My aunts and uncles are more in education right now. They live out in the country but they're not really farmers, per se. But, they all, my grandpa was a farmer when he was growing up and my grandma was from a farm. So, we all, they all have a farm background. That was really instilled in my dad when he spent a lot of time with my great grandfather as he was growing up. And he really wanted to have a farm when he grew up and got older. And so that's kind of why we have what we have because my dad really wanted his kids to grow up on a farm. And he's given a lot of great opportunities. And all of the things that we have done here would not have been possible without having the land. And there were a lot of things we've been able to do, and we've had a lot of fun and we've had a lot of success, but without having my parents have the land they have had, I would not have been able to do any of it.

Maniscalco: Now, growing up on a farm, I'm sure you probably had some chores to do.

Sullivan: Yes.

Maniscalco: So what were the good chores to do?

Sullivan: Well, probably the earliest memory of doing things on the farm—probably my first vivid memory of my whole life—I remember being in one of those little baby backpacks, you know? My dad would get up in the morning, and he used to milk cows. He used to have dairy cows here. And he'd put me in this little backpack, and I remember leaning over his shoulder and petting the cows as he was putting the cows in their milking stanchions and stuff. And so morning chores have been something that we've done forever—for the last 25 years. And good chores would always be like getting to help Dad with that kind of stuff; getting to gather eggs used to be a good thing when there was only like fifty chickens. Now we have 500, 600 pheasants—that's not exactly a good chore anymore.

Bad chores would probably be anything with having to clean out pens or clean out bedding straw or pulling weeds or anything like that. Those were all things that you really didn't want to have to do.

Maniscalco: Now, I mean, we've been with your sister most of the day going around here, and we saw your brother a little earlier. Were there still little sibling rivalries, like, Oh, I don't want to do that, so my sister should go clean that out?

Sullivan: Well, yes, actually, there are. The girls would always say, "Well, those are the boys' jobs." Things outside that we had to do. But we were still expected to do things inside and to take care of some of the household stuff—which is the way it should be, but we'd always kind of go back and forth where, well, mowing should be one of the boys' jobs to have to do, but the girls still want to do the mowing sometimes. But there was somewhat of a double standard, and I think we would all agree with that.

Maniscalco: (laughter)

Sullivan: But yeah. As far as rivalries, I wouldn't say there were rivalries. That's probably the thing I'm most fortunate about, is the relationship I have with my brothers and sisters. We all have grown up together and we're all great friends; my sister's fiancé is like a brother to me. I mean, he's been around here for, what, nine years now, Matt? I mean, we're all just a very tight, close family. We do everything together. When we go on vacation, we go on vacation together; when we've got problems, we all deal with it together. I was in the hospital—and I got injured playing football, and everybody—all my brothers and sisters and cousins banded together to do my chores for me while I was in the hospital for about thirty days. So we really try to watch out for each other on stuff.

Maniscalco: That's great. That's a great support net that you've got.

Sullivan: Yeah.

Maniscalco: What about other friends outside of your family? I mean, growing up on the farm, did you ever have other friends from off the farm?

Sullivan: Well, you don't have a lot of friends when you have manure on your shoes all the time, you know. Yes, we've had lots and lots of friends over the years that love to come out to the farm and enjoy what we do out here. It's so unique—even just the farm life, what we do is kind of our own niche with the wildlife. But even kids that grew up on farms, around hogs and beef cattle or poultry, they see what we're doing as something different and something interesting. And even people that might be complacent with what they've grown up with see our thing as something unique. And they're like, "Wow, I'd like to see how that works."

So a lot of my friends from rural areas are especially interested in it. My friends that are into deer hunting, they love coming and seeing the deer and helping work out with the deer. One of my friends, Zack Lancaster, has come out on many occasions and helped us when we're working deer and doing the deer handling stuff. Some of my buddies from Chicago and St. Louis have come just to visit the farm sometimes, and they're completely blown away by, like, I took them back there to see the buffalo like we did, and they were very intimidated at first being that close to an animal, let alone a buffalo. So, yeah, we have had lots and lots of friends come in. Especially once we got to college—more people were wanting to come in and see what we had going on here. And when you're in high school, I mean, a lot of the people have been here at different times, so it was more something that was commonplace to them. But when we went to Illinois College, everybody started wanting to come out and see our place.

Maniscalco: Now, when you went to high school, were most of the kids from rural areas or urban areas?

Sullivan: Yes. The majority of our high school is a rural, agriculture background - where at least one of their parents did something in an agriculture-related field, be it being a farmer or working at one of the implement or mechanic shops or maybe a seed company. But I would say at least, probably eighty percent of them, their parents were involved with agriculture at some level. The other would be people that's parents worked in Springfield and commuted from Petersburg to Springfield. And what's kind of sad is to see Petersburg more shift sometimes, and to see that there's more people living in Springfield, working in Springfield, and it's becoming more of a bedroom community. And it's kind of a challenge that Menard County is facing, where people are living in Petersburg and paying the real-estate taxes, but that's about it. They go to bed in Petersburg, and they go do everything else in Springfield. So that's a challenge that our small, rural county is combating right now. And trying to encourage industry and development in this area aside from agriculture, or—I mean, we've got the cornfields and everything and the livestock, but the next step in the process is somewhere else. And it would be nice to have the industry here also.

Maniscalco: Yeah. What are some of the industries they're trying to bring in?

Sullivan: Well, right now it's tough. I mean, there's talk of how it would be nice if we could get an ethanol plant. That's the whole new talk right now, is to produce ethanol. But really, there wouldn't be enough of a workforce right now in Menard County to do something like that, because the demographics are that there are so many elderly people, retirement-village-type-people. I mean, they're moving out to the country for the good life once they retire. And I'm sure the people on the Menard County Board would probably be very upset at me saying some of the things I am right now. But it just seems like some of

the industries that could be attracted here—we've got the raw materials to do a lot of this stuff. I mean, with the agriculture products. We're not on an artery like the Mississippi River for hauling grain or moving grain, but we have an opportunity to do something. I mean, I don't know. I'm kind of on the spot right now trying to think of something. But there just needs to be more opportunity for people to do work in this county and not have to go somewhere else, is what I guess I'm saying. And that would attract more people to come to the county that are younger couples that have kids, and you kind of grow. And I've been told before by people that are involved with county politics that ten thousand people in a population is—we've talked about benchmarks before. That's like the special number—that's like the magic number. When you get ten thousand people, something's really happened. You've got the jobs, you've got this. And I think Menard County is at six or seven thousand people right now—I think is what the population is at. And that includes Athens, Petersburg, Greenview, and all the little ones—Atterbury, Tallula, Rock Creek; all the initials in Porta High School. Petersburg, Oakford, Rock Creek, Tallula, and Atterbury.

Maniscalco: Okay. To kind of get back to the time you were in high school, now—you were in 4-H?

Sullivan: Yes.

Maniscalco: Can you tell us a little bit about what you did in 4-H? And your involvement?

Sullivan: Well, a lot of times when you're a kid in 4-H, you decide to join a local 4-H chapter. And my first year I did; I joined the Blue Ribbon 4-H Club, and I was just showing chickens, and I had a club calf, and we had some lambs and stuff that we were showing, and some hogs. And we really enjoyed it. I was the oldest; I was the first one to get into it. And then when my sisters Chelby and Shilo started getting to the age where they wanted to be in it, and a couple of my cousins decided they wanted to be in it, we decided to start our own 4-H club.

Maniscalco: Oh, really?

Sullivan: So we started our own family 4-H club, and that went on for a couple of years. And we all took turns being president, you know. So that's kind of how the 4-H went for us. And we did a lot of the volunteer stuff with the other 4-H clubs in town. When I really started developing on the farm was through the FFA, though.

Maniscalco: Okay.

Sullivan: When I was in sixth grade, the FFA instructor at Porta High School, Boyd Paulsmeyer—he knew I had a lot of different… I had a bunch of turkeys and

geese and ducks at the time. And they have an FFA show every year at the high school where all the little kids come in and have a farm tour, basically. And he was like, "Well, you know, we really want someone to have this and this and this animal here." And I was like, "Well, I've got some of those." So before I even got to high school, I mean junior high, I was bringing stuff to the high school 4-H day, and all the little kids would come in. And so I started participating in the FFA very early on. And once I got to high school, I knew this was something that I wanted to do. I mean, it was something that was going to be very up my alley. All of the classes and all of the contacts that could be made through the FFA would be something that would benefit me a lot.

So I joined the FFA in my freshman year and took the ag classes. And I started my projects, which were at the time—my first year I had a beef project, I had a swine project, I had a forage crop project, so I was keeping records on our hay fields. I had a—did I say poultry? I think I said poultry. I don't know; I get all turned around.

Maniscalco: (laughter)

Sullivan: But I had three or four projects, and I kept records on them. I had a wildlife management project along with it, so I was keeping records on all of the stuff that I was doing. I would just write down each day what I did. The wildlife management was something that I really, really loved. That was my passion, was going deer hunting and going out, spend time in the woods and managing, looking at what we can do to produce big deer, more game birds, improved habitat. And I think my second year—I guess I was a sophomore—I got second in the state of Illinois with my wildlife management project. And I was really excited about that. But the kid that beat me raised a bunch of pheasants. And I thought, "Well, you know, I can raise pheasants. I've raised chickens and turkeys and ducks." And I'd raised pheasants before; my first pheasants I got when I was twelve years old. I got 200 eggs from the state of Illinois, and I tried hatching them out, and I hatched out like nineteen of them. It was just terrible. It was a massacre. And of the ones I raised, half of them got loose, so I had, like, four when I was said and done. So it was kind of a flop. But I had raised pheasants before, and I thought, "You know, I could really do something like this." My sophomore year. So I started raising birds; I got, like, 200 the first year, and gradually built it up each year after that. And then the next year, I came back and I won the state FFA wildlife management. And I went on to nationals, and I think I got a bronze medal in nationals with the project.

So it was something that did really well. I mean, it was something that was unique; it was making some money, so that was always good. It was something that I really had a lot of enjoyment for. So. Chelby who's that?

Chelby: (Inaudible speech)

Sullivan: Oh. That was my buddy I was talking about. So what was I saying? Oh, yeah.

Maniscalco: You were talking about FFA.

Sullivan: So the FFA was really my springboard. It got me started doing a lot of this stuff with the wildlife and agriculture. So Boyd Paulsmeyer getting me involved with some of this stuff, that was a key thing. And I really am thankful for having that opportunity.

And the farm grew once I went to college, because I realized I wasn't going to get a Division I football scholarship, so I needed some way to pay for it. And all through high school I'd been making money, raising pheasants, and I mowed yards and stuff to help build some capital to invest in the pheasant farm and get it built up. But I thought, you know, I can do this. I can pay for my school raising game birds. So I increased production somewhat in 2002 when I was going on to college, and it's kind of snowballed ever since—some days for the better and some days for the worse.

Maniscalco: You know, your father had a pretty conventional farm, with it being dairy cattle.

Sullivan: Yes.

Maniscalco: How was it for you to work with him in switching it over to doing something that's not really so conventional?

Sullivan: At first it was like pulling teeth.

Maniscalco: Really.

Sullivan: At first, trying to get Dad convinced that this is something to do—I mean, my dad is a very, very creative person, which is in my benefit. Because he's very, very insightful, and can see things done, and can see things down the road and how things are going to turn out. And I explained to him that the wild pheasant populations are dwindling. And there is an opportunity for people to raise pheasants for people—for hunters—that we can fill, and I've got the knowledge to do it, and we've got some of the facilities that we can convert to do it. And at first, let's just go slowly. Let's just get a couple here, and every year get a little bit more. Which is wise. His saying was always, "Don't get too big too fast." Because I always want to jump in with both feet and both arms just ready to go, and a big splash, and just do it. And he would want me to be more cautious and take more thought in it. Which is good, and it keeps me from getting overextended and doing more than I need to.

But once I convinced him that this is something that can be done and should be done for the benefit of our farm, he was all about it. He was behind it 100%, and so was my mom. So at first it was kind of like, Okay, this is

something that's new. And at first they were like, Well, I don't know. But then after that, it was all systems go, pretty much.

Maniscalco: Great. Now, you started to say that you've been able to pay for your school?

Sullivan: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Through pheasant farming?

Sullivan: Yep, yep. That's something with all four of us kids—we talked about it; we were told that it's going to be our responsibility to pay for our education. And not because parents want to be jerks, and just because they're saying, Oh, you know, we're being cheapskates. It's for us to get the most out of it. Both of my parents, as I told you before, are in education. And they've seen a lot of kids going to school where their parents pay twenty grand a year for their kid to go and party all night long and then get kicked out at the end of their junior year or sophomore year, just because their grades are too low, or they're not focusing, or they're just wasting their time and their parents' money. And my parents say, you know, "We know you're good kids; we know you guys are hard workers. But you're going to get much more out of it if you buy it yourself and pay for it yourself."

So they have been very, very supportive. I mean, when I started the pheasant farm I took a loan from my dad and got the farm started. But the reason I wanted to build the farm up was to pay for college. And that is what it has done, and that is what it is doing for my younger brother now—he's going to be going on to school this fall. He's going to be, I mean, he works on the pheasant farm, the deer farm. So the deer farm, out of—I don't know if this is something the IRS would get mad about or not—but the deer farm was created out of necessity. The pheasant farm was doing very, very well, and during my junior year of college, the way financial aid and FAFSA works, if you're making money, they're wanting you to pay more money; they're expecting you to pay more money. So I thought, "Why does it make sense for me to be paying all this money for college because I'm being successful? Why don't I reinvest this money back into my own business and show less of an income?" So I thought—okay. This opportunity came to buy some deer and buy out an existing scent company. So I did. And basically, I bought several of his deer and I bought his contacts, is what I bought. His contact information. And from there is what spurred the deer—because I'd been wanting to do it for a long time, but I really didn't have a good reason enough until I thought, well, you know, I'd save money by buying this. So I guess it's a—is it a tax shelter? I don't know what it would be called.

Maniscalco: (laughter)

Sullivan: I should have taken more business classes at school, rather than biology classes. But the deer farm was created because of a financial need to have somewhere to invest money and not be spending as much on education, I guess. So that's neither here nor there, I guess.

Maniscalco: No, that's great. So you've basically grown up here; you've been building this farm to basically support your education.

Sullivan: Mm-hmm.

Maniscalco: And you've gotten it to a pretty good point where it has.

Sullivan: Mm-hmm.

Maniscalco: Can you kind of explain what the farm looks like?

Sullivan: Yeah. Well, the main facet of the farm right now is the pheasants. That's the first thing you'll see when you're coming into the driveway—you'll be blown away by the number of pheasants that you see. And each year, we have been producing—last year we produced about 30,000 ring-neck pheasants, half of which we sell as day-old chicks. The other half are grown either as adult birds or as half-grown birds and then marketed at either seven weeks or twenty weeks. And that's kind of the pheasant end of the operation.

The second part that you would notice would be the deer. We raise white-tailed deer, and like I said, they are raised predominantly for deer track scent. And we also raise trophy bucks for release on shooting preserves, where they restock genetically powerful bucks on these populations to improve the genetics in these pens. And then the third part would be the buffalo. And they're probably the smallest… they take up the most space, but they're the smallest part of the business. And mostly, those are for our own consumption, and we have about thirty people that buy buffalo from us. So that's the smallest part of the business, but still, it takes up a large majority of the property. That would not be suitable for the other types.

Maniscalco: What kind of buildings do you have on the property for you to do all of this?

Sullivan: Okay. Well, we have several brooder barns; we've been in one or two earlier this morning. And they are designed to replicate a nurturing environment for baby chicks. And that keeps the chicks at a certain temperature, which would be about a hundred degrees to start off—ninety to a hundred degrees. And that keeps 'em nice and warm, and that way they can develop and grow in a good environment, where it's dry and it keeps them from getting chilled or wind blown on them.

Another building we have toured would be the hatchery facility, and that's where we gathered all the eggs from and bringing them too. And then that's

where the incubation and hatching is done. We have several out-buildings; the deer use that barn for shelter, and there's also where we do the urine collection. We've got several areas where we do the bottle-feeding for the fawns. Then we have a horse-stall system, where my mom has her saddle horses. So I guess that would be kind of a look at how many… I'm probably forgetting a couple of them, but that's the farm buildings that we've got on the property.

Maniscalco: Now, we went up to a pasture where the buffalo were.

Sullivan: Mm-hmm.

Maniscalco: What, property-wise, do you have here?

Sullivan: On this residence there are thirty acres, and then we have about 450 up the road. Right here, this is where the livestock operation is occurring—on this thirty acres. The farm up the road is forage crop, so we're raising alfalfa there. And then the row crops, like beans and corn. And it's the Sangamon River water right now is what we're growing there right now—half the farm was flooded. So.

Maniscalco: So that's not so good. You're growing alfalfa and corn and…?

Sullivan: Corn and soybeans.

Maniscalco: And soybeans. And that's 400 acres—are you growing that for the livestock, or…?

Sullivan: The alfalfa is used for the livestock, yeah. The row crops are all cash rent, where there is a tenant farmer that is farming the row crops. And we have discussed, possibly in the next couple of years, taking that over and farming it ourselves—when my brother's going to be out of school, and he'll have a little bit more time, hopefully. And my goal would be to farm it ourselves. I think we've got the know-how to do it. It's just finding the time to do it, you know. So that would be my goal, would be to start farming it ourselves eventually.

Maniscalco: So you're renting out to the same tenant every year?

Sullivan: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Or different tenants…?

Sullivan: Yeah. There's actually two tenants that split the farm about in half. And then each of them have their half that they farm. And they are rotating between beans and corn, usually. I think this year they're going to go with corn again. Well, they tried going corn again because of the prices of corn. But yeah. They are in charge of the row crops. And they just pay a cash rent for an acres, for each acre.

Maniscalco: And then you're growing the alfalfa for the livestock.

Sullivan: Yes. We're growing alfalfa for our livestock here. And what we did was, we took—the area that's growing alfalfa now was row-crop production, but it was low soil quality and the yields weren't as high on that land. And we thought, well, we can put it into alfalfa, which can utilize lower-quality soil and get it to produce more efficiently for our uses. So we put a bunch of it into alfalfa three years ago.

Maniscalco: Okay. What other types of feed are you having to bring onto the land to feed the livestock if you're just using the alfalfa?

Sullivan: The alfalfa is the forage crop, so that would be like a roughage for the animals. And we don't feed the pheasants a lot of alfalfa. I mean, they can, and we do sometimes put bales of alfalfa out for them in the winter. But their ration consists of a pellet that we buy from a feed mill in—well, there's several of them that we do business with. But what it is, is a high protein—about 28% protein, it starts out with—and it's got corn in the mix, it's got soybeans in the mix, it's got amino acids, vitamins, dicalcium phosphate; all the things that animals need to have a balanced diet. And having a pheasant ration like that is kind of important. That's a complete feed. Because if we mix it ourselves, sometimes they pick out things that they want, and then they leave other parts, so they're not getting a balanced ration. So you want them to have a pelletized feed, is what we've found. We will supplement some corn; we might spread some corn on the ground so that they're not picking at each other, they're picking at the food on the ground. And the pheasants eat essentially the same diet the whole way through; the only thing that changes is the protein level, which is controlled by pretty much the amount of soybeans in the mix. So it goes from twenty-eight to twenty and then down to sixteen percent, depending on their age. So the older they are, the less protein they require.

The deer on the farm, we're bringing on a feed ration that brings on a very, very big balanced mix of seeds. It's got roasted soybeans, it's got corn, it's got oats, it's got yeast, it's got wheat. It's got sunflower seeds in it. It's got a product called Calf-Manna which is like a calf supplement they use for dairy calves that's got like a lot of high calcium in it. And then it has like an alfalfa-meal pellet in it, and then we're also giving them supplement-alfalfa hay that they have free access to at all times.

And the buffalo—we don't give the cow herd really any supplemental grain unless it gets really, really cold out. Because if you give them too much grain they get too heavy and too fat, and their calves get too big and too fat inside of them, and you have calving problems. So you don't want to feed the cows too much. When we're feeding out buffalo, the last sixty days, we put them on as much corn as they want—just straight shelled corn—and then all the alfalfa hay that they can eat. And then that kind of gives them that last little push

where it puts—like I said before, buffalo don't have marbling; they don't have intramuscular-fat. But it puts a little bit of fat around the edges of the meat for a little bit of trim to give it a more moist texture to the meat.

Maniscalco: Now, how many pheasants? Let's start with just the pheasants first.

Sullivan: Okay.

Maniscalco: How many pheasants do you keep on the farm?

Sullivan: Okay. Right now, we have close to six thousand pheasants. That's mostly young birds. Through the year, we will progressively switch groups. So really, there's probably not ever going to be more than five to six thousand birds at one time; but over the course of a year, about 30,000 birds will leave the farm. So I always tell people, "About 50,000 eggs will come through one door of the hatchery, and about 30,000 chicks will go through the other." And that includes some of the eggs that we sell for other people to hatch, too. So we do sell some hatching eggs for other farms. So that's kind of what we have said on the pheasants. There's about a total production of about 30,00 birds, but they're not all here at one time.

Maniscalco: Now, you also have quail?

Sullivan: Yes. And the quail are something that—I used to have a breeding flock of quail, like I do the pheasants, where I gathered eggs every day and would have that. As far as the production of the quail, economies of scale have killed us. Because we can only have—the amount that I have to pay for feed and the amount of labor that goes into them and all these input costs—I can buy them for about two cents more than I can produce them more apiece. So I've found that if I can go ahead and buy them, it's in my best interests, where I can put my labor better elsewhere. So I buy day-old quail from another producer, and then we raise the quail just like we do our pheasants and market them.

Maniscalco: Now, in terms of disease, and I know we've talked about some of these things, but in terms of disease with the birds, what sorts of things do you do to ensure that you don't have problems with that?

Sullivan: Well, first and foremost is our biosecurity. We will absolutely not let a bird once it's left the farm back on the facility. So that's kind of our first line of our preventing us bringing something back to the farm. Second, I mean, we monitor anybody that would be coming in and going from the farm. We ask everybody questions and stuff when they're coming to the farm to make sure that nobody has been in contact with any other poultry or any other avian species within a reasonable amount of time. I mean, I do disinfect a lot of—a lot of times if school groups come here, I disinfect shoes, or if people have been around other facilities, I'll have them put on boots or something that they

can wear so they are not possibly tracking something back and forth. We disinfect a lot of stuff. If it's coming from another farm or it's been possibly in contact with another farm, we disinfect.

Control of flies is a big thing to keep disease problems down. Because when we're raising wildlife, there is potential spread—you don't have to worry about other farms; it's the wild population spreading disease. So you want to limit flies, because they can be a vector for diseases back and forth from different wildlife that might be in the area.

Sparrows are something that we have a problem with, and it always makes me really nervous that they're going to go over to one of my hillbilly neighbors and be eating out of one of their chicken feeders and then come over to here and eat out of here and spread something back and forth. So the European starlings and the sparrows are managed around here.

Maniscalco: So by "managed", do you mean…

Sullivan: Yeah, we shoot them.

Maniscalco: You're shooting them.

Sullivan: Yeah.

Maniscalco: And how do you deal with the flies?

Sullivan: With the flies, it's kind of cool—we have, like, a three-pronged attack on the flies. First of all, there's a chemical defense; we put fly spray out. It's Prometheran—it's a fly deterrent, and it also kills them. And we'll spray the deer with that; we'll spray a lot of facilities with that to just kind of keep the flies off the deer and around the pheasant feeders and the waters and around the birds and stuff. And so that keeps the flies away. We also have—there's these little wasps that we release, these tiny little things. And their life cycle is that they lay eggs around the maggots and they eat them. The wasp larva eat the maggots, I guess. So they're constantly killing fly larva. And then we also have these fly traps, which you saw all around the property. And they operate off a fly pheromone; it's like a reproductive pheromone, and it causes them to just—they love it. They just love the smell, and it smells like fly sex, I guess is what it smells like. (laughter) And they all go in there, and we actually remove about ten pounds of flies a week up on the property.

Maniscalco: Wow.

Sullivan: So yeah. Lots of flies are removed from the property. And then—that would be our greatest potential for problems, is the flies. So we have to keep them down.

Maniscalco: OK. Now, what about… I mean, you've mentioned a few things with equipment. But other special equipment just for handling the pheasants?

Sullivan: Well, we saw the incubators. They are very specialized equipment for what we're doing with that. And then they have to be held with a specific temperature and humidity, and they have to be able to turn the eggs at intervals that would prevent the embryo from sticking to one side. So our incubators actually turn them every hour. As far as other equipment that we use, we use the John Deere Skids Steer quite a bit for handling manure; a manure spreader. We use a tractor quite a bit with an auger wagon on it, where we're moving feed to the big feeders. Probably my most indispensable piece of equipment that I use every day is a little green wagon. If somebody ever asked me, "What was the best birthday present that you ever got?", I'd have to say, "My little green wagon." And then they'll say, "How old were you?" Well, I was about 22.

Maniscalco: (laughter)

Sullivan: But I use that wagon every day, because it's just short enough that I can get in the pheasant pens, and I can usually get, like, two big trash cans full of feed on it. If I get a feeder that I can't reach with the auger wagon, I'll just take those trash cans of feed and dump them into the feeders. So that is something I use all of the time.

Maniscalco: What about fencing for the pheasants?

Sullivan: The pheasants require a pen that's about five and a half feet tall on the sides, and the tops of the pens are nylon or polypropylene knotted netting. And that keeps the pheasants in and keeps wild birds out and keeps predators out. And it also allows the birds to fly around and fly up and not injure themselves. Because that's something you have to worry about; pheasants—especially, as I told you about before, we're trying to grow pheasants that are really, really explosive off the ground. They're going to jump up and fly like a fire's been lit underneath of them—and if you have a pen that has a solid roof, they can hurt themselves. They can injure their necks and their heads. So you need a top that's soft enough to absorb the shock of them hitting it continually and not hurting them.

I mean, a big problem we have with predators is hawks and owls coming and trying to get them through the net. So you have to have something that's heavy-duty enough to prevent hawks from getting in, but something soft enough that's not going to injure a bird trying to get out.

Maniscalco: Really.

Sullivan: So it's kind of a happy medium. Yeah.

Maniscalco: So does that happen often, though?

Sullivan: Yes. We will lose five or six pheasants a week during the fall when hawks are kind of migrating through this area, and owls and stuff. And there's nothing we can do about it; our hands are tied, as far as you can't do anything to remove hawks or owls. Occasionally we'll have one that gets its feet caught in a net, and we'll call conservation and they'll come out and relocate it.

Maniscalco: Okay. And finally, with the pheasants—let's talk about the markets, and where you're selling them to.

Sullivan: Okay. The majority of our pheasants are destined for hunting/recreational purposes, where they'll be restocked on land that's designated for pheasant hunting. The birds will be released on these properties and then they will be hunted on these properties. And it's the equivalent of a put-and-take catfish pond, basically, where these birds are being stocked here for this purpose, for recreational purposes.

And what it does is that it keeps a pheasant population that would sustain hunting pressure that a wild population couldn't. Because let's say you're a hunt club operator and you wanted to have 5,000 birds shot on your property, to have 5,000 birds in a wild setting, you'd need hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of acres. And with this, you could have 60, 70, 80—250 acres is the minimum for a hunt club. But you can raise and you can do all of this on a smaller parcel of ground. And you can control it more, where you're saying, "All right, this number of birds is being released in this area," and you can manage it better. So you can say, "All right, well, we've harvested this number of birds, so that means that there should be this many birds left out here." I mean, you're always going to lose some to predators, and some of them run off and escape, but that is where the majority of our birds go to.

Now, there are some of them that are destined for dog training. Guys that train pointing dogs and setters and different types of bird dogs come and buy birds from us to use and aid for training their bird dogs. And they probably buy about fifteen percent of our birds.

And then there's a very small group of our birds that get sold to guys for eating. They'll come and buy them just to butcher them to eat. And there's several guys that do that, but not very many. And then there are another group of guys that like to buy birds to release on their property, just for the aesthetic purposes. They want to establish a pheasant population because they used to have pheasants when they were growing up and now they don't.

And a lot of that has to do—

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Sullivan: —with the loss of habitat. And everybody knows that pheasant aren't really a wild, I mean, they're a wild bird, but they're not native to North America. They were imported in the 1850s from China, and the uplands of Mongolia. So they're not, per se, a native bird to Illinois. But they've been here a long, long time, and people like to see them. And they associate pheasants with wild places and they like to see pheasants. So a lot of guys will come and buy birds just to release on their farms, just so they can see them again.

Maniscalco: Now, I mean, how much are you getting for a pheasant? You know, if somebody were to come in and say "I want to buy a bunch of pheasants from you"?

Sullivan: Well, we have a price breakdown. Usually the way it works is October first they are eight dollars, and then it goes up three cents per day after that. And that is for our standard orders. Now, we have some price breaks through buying groups of over a thousand, and that's something that we discuss and we work on some terms if we're if we're making out some contracts with a larger buyer. But usually it starts out with eight dollars on October 1 and then goes up because of feed costs. And our feed costs right now are just skyrocketed through the roof.

Maniscalco: Really.

Sullivan: Because of—well, the crop damage because of the floods this year. And everybody's buying corn for ethanol and not for pheasant food. (laughter)

Maniscalco: Yeah. Now let's talk about the deer.

Sullivan: Okay.

Maniscalco: And what you're doing with the deer.

Sullivan: Okay.

Maniscalco: First of all, what do you have for housing the deer?

Sullivan: Well, you kind of saw when we were bottle-feeding the fawns. We've got several places where deer have access to an inside area where they can come in and stay dry and get warm if it's kind of cooler out. But they all have access to outside runs where they have grass and places to run around and get in the sun. And that's when we're doing the bottle-feeding.

As they get older, we move them out to a larger enclosure. The pen we're in would be a pasture, but it really doesn't have any vegetation, and that's pretty much because I want them to be eating the ration that I'm feeding them so

they're getting a balanced diet. In the wild, they'd be able to browse over hundreds of acres and find all that they need to have. In a wild [captive] setting, they're more confined, so they'd maybe just eat this kind of grass and this kind of grass because that's all they'd be given. So this way, they're getting a good balanced diet through the ration that I've mixed for them, and they're not just eating up the grass on the pins. And I have on occasion replanted those pens, but they eat it down really fast. I mean, everybody knows what deer do to their gardens and stuff, so you can only imagine when they're enclosed in an area. We're in the process of expanding the deer pens so we can rotate them around to different pastures so they can have some wild vegetation to feed on inside the pen along with what they're eating in their ration.

Maniscalco: Now, how many deer do you have?

Sullivan: Right now I have 21 breeding does, so they'll be does that will be used in you breeding herd. And then we have the bucks. Right now we have like four bucks, and then we have the fawns. And each year, the fawns will be marketed, and some of them will replace some of the does in the doe herd, and some of the does will be sold, and so we try to keep it around 20 breeding animals, and then whatever bucks we need to have on hand.

Maniscalco: And then what are you doing in terms of disease or problems like that?

Sullivan: Well, we are a part of the Chronic Wasting Disease Testing certification program through the state of Illinois. And what we do is that if we have a deer that dies for any reason, whether it's old age or it gets injured and has to be put down, we submit the head to testing for testing for chronic wasting disease, and they examine the spinal fluid. So that's one thing that we do to help prevent the spread of any types of diseases. They've never found chronic wasting disease in a captive herd in Illinois. They've only found it in wild populations up in Northern Illinois. So a lot of people blame deer farmers for spreading chronic wasting disease when it's actually hunters and guys that are taking wildlife from out west and bringing it back here, is more possible vectors for the spread of it.

We are in the process of getting tested for tuberculosis and for brucellosis. That way, we can be certified. And once you're certified for brucellosis and TB, you can be able to ship animals anywhere in the country, as long as you have entry permits and your chronic wasting disease level is accepted at that state. Like, Indiana doesn't allow any deer coming from a state that has CWD in the state, whereas Missouri has different requirements for entry. So every state is a little bit different.

Maniscalco: Now, I mean, not everyone is raising deer. What sorts of special equipment do you need?

Sullivan: Well, the most obvious is the high fences. Deer, as everybody knows, can jump really high. So we have eight-foot fences that are required of us by the Department of Agriculture, and we have areas where they can get away from people. I mean, the deer we have seen, a lot of them are nice, but we have several that are not bottle-fed, so they want to be able to get away and be secluded. So those are kind of the two essential things for raising deer.

For handling the deer, we have a chute that we run them into the barn and put them into the stalls where we're collecting the deer urine. And then we set up the chute, where we can run them up reverse through the system. And then they have to exit through this handling chute, where it basically squeezes down on their sides, and that way, they can't struggle. I mean, they can struggle, but they can't hurt themselves, because it's kind of pinching them down. And then we can do any type of vet work that we need to do on them.

Maniscalco: Okay. Now, you said that you're collecting the deer urine.

Sullivan: Yeah.

Maniscalco: So what's the process with that?

Sullivan: All right. Well, it kind of sounds like a very foreign thing when someone says, "You do what to urine? You collect the urine?" Especially my friends from St. Louis and Chicago. They're like, "You are really a hillbilly, you know that?"

Maniscalco: (laughter)

Sullivan: So, yeah. The way that whole process works—I bought the scent company from a guy and I kind of got his ideas. The way they were doing it, they had poured a concrete floor, and it was a sealed concrete floor. And the deer were peeing, and it was going down the drain, and they had a bucket and this big enclosure that they were collecting it off of. And I saw that, and it was a good idea, but it had some flaws. There's two things that degrade urine, and that is bacterial growth and the degradation of urea to ammonia. And those are two things that destroy a scent product the fastest. And so I started thinking of ways that we can prevent those two things.

Well, you can stabilize it by cooling it down. You can stabilize the urea by cooling it down to just above freezing. You don't want to freeze it, which I'll cover in a second. And to limit bacterial growth, you want it to be able to be collected on a clean surface, so it's not constantly building up. So the way we decided it—we're collecting it all on top of plastic, PVC, which can be cleaned every time a new group of deer is brought in, which is every twelve hours during the season. So we start collecting the first of October, and we bottle only during the season. And we are marketing for that season. So everything we collect this year will be sold this year, and we have no carryover from

season to season. The majority of the other scent companies are bottling all summer long and all fall for next year, so they're constantly having a product on the shelf while they're producing a next season's crop, as I guess it would be called. And I don't see that as being, I mean, I guess it can work sometimes, but it's not as good.

And ours is a premium product and nobody has approached it this way. One, because it's so labor-intensive and two, because it requires a deer herd that's very, very tame, that we can handle on a daily basis and still efficiently produce urine. Now, if we were still wanting to make change on a national level, we'd really have to make some big changes. Right now, we are in the process of brokering several deals with several national chains, but they are aware that our limitations are that we have a given volume—we can't just say, "Oh, you want 100,000 bottles next year? Well, we can do that." We have a finite amount of bottles that we can produce in those three months of collection.

So when I first started I asked a guy how he did it, and he said, "Well, you know, when we first started we used a broomstick and a milk jug." And I said "There has got to be a better way." So that's how we came up with this barn. The way that the barn works is, the barn is kind of built on a hill side, and the deer enter through one end of the barn, and there are stalls all along the barn. And they're fed in there, so they're familiar with going in. And once they go into their stall area, the doors are shut, and it's got a false floor on the bottom of it. It's got a PVC or, I'm sorry, it's fiberglass slats like you might see in a nursery building in a hog barn. And it's narrow enough that the droppings don't go through, really, but the urine drips through. And then there's PVC boards below, so it drips through, goes to the boards, and then kind of goes chutes-and-ladders to each stall has a collection bucket. And then we'll have a group of does we'll put in in the evening, and in the morning we'll come in and collect the urine, take that out of there, hose it out, go up to the facility—I guess the garage here is where we do it; we have a room in the garage where we do all that urine processing. Bottle it, put the labels on the boxes, put it in the refrigerator, cool it down, and then we'll ship it out with a cold pack, usually. So it's a twenty-four to forty-eight hour turnaround. So it's all really, really fast. And then we'll come back. Those does will have been run out. The pens will have dried out, and then we'll run another group of deer in. So it's constantly rotating. So the deer don't have to spend very long in the collection facility, so it's low-stress on them. But it's just a lot of manual labor.

Maniscalco: Now, the deer urine is being used for hunters?

Sullivan: Yes. It is being marketed to hunters for deer attracting. And the way I explain deer scent—I mean, this is not a perfect interpretation, but it gives people that might not be familiar with this an idea of what we're talking about. Deer urine is like the equivalent of a MySpace page for deer. It tells what their nutritional

level is, what their reproductional status is, where they're kinda at in the herd, what their health level is; so it kind of tells a little bit about this individual. And what the goal is—most hunters want to shoot a big buck, so you're wanting to buy deer urine from a doe to attract a buck to come in and find out who the new girl is on the block. Or we do sell a small amount of buck urine, which is trying to antagonize a wild buck. And say there's a new guy who just moved in and he's looking to take over your territory. Basically, without having to get too much in detail, that is what deer urine is used for—it's to spark a curiosity in a wild deer, to have them come out and check. And what that will do is bring them closer to a hunter and help them increase their odds of getting a shot. So our slogan is "Bring 'em in close." (laughter)

And we have. We've got us a product that we've been working on last year—we started, we've used a hormone therapy that we can bring the does into heat, like they do for beef cattle or dairy cattle when they're wanting to use the artificial insemination. So we're actually doing artificial insemination with the deer and and we're bringing them into heat. And we can actually pinpoint when they are in estrus, and we're bottling the urine while they're in estrus, and we're selling that as a premium product. I can only get sixteen ounces per doe, but that stuff is smokin' hot. And our first year testing it, a couple of my buddies, I gave them bottles and said, "Try this out, tell me how it works." A couple of them called me and said "Oh, man, that stuff—I got trapped in my tree." One of my buddies put it on his boots, and a buck chased him out of the woods and just wouldn't leave him alone. Younger bucks are more apt to be very aggressive toward that, because they're just not familiar with anything yet. But it's something that I say—you've got to be careful, because you can get hurt. And knock on wood, nobody's been hurt yet, but I say—don't put it on yourself. Put it on some towels or something. Don't put it on yourself.

Maniscalco: Yeah. Now, where exactly are you selling your products to?

Sullivan: Well, the internet is a huge, huge thing for us. And that's really what the future of our industry is—the internet. Because it allows somebody who's basically a nobody to reach so many more people. And it's a very, very inexpensive form of advertising, and it's where everybody does a lot of their shopping nowadays. They get online, and they find out what information is out there, and that's where they make their purchasing decisions.

So that's where we're doing a lot of the marketing for the deer scent. I have several retail stores that do buy it wholesale from us and sell it. And I also have tons of guys that come and just buy it straight off the farm. Just by word of mouth, or people have seen some of our ads or talked to me—they'll just come and pick it up right off the farm.

So those are pretty much how we market the deer scent. We've got a couple of deals I was talking about with several of the larger chains that are, I don't want

to name any names right now, because it's still kind of in the infancy of developing these relationships. But a couple of the big names have taken an interest in our product, just because of the way we're doing it; nobody else has approached it this way. So maybe in the next couple of years, we'll be going to a national level and we'll need to increase our facilities at a different location and change some of the things that we're doing on that end, just so that we can meet the demand for the volume.

Maniscalco: What would you have to do to change your facilities, exactly?

Sullivan: Just expand.

Maniscalco: Right.

Sullivan: I'd keep doing it exactly the same way, but it would be expanding the facility. I mean, right now, I have six collection stalls. I would need to increase that to whatever it would be. I would probably need to hire on some more work and get my brother to be here more often. Steele—my brother Steele—he's half of all this, but he's working right now. He's out baling hay right now. So I'll probably hear about this for years and years and years. He was putting up hay, and I was here giving an interview, so... (laughter)

But yeah. Steele is a half-partner in all of this. And I couldn't do the things I do without him. Because I'm only on the farm, Monday and Tuesday during the semester I'm up in Macomb taking classes, so he's here doing the day-to-day stuff on Monday and Tuesday. So without him we couldn't do any of the stuff we do, because he is really indispensable.

Maniscalco: Okay. So finally, let's talk about the buffalo.

Sullivan: Okay.

Maniscalco: (laughter) How many buffalo do you have, first of all?

Sullivan: We have nine cows and we have one herd bull, and we've got four calves from last year, and then we've got four calves that have been born out. So that's eighteen.

Maniscalco: And they don't have any housing out there?

Sullivan: No. The buffalo really don't like to go inside. I mean, occasionally they'll go up to the barn here and they'll go into the barn, but they really don't like spending much of their time inside. And that's just because they're a wild animal. It's kind of like the pheasants and the deer. They really don't like spending time inside, because they like to feel like they can escape. They like to feel like they are not confined, where if there was a threat they could get away from it. So the buffalo spend most of their time—even on a hot day like

today, when they could have been in the shade—they just are very, very used to being in harsh conditions, and that is what they would prefer.

Maniscalco: Now, what about fencing?

Sullivan: The fencing we have for the buffalo is very substantial. It's high-tensile, tight-lock, woven-wire fencing that's eight feet tall. And that would prevent them from going through it or over it.

Maniscalco: And have you ever had any kinds of problems with that?

Sullivan: No. Well, again, knock on wood, we've never had a problem with an escape of an animal that has tried to come through. I actually have seen a buffalo we were unloading out of a trailer once—it was startled, and it ran right at the fence headlong as fast as it could. It hit that fence, and the fence kind of stretched out and flung him back. So it did exactly what the guy was selling it said it would do. He said, "It's going to give, but it's not going to break, and it's going to spring them back." So it's going to absorb the initial shock of them—so it's not like hitting a concrete wall, where it will break their neck, which would be bad if they hit it.

Maniscalco: Yeah.

Sullivan: It kind of gives, and then it pushes back.

Maniscalco: You haven't really said how you came to the decision of getting buffalo.

Sullivan: Well, that was kind of a wild deal. My dad, ever since I was a little kid, has said "We're going to get buffalo." He also said we were going to get an elephant, too. (laughter) But we never got an elephant. He said, "Well, hey, I got that baby buffalo—it's going to be here next week." He would always tell us that, and we'd always go, "Oh, it's going to be a baby buffalo!" And he would just do it to tease us.

And for his birthday, all four of us kids talked about it, and we decided to buy him a buffalo. We were all freshmen and sophomores in college, and we had raised beef cattle for years. And when I went to college, we had the pheasants; we had beef cows; we had hogs; we had not started raising the deer yet, and my dad and I talked about it, and he was like, "Something's got to give. You're not going to be here." And this was when I was doing my undergrad, so I was actually away from the farm every day. I was commuting to Jacksonville from here, so I would get up in the morning, do chores, drive over there, go to class, then come home at night. I actually played football over there for five years.

So there were a lot of long days in there. And he said, "You know what, we can't keep doing all of this. We've got to reduce something." So we decided to reduce the cow herd. And so we had all this pasture that my mom had a couple

of horses on. And it wasn't probably a year and a half after we got rid of the cows that we decided to buy a couple of buffalo.

So we were at an auction barn, and my dad kept kind of saying, "Hey, we need to get these buffalo—or we need to get some more calves for the feed lot." Because a lot of our customers that were buying beef for their freezer from us still wanted them. And beef prices at the time were just through the roof. And we were at this auction, and my brothers and sisters and I, we talked, and we were like "Hey, let's buy Dad this buffalo." And we ended up buying four of them for him. And we put them in the feed lot, and we raised them up and sold them, and they tasted really good, and we really liked buffalo. And we thought it was just as good or better than any beef we'd ever had. So from that point on, we kind of started raising buffalo.

And the next year, my dad ended up buying a couple for himself from another herd, and then that's kind of what started the herd that we have here now.

Maniscalco: Great. Now, what do you have to do in terms of disease for your herd?

Sullivan: For the buffalo?

Maniscalco: Yeah, for the buffalo.

Sullivan: What's very nice about buffalo is that they require very little maintenance. In this area, we're not as worried about tuberculosis or brucellosis, especially since we're a closed herd. As far as, like, other diseases that you have to worry about—pinkeye, you really don't have to worry about that. Other things that you can vaccinate them for that you would vaccinate your cattle for, like blackleg or lepto—anything like that, you can vaccinate them for. But really what we've found with the buffalo is that the less you do to handle them, the better off they're going to be. Because they're so big and they can get so rowdy that they end up hurting themselves worse and getting themselves stressed out when you're handling them than if you're actually doing it. So really, the only veterinary care we give them is that we worm them once a year. And other than that, they kind of are pretty sufficient. If there is a problem—let's say one of them gets injured or something—instead of trying to do the vet work and doctor them up and everything, we'll probably just butcher it. So that way we'll eat it ourselves for our family. Because that way you're not pumping it full of a bunch of antibiotics. And those are things that can really—for buffalo and for people that are wanting to buy buffalo from us, they want it for a healthy aspect. They're wanting it for healthy living and a healthy diet, and they don't want something that's pumped full of a bunch of hormones and antibiotics and stuff. So that's kind of how we do it. We don't do a lot of that stuff or try to do any work on them like that.

Maniscalco: In terms of equipment, to deal with buffalo, there's got to be some other stuff like that….?

Sullivan: Yes, there are. We have a handling facility for the buffalo which consists of several chutes that get smaller and smaller as we run them down the line. There is a head gate that we had talked about buying—it's about eight thousand dollars for this head gate. It's like a beef head gate, just like that, but it has a crash gate on the front of it, so they actually run into it. And like he fence, it absorbs that initial shock when they're just running into it, and then you just clamp it down on their head and squeeze them down so you can do any of the work on them. But at this point we've not bought one of those yet. We've not had to do any of that work on them. And if for some reason we needed to knock one of them down to do some work on them, we do have a tranquilizer gun that we could tranquilize it. But again, then you're using drugs and stuff. We've not had to do that.

Maniscalco: And just as you mentioned a second ago, you're pretty much selling your buffalo as meat.

Sullivan: Yes.

Maniscalco: To specific people?

Sullivan: Yeah. We've got a list of about thirty people that come and buy, like, a whole or a half or a quarter buffalo. And they're kind of on a yearly basis—everybody's kind of got their name in, so if we have buffalo ready, we call them and we say, hey, we're taking a buffalo over to the processor. And then the processor will call them and say "How do you want it cut up?" And they'll say, "Well, I want this many steaks and this many ribeyes and this many pounds of ground buffalo." So that's kind of how we handle that. And we leave it all up to the consumer as to how they want their buffalo processed. I mean, they could say they want it all cut up and put into hamburger if they want, or they can say, Well, let's get as many steaks out of this as we possibly can say, Well, let's get as many steaks out of it as we possibly can.

Maniscalco: So what's the difference in cost, comparing buffalo to beef?

Sullivan: Production costs—it costs more to produce buffalo. Because it takes longer; it can take up to twenty-four months to produce a buffalo, where it would be twelve to fourteen, I think, for a beef calf. They're less efficient at converting feed into gain, so it takes more feed to convert into gain. They require more space per animal per square foot per head—just because they are bigger and they're kind of aggressive sometimes. So that's something that you've got to figure in.

As far as selling them, on the hoof, we sell them for a dollar-ten a pound right now on the hoof. Which is probably something we'll have to increase a little bit; we do increase with rising corn prices and input costs. But it's maybe ten percent higher than beef is. And really, if you went online and tried to buy buffalo meat, it would be a lot more than if you were buying it directly off our farm. And the reason for that is that most people who were buying from us are people who have bought beef from us before. And they're not rich and wealthy people; they're just local people that we've grown up with, and they had been buying beef from us for years, and now they're buying buffalo from us. So we're not trying to gouge them or anything like that. So we're trying to keep it as close as we can to selling our beef prices.

Maniscalco: You mentioned, out in the field, something about genetics and buffalo.

Sullivan: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Can you talk about that?

Sullivan: I don't know what the scientific documentation behind this is, but we have noticed that there are two kinds of buffalo, it seems like. There are what we'd call the "nickel buffalo," like you might see on a buffalo nickel or an Indian-head nickel. It's got really skinny hindquarters and it's got a great big hump, and they're really light-colored, and they've got a sandy brown back. And then there's the black buffalo. And that's kind of like the bull that we took a look at. He's very massive through his hindquarters; he's got a lot of dark features. His skin's a lot darker; his fur's a lot darker. And I don't know what causes that or why there is two types in the population. And some of the calves are born to look more like the nickels, and some of them look more like the blacks. So I don't know where that all comes from, but one thing we have found with buffalo, something a lot of people know—buffalo used to have so many in their population. There used to be 30 million buffalo roaming across the prairies of North America. And that's right when the first European settlers arrived to in the Civil War, there was less than three hundred left after the Civil War was over and they started eradicating them across the entire West. So buffalo have gone through a very tight bottleneck. And so that has caused a very, very great bottleneck effect in their genetic diversity. So they went from having a very, very genetic diverse population to going down to a very small group of individuals contributing genes to a population.

And so inbreeding was really a problem for a long time. It still is something that people have to watch out for with buffalo, is inbreeding problems. And a lot of times, if their populations are too inbred, you'll start getting midget buffalo, dwarf buffalo, that don't grow very fast and are very, very inefficient. And so that's something you always kinda have to watch out for.

And so with buffalo populations in captivity like this, you're wanting to make sure that you're doing your best to improve the genetic diversity. You don't want to keep inbreeding for too long, because you're going to start seeing lots and lots of problems.

Maniscalco: So what are you doing here, specifically, to…?

Sullivan: Well, we haven't been doing it very long. So our herd bull that we've been using—our first year that we started breeding buffalo, I think, was in 2004. So we've had him for four years now. And he probably will, within the next two years, be sold and will be replaced with another bull from another herd that is clean, basically. No TB, no brucellosis, and they're tested and everything. And it would be somebody that is not related to our cows. Because we'll be keeping some calves back to use as replacement heifers and we'll be selling some of the old cows. So we don't want to breed back to a father-and-daughter kind of thing, where you're going to see problems maybe with growth, or your birth rates and fertility can go down when you start inbreeding like that. And they start liking banjo music and that kind of stuff. (laughter)

Maniscalco: (laughter) What kind of cost are you talking about to get a new bull?

Sullivan: It kind of depends on who you're buying from. We might just talk to a couple of guys that we know that raise buffalo and say, "We'll trade you our herd bull for your herd bull." And so then you're changing out two different genetics that way. I might say, "Well, we've got a couple of bull calves in here—what if we switch to you a couple of our bull calves, and then we grow out theirs and they grow out ours, and if one of them looks good, then we'll take that one?" I mean, if you went to a big buffalo ranch and wanted to buy a herd bull, you could be looking at four or five thousand dollars, maybe. If you're wanting to buy from a premier herd, this is the one to buy. You can spend a lot of money. You could probably spend as much money on one as you wanted to spend. It could go up and up and up, as far as people that you are talking to and different individuals that are involved in it. But it could be as high as, like I said, five or six or seven thousand dollars—or it could be down in the eleven hundred dollar range.

Maniscalco: That's interesting. You know, what's really interesting to me is that here you've put together this really large business kind of by yourself, with the help of your brother, and your sisters probably helped you out some as well.

Sullivan: Oh, yeah.

Maniscalco: And you're funding your college degree through that. Can you talk a little bit about your college, and what you've done?

Sullivan: Yeah. As an undergrad, I went to Illinois College in Jacksonville. And I wanted to go someplace fairly close to home so I could continue doing what I was on the farm. So I commuted from Jacksonville; it's about a forty-five-minute drive from here to Jacksonville, so that's really not bad at all. And at Illinois College, when I first got there, I was kind of just not sure what I wanted to do. I was kind of thinking that I wanted to be a schoolteacher, like my folks were; that was kind of the family tradition to do. But I knew I really liked doing this, so I kind of thought, Maybe I'll be an ag teacher and a football coach or something. Because I really enjoyed playing football, and I played there at Illinois College for five years. So I really wanted to do something along those lines.

And while I was there, I took a couple of classes from a professor—her name was Dr. Beal, Dr. Deborah Beal. And she completely opened my eyes to this whole world of science. And I've always been interested in nature and wildlife and the outdoors, but she kind of opened my eyes to a different side of it. And her major that she taught was in environmental science. And I thought, “Wow, this is really great. I really like this.” And I started taking her classes and really enjoyed it and had a lot of fun taking her classes. And she had taken us across the country. I've been up in the North Woods with her in classes; we were hiking through the Upper Peninsula, kayaking on Lake Superior. She took a class out to the Grand Canyon before, I think. I've been down to the Everglades with her and her husband on five different occasions, paddling with alligators and going on different tours. I've been down to Mexico with her twice. So she's completely broadened my horizons on all this stuff, as far as the science part of this business goes.

I decided on an environmental science major, and she kept encouraging me to take biology classes along with environmental science. She said, "You really could be a double-major, you know; you could get environmental science, and then you could get biology, because they kind of go together. They really feed off of each other, because environmental science is a lot of the application of things in the biological field, and a lot of the reasons you might want to learn something in the biological field is so that you can apply it to environmental science."

So I decided to get a double-major in environmental science and in biology. And I also ended up getting a minor in chemistry for some crazy reason—I'll never, ever figure out why I did that, other than the fact that, I don't know. I still can't come up with a good reason. Maybe there was a good-looking girl in the class. I don't know. (laughter) But I did get a minor in chemistry. And I graduated, and I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do with it. The reason I developed this farm was to pay for school. It was a means to an end; it was never supposed to be the end. I just thought, Oh, I'd make enough money to pay for school and then go on and do whatever else I was planning on doing. And really, truly, what I had seen myself doing was going to school for four

years, playing football, having a good time, getting a degree, and then going to OCS and going into the Marine Corps. That is what I saw myself doing. And the way this farm was developed—it kind of has given me another opportunity to do something else. I still tried to pursue the Marine Corps avenue after I graduated, but I was injured playing football, and it was a disqualification for service. So unfortunately—my mom and my grandmother keep saying to me that it was God telling me that I need to do something else. But that kind of helped me say, Okay, so this maybe was what I meant to do.

So I decided to keep doing the farm thing. And my professor, Dr. Beal, she is the reason I am now in grad school. After I graduated from Illinois College in 2006 or 2007—I don't really remember—she kept saying, "You need to go to grad school. No, you need to go to grad school, It would be a great thing for you; you'd do really well." And I'm not Johnny Student. I never have been. I liked going to school, but I never saw myself going on and getting a Master's and all this. But she was like, "No, you need to. You need to do this. You need to go on in school." So she convinced me to go to Western and get a Master's in biology. So right now I am one semester away, hopefully, from graduating with a Master's in biology. All I have to do now—I've got all my classes taken, and I just need to complete my thesis. And that's what I've talked a little bit about, what my research is going to be. We're correlating the ring-neck pheasants' sexual ornamentation, like the tail length and the spurs and UV reflectiveness of the feathers—we're trying to correlate that with the mobility of the sperm. And seeing if there's—basically, do these ornaments honestly advertise how fertile a male is? So can a female look at a male and say, "Well, this is a good male—he's fertile because he's got a long tail and he's got big spurs"?

So that's what we're looking at. And I could probably go on and on about that for another half hour. But usually people start falling asleep when I start talking about my research.

Maniscalco: No, that's cool. That's great. So, real quick—what are the key things in pheasants? You mentioned a couple of them, the tails and the spurs…

Sullivan: Well, that's one thing we're looking at right now. I'm trying to find a couple of papers on things that people have already found. One guy did a paper—the title of the paper was "Pheasant Hens Prefer Males with Large Spurs". And his take on it was, he took a genetic sampling of a group of male pheasants, and then he put these males with this group of females, and then came back and tested the paternity of all the chicks. And the majority of the chicks were sired by the males with the longer spurs. So he goes, "Aha! These females are selecting for males with longer spurs!" Which—I can see his argument there, and that's what I'm using in my thesis, is that if these females are selecting for these specific traits, then there should be some sort of reproductive benefit. In nature, there's not waste. There's no waste. They're not looking at specific

things just for no reason. There are reasons—like, peacocks prefer males with longer tails, because that signals to them—there's several hypotheses about why that is. One could mean that they have a low parasite load. One may mean that they have this great big tail but they're still able to escape from predators; they must be really good males, because they've got a big encumbrance, but still they're able to get away and be reproductively active. And so I'm trying to go back and forth with some of the stuff that other people have done, some of the other research—kind of standing on the shoulders of giants on some of this animal behavior stuff.

But there's other reasons there are a couple of things I wanted to look at with the pheasants that that same guy did, and nobody has proposed this yet—that the spurs that you see in galliforms, like chickens and turkeys and pheasants; that's that little bony projection on the back side of their leg—they always say that they're being used for introspecific competition between males. Like, they're being used for fighting and combat. So you see these cock fights down in South America; these roosters are jumping each other and using their spurs to injure and damage the other one. And really, I don't think that's the case. Growing up here, I've watched a lot of the chickens fighting in the barn and pheasants fighting each other, and the spurs are very very, actually very seldom in contact. They're very seldom used in contact in these fights. And so I kind of have a feeling that there's something else going on. And I think the reason these males that this guy found in his paper were more successful in these reproductions were that they were actually using these spurs—I call it "the bull rider hypothesis". If a bull rider was riding a bull and had no spurs on, he would be thrown off a lot faster than if he does. So the males with longer spurs are able to mechanically stay on the female a little bit longer to secure more breeding. So that's kinda where… I don't know. I need to clarify these thoughts a lot more in my head before I actually develop them, but that's kind of what my research is centered around.

Maniscalco: All right. Great. That's really interesting. Now, there's a lot of work to do here.

Sullivan: There's never a dull moment, that's for sure.

Maniscalco: And you're going to school on top of all of that. Who else is helping you, besides—you have a brother who is helping you?

Sullivan: Yes. My brother does tons and tons. And my sister does a ton. My sister Chelby—you've seen what she's done today. I feel so fortunate and so blessed to have the family that I have. It's a great support system, and we are always supporting each other in everything that we're doing. And I feel like I get the lion's share of that support. I have a lot of different things going on, and all the time I will call them and say, "Hey, I'm going to be a little bit late, can you go gather eggs for me?" Or, "I've got this going on and this going on—can you give me a hand doing this?" They always kid me I don't pay very well, but

they get compensated somewhat for it. But I'm always there to help them out if they're needing something, or I try to be, at least. But I do think that I get the better deal, because they are very, very good about helping me out.

Maniscalco: So how does that work? If they're helping you out, are you paying them?

Sullivan: Yeah. I pay Steele, what he's doing is, he's buying a share in the business. So every hour he works is going towards him buying his share in the business and investing. We've figured out that we've got half of the equipment, half of this and this and this. So eventually, he will be a 50% partner in it.

And Chelby and Shilo, both of them have helped out at different times, and Matt, and I'll pay them for helping out. And a lot of times, they don't want to be paid; they'll say, "Oh, no, I just want to help you out." But I try to pay them. And they'll kid me after that, "Oh, you don't ever pay me." (laughter) And it's a good thing they're asleep over there.

Maniscalco: Oh, that's great. Now, how about government programs and government issues and things like that? I mean, wildlife is totally different.

Sullivan: Yes. We have lots and lots of questions about that. Usually that's the first question: How can you guys raise deer and pheasants? They're wild animals. How do you get licensed to do that? And there is a permit called the Class B Game Breeding License. And that gives the holder the right to raise—you can't collect from the wild; that's totally different. You can't go out and take them from the wild and raise them from there. You have to buy them from a licensed breeder. So somebody down the line, somebody got them from the wild, but it was many, many generations ago.

So the license that we have allows us to raise deer, game birds, turkeys. I guess you can have rabbits. There's ferrets. There's all kinds of native wildlife that can be raised from these permits. And that's through the state level. Through the federal level, we used to have a Federal Migratory Game Bird Permit, which was when we had Canada geese and some ducks. That was awhile ago. We are a part of the pollorium typhoid testing in our program, where we blood-test ten percent of our pheasant population every year for pollorium typhoid, which is a national organization. I said before that we test for avian influenza or we have tested for avian influenza. So we answer to a lot more bureaucracy than, say, a cattle farmer or a horse farmer. Because we are managing wildlife. And the way the state of Illinois deems it is that deer belong to the state of Illinois; they're just allowing us to raise them. And it's kind of funny—where most of our deer came from, which is Pennsylvania, they are individuals' property. They are owned by the individual; that's the way that it is, just like somebody's cow or somebody's dog. If you buy a deer, you own it; it's yours. And once they come into Illinois, they are owned by the state, but we're taking care of them, and they're allowing us to take care of

them. So I don't really know exactly—I mean, there's a lot of gray area in the laws on that. I always say, though, "Well, if they're the state's deer, then I'll just send them the feed bill at the end of the year, and they can foot the feed bill if they really want to have ownership in them." (laughter) So, yeah. There is a lot of red tape and bureaucracy that we have to go through when we're wanting to move deer from another state, from state to state, or if we're wanting to import deer. So, yeah. It's something that we have to deal with. If the cattle industry or the hog industry had to go through the rigorous testing that we have to go through with the deer or the pheasants, it would break the industry. The industry would completely fall apart.

So that's something that we've had to combat really a lot. And we're really hoping that eventually deer will get under the Department of Ag and the pheasants will get under the Department of Ag, where they're managed like they do traditional livestock.

Maniscalco: Are there movements to do that?

Sullivan: Yes, there are. But up to this point they've not been effective. We've got several lobbyists for the Illinois Deer Farmers' Association that have been trying to do that for a long time, but who knows how that will all turn out. I mean, it would be good for us because right now we already answer to the Department of Ag for our health testing stuff, but we still have to answer to the DNR, because they say that the deer are theirs. The deer belong to the public, because they're a wild animal. So I don't know.

Maniscalco: Interesting. What about buffalo?

Sullivan: No, buffalo—it's kind of interesting. Even though buffalo are a native species to Illinois, they're kind of in the same wad as cattle. They're just kind of grouped in that same genre, I guess, of animals.

Maniscalco: So, then, the buffalo are under the…?

Sullivan: Department of Ag.

Maniscalco: Department of Ag?

Sullivan: Yeah.

Maniscalco: Interesting. What about your neighbors? I mean, you're doing some really different things here—

Sullivan: (laughter) Yeah.

Maniscalco: —to the normal farmer, and how are your neighbors.

Sullivan: Yeah. That's probably the number-one challenge that we're facing at this time, is our neighbors. The urban sprawl that's kind of engulfing us. We've lived here on this property for thirty years. I've been here for twenty-five, and my folks had been here five years before I was born. So we'd been here close to thirty years, and as the years progressed, more and more people have been moving to the country or starting to become surrounded. Our little farm is becoming an island in the middle of an urban sprawl. And many of the people are very, very curious about what we're doing, and they're very interested. There's half a dozen kids that come down here on a regular basis and help me bottle-feed the fawns and help gather the eggs, or just come out and see the horses. My mom takes them on horseback rides. So there's a lot of kids that are from an urban environment that want to learn about the rural area, and they love living in the country. And their parents moved out here for that reason, so they can be exposed to the rural life. But then there's some of them that are a bunch of, I don't know. I could say a lot of not very nice things about them. Because they tried to get our farm shut down last year.

Maniscalco: Really?

Sullivan: They tried saying that our farm was a health hazard. They accused us of doing everything from spreading bird flu, histoplasmosis, airborne e. coli. They tried to sic the EPA on us, saying that we were polluting the rivers, saying that we were dumping illegally. They were trying to say that we didn't have permits to do what we were doing, saying that animal welfare stuff—we weren't taking care of the animals. They made all these completely unjustified accusations, trying to get us shut down. That's what they were trying to do. And that really, really was not good. I mean, they caused us a lot of grief on that. We ended up spending a lot of money on an attorney, trying to fight this whole thing. In 1999, our county decided that this area between Petersburg and Athens would be a great rural-residential zone, or R1 zone. So they decided to zone this area R1, so they could build houses. But they never came out to assess what was going on in this area. So there was a huge chunk of farming ground that got zoned R1 that should not have ever been. So that was not a big deal because nobody ever came out to check it; we were zoned R1, and it didn't really matter. We were grandfathered in agriculture, because we had all this stuff going. Well, when their lawyer found out that our property was zoned R1, they started saying, “Well, wait a second. How can the Sullivans do all this stuff, because it's zoned improperly?”

Maniscalco: How did you end up dealing with all this stuff, bombarding you after awhile?

Sullivan: It finally all came to a head about a month ago. The county board had a big vote on it, and they voted five to nothing in our favor. So all five of the county board members said, "The Sullivans are legal. They're doing everything right. They are not in violation of anything that we have found." And on every step of the way, I invited anybody into our house. I said, "I'll come down and give

you a tour. I'll show you everything we do. We have no secrets to hide. Anybody is welcome here to see what we do." And they said, "You guys are fine." They said, "As far as farms go, you guys are doing very, very well." As far as trying to protect the environment, and helping out the waters. It's not like it's a huge hog farm where we're having a lagoon that's dumping animal waste into a stream. I mean, we are trying to preserve the natural. We're going back to nature. We're raising wildlife here, for Pete's sake.

So it's been kind of quiet the last couple of weeks from them. They haven't said anything. But it's something that we're going to have problems with, I have a feeling, down the road. It's going to be something that we will always have a rub from now on. And it's just that when you deal with people that don't understand wildlife and don't understand how nature works and how agriculture works, they see it as a threat to their safety. One lady thought that the buffalo were going to get loose and stampede her children. She stood up in a public meeting and said, "I'm afraid the buffalo are going to get loose, and they're going to stampede our children." And another lady was scared because the pheasants—we had a snowstorm come through and rip down the pheasant nets and a bunch of pheasants got loose. And the pheasants came up into her yard and drank some water out of her dog water bowls. And she said that that was just horrible for her. She just couldn't stand it. We had a lot of people—one lady was scared she was going to get Lyme disease from the deer, because deer ticks are on deer. I said, "Well, we actually put a tick spray on the deer to keep ticks off of them." So I said, "You don't have a dog in your house, do you?" She said, "Yeah, we have a dog." I said, "It doesn't go outside, though?" "Yeah." "Well, it could just as likely be on your dog as it could be on one of our deer." So the county board saw all this, and they went through and they looked at everything very closely, because they wanted to do their job. But they found that we were doing absolutely nothing wrong, and these people were completely unjustified in their complaints.

So all it is is that we spent a bunch of money on our attorney, they spent tons and tons of money on their attorney, and they lost. So they have not said anything much. And what's funny is that a lot of their kids are some of the kids that still come down. And it kind of makes me feel good that they go home and the kids tell about what they did today and they come down here and play. You know?

Maniscalco: What's the future for wild game farming?

Sullivan: Well, in the near future, it seems to be very good. Because for one, the baby boomer generation grew up hunting—they did a lot of hunting with their dads growing up. So they are very, very outdoor-oriented. So sport shooting is something that, in that generation, there's a lot of people that still enjoy that. The next twenty years will be very good for us as these guys start retiring and they've got more time on their hands. But after that, it could be a little bit less.

Because there's less and less people from my generation that are actually out and enjoying the outdoors in that aspect. There's more recreation outside—bicycle riding, kayaking, this kind of stuff. But the shooting sports are something that a lot of kids don't have access to. And it kind of concerns me down the road: is there going to be as big of a demand for pheasants for people to do sports shooting as there is now. Or is there going to be a demand for deer scent now as there was now? So that's something that always concerns me down the road, is to look in the far view and say, "Well, are we going to be able to do this for the next fifty years, or is this going to be something that's just going to be a flash in the pan and disappear?"

So I don't know. It's going to be interesting to see how it all turns out. I know, for one thing, we're going to need to move from this location. As much as I love this place, I mean, we've kind of maxed out, expansion-wise, what we can do here. So I'm looking and am in the process of expanding the farm in another location.

Maniscalco: Have you picked someplace, or…?

Sullivan: Well, there's the farm that we have here and the farm that we have up the road, and then there's a couple of other properties that I'm looking at to possibly buy. The land market right now is so high, though, in Menard County, that it's hard to justify spending six or eight thousand dollars an acre to raise pheasants on it when you can raise pheasants on pretty low-quality ground. They don't need the best black dirt in central Illinois to raise them on when you can raise them on sand if you wanted to. So we've got a couple of places that we've been looking at. And I would say in the next probably two years, we'll have another branch of the farm somewhere else, and we'll start shifting more towards another location.

Maniscalco: You know, there's so many difficult things that are kind of coming towards you.

Sullivan: Yeah—on the horizon.

Maniscalco: What's making you get up in the morning to go out and do your morning chores and things like that?

Sullivan: Pretty much the fact that I get to do this myself. And if I fail it's going to be up to me, and if I succeed, it's going to be up to me. Hopefully it's not up to my neighbors. (laughter) I guess that's what I love about it the most, is that it allows me to have my own destiny in my own hands, and allows me to do something I love and allows me to do something that I could use my education for something. And it's just a challenge. I guess, more than anything, when you say, "What makes you get up in the morning and do it?" It's the challenge of being able to say, "Yeah, I did this. I started from nothing and I built this

business into here." So I think that's probably what does it—it's that challenge of saying, "Well, can I do this? Let's try."

Maniscalco: Well, I have one more question for you.

Sullivan: Okay.

Maniscalco: And this is the question that everybody gets asked.

Sullivan: Okay.

Maniscalco: That I do all oral history interview with. And that's the fact that this is an oral history that I'm doing. And you even mentioned earlier that this is going to be around forever.

Sullivan: Right.

Maniscalco: And one day down the road, there could be some great-great-grandkids of Cavan Sullivan that will walk into…

Sullivan: I've got to get a girlfriend first.

Maniscalco: (laughter) Well, it's, you know—but it could happen that they'd walk into the museum and say, "Hey, look, there's Great-great-grandpa's interview." What's the thing that you want them to find out from here?

Sullivan: I hope they don't lose there roots. If I end up having grandkids, which, who knows if that's in my future or not, I hope that they remember where they came from. And that's another part of what I bring to the table. I feel like I'm deeply rooted in agriculture in Illinois. I have been farming my entire life; ever since I was little, my first memory was helping my dad milk cows. And then to look back and say—My dad's farther did that most of his life. He was a farmer. And then his dad did that his whole life; he was a farmer. And so as long as the Sullivans have been in the United States—they came over from Ireland during the Potato Famine, and they were farmers back in Ireland. So as long as you go back in history, the Sullivan family have been farmers. And I feel very, very connected to my history, not only here in my roots in Illinois, but all the way back into Ireland and back, way back into my ancestors' history. I think that's really neat. And I hope that any future generations of the Sullivan family, even if they aren't farmers, I hope that they still remember these roots and the values that have taught all of us about hard work and being able to weather out storms. Whether it's actual physical nature-storms or storms that have been brought on by neighbors or bureaucracy or anything like that. So just remember where they came from and the people who have worked really hard to do this.

And like I said before, I could have done nothing that I have done without my parents. And I wish that they could be here today, but they're out gallivanting across the country on their second honeymoon. My dad retired this year, and they'd been talking for a long, long time about going to Hawaii, so he took my mom. Their anniversary was on June ninth, and he took her to Hawaii for their second honeymoon. So I wish they could be here.

Maniscalco: Well, they can watch.

Sullivan: Yeah. They can log onto the Internet and watch it someday.

Maniscalco: There you go. Well, thank you very much.

Sullivan: Yeah. I've really enjoyed this. Well, thanks, guys.

(End of interview)