

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL SMITH AND VAL BOHATY

July 10, 2013

1 PROCEEDINGS, JULY 23, 2013:

2 MR. BARR: This is Jim Barr. It's July 10th,
3 2013. And I am visiting with Paul Smith and Val Bohaty here
4 in Lincoln. Paul, do you want to start, kind of a little
5 background on yourself?

6 MR. SMITH: Yeah, I'm Paul Smith from Burt County
7 and I spent a full career, 36 years with the Soil
8 Conservation Service from 1958 through 1994. Burt County
9 farm boy. My dad was the original organizer, you might say,
10 and interim chairman and chairman of the Burt County Soil
11 Conservation District for the first 22 years. They were one
12 of the districts that did well with their equipment and
13 raised some money and, in fact, had terracing equipment all
14 through the years and built the office there for not only
15 the district and their equipment, but also for SCS housing,
16 which was -- weren't very many of those like that. But my
17 dad really believed in conservation. He had been a school
18 teacher for 10 years, originally from Missouri. But he came
19 here to teach school and married another school teacher. So
20 after 10 years of teaching he went into farming. So that
21 sparked his interest in conservation and he followed
22 through.

23 I can recall that, you know, the old soil
24 conservation district supervisors did not receive any pay or
25 compensation. And then along came, through the Natural

1 Resources Commission, they started paying them per diem,
2 which my dad opposed. His reasoning was that he wanted
3 local control and didn't want the state or anybody else
4 poking their nose into it. But he also was a strong
5 supporter of the Soil Conservation Service at that time, now
6 the natural resource districts, and he was a real believer
7 and realized that that was a technical agency that was
8 offering them free technical services for the farmers. He
9 donated all of his time, too, of course, and, of course, as
10 chairman when they had their equipment and had to hire and
11 fire and manage their equipment, the terracing equipment,
12 they had dozers and patrols and also a tree planting -- tree
13 planter and they planted trees, handled trees out of their
14 office in Lyons, my home town.

15 I eventually went to Wayne State College a couple
16 of years because I thought I could play basketball and I
17 didn't -- I played one year. I then decided I better stay
18 in something I knew and that was farming, agriculture and so
19 on, so I transferred to the ag college here in Lincoln,
20 graduating in 1959. Subsequently, I worked in I believe it
21 was 11 different jobs and about nine different locations and
22 moved my wife into her 13th house she says is the last one.

23 So it was an interesting career because I worked
24 both in the western part of the state and the eastern part
25 and so I had experience in range lands and irrigation as

1 well as the typical eastern Nebraska terraces, waterways,
2 tree plantings and so on. And then later I spent a total of
3 four years as a liaison, representing the Soil Conservation
4 Service with and at the office of the Natural Resources
5 Commission at that time. Of course, that's been changed
6 now, too.

7 So I later, I went from there to David City,
8 Beatrice. I had stops in West Point, Curtis, Chappell,
9 finally wound up in Lincoln in 1988 and have been here ever
10 since.

11 MR. BARR: Okay, Val?

12 MR. BOHATY: I'm Val Bohaty and I was raised on a
13 farm over in northeast Butler County. My grandfather was a
14 farmer. My dad was a farmer and I decided to work for the
15 Soil Conservation Service. And I had started and got
16 drafted in the military in '57. And when I got back in '59
17 they sent me to Syracuse. I was there a short time and in a
18 year and a half they moved me over to Auburn, Nebraska, and
19 from there they transferred me to Nelson, Nebraska. Keith
20 Meyers was the state conservationist at that time. And then
21 he transferred me in 1971 to Lincoln, Nebraska.

22 His goal was to get our name, the Soil
23 Conservation Service, then later the Natural Resources
24 Conservation Service, on TV, radio and the newspapers. And
25 I have to give a lot of credit, when I went to channel

1 10/11, they connected me with Dale Holt and his assistant,
2 Donna Blakeley. And for whatever reason it is, we hit it
3 off real well. We had the professional do the articles that
4 I took down. After 10/11, I can't think of the person that
5 was making the decisions, they said, from now you just bring
6 them over and we're going to use them as is. I mean, they
7 were done professionally. And so I was recognized in my
8 work in information and working with the farmers and getting
9 things going the way at least my state conservationist
10 thought.

11 Just a little sidelight here. I didn't want to
12 move from Syracuse. I didn't want to move from Auburn. I
13 didn't want to move from Nelson. And I am definitely not
14 going to move -- I retired in November of 1997 on a Friday
15 and I had already let the word out a few days or weeks
16 earlier that I was going to start my own consulting
17 business. I was a firm believer that how could I be a
18 supervisor if I couldn't tell if my staff had a problem with
19 a project. And the staff, on occasion, would say, I don't
20 know. This isn't working. Yes, I think I might walk those
21 steps before that.

22 And so all the employees, and I trained a lot of
23 them. One of their goals on their worksheet was that they
24 will learn how to do these projects because the technicians
25 are the ones that are assigned this. You better know how it

1 is so if they have a problem you can go ahead and do this.

2 At that time, at least up here in Lincoln, we had
3 very, very few women conservationists and technicians. And
4 Dale Williamson, digress a little bit, had a daughter and
5 she didn't know what she wanted to do with her life, Susan,
6 and Dale asked if she just couldn't work for nothing, which
7 she did, and so we would take her out. There was another
8 lady that I -- we had so many of them that I don't recall,
9 Jim, what the other girl's name was. But, anyway, I was
10 going to go on vacation for a week and I let the contractors
11 know and the farmers that they would be expected to go do,
12 that she was coming. And the contractor called me, said he
13 was going to wait with his job until I got back. I said,
14 no, they're scheduled.

15 The next time he came into the office, why, he
16 didn't say, good morning, hi, Val. He says, where are the
17 women? I said, what do you mean? He says, they're good. I
18 said, I wouldn't have sent them out if they weren't any
19 good. So you have to walk that. But, yes, I've had an
20 excellent career. Couldn't have picked a better job. And
21 this consulting work, I did 29 jobs last fall and expect to
22 be doing some more now.

23 MR. BARR: Great.

24 MR. BOHATY: If you have any questions, please ask
25 me.

1 MR. BARR: Well, I thought next we could -- each
2 of you could talk a little bit about the time, say in the
3 '60s, when -- any experience with the districts and then as
4 the natural resource district legislation was being
5 discussed and actually passed, that period of time.

6 MR. BOHATY: You go first, Paul.

7 MR. SMITH: Yes, I worked with three soil
8 conservation districts as well as being familiar with my own
9 county prior to the NRD's law being passed. And then later
10 I was what we call liaison district conservationist. Since
11 the NRDs basically were drawn on watershed boundaries, which
12 really helped the watershed projects because that's the way
13 they had to delineate their boundaries, but the SCS assigned
14 what was called an LDC, a liaison district conservationist
15 that met with the board. Even though there might be several
16 counties involved, we did have a lead DC that worked with
17 the NRD managers and board and met with them at all their
18 meetings and activities. That was an interesting job. And
19 I worked in Beatrice and David City both. Quite a contrast
20 in districts there, Beatrice being very heavy in watersheds.

21 So -- but the taxing authority that the NRDs
22 received with the law really enabled them to increase their
23 watershed funds since they had to buy land rights. Prior to
24 that, if the districts, they didn't have enough money to pay
25 for land rights, which was a fair way to do it with the

1 farmer, they had to count on volunteers and that didn't
2 always work. So it really accelerated the program and later
3 on I worked in the Lincoln area office and in our state
4 office on watersheds, watershed contracts. We also got into
5 contracting regular farm conservation plans using watershed
6 funds and all those -- I reviewed all of those as they came
7 in and did the training involved. The watershed was a very
8 good program and Nebraska is well noted for it. And pretty
9 much carried out all the construction that was one the books
10 after the NRDs came in.

11 MR. BARR: Val, what was your experience in that
12 period?

13 MR. BOHATY: In the NRDs?

14 MR. BARR: Well, both districts and as the NRD
15 legislation was written.

16 MR. BOHATY: The districts were -- had no problem
17 with them because they were all, every one that I can think
18 of, were land owners, land or farmers. And then when the
19 NRD came in, as Paul has indicated, a lot of the board
20 members were concerned that they were going to lose control
21 of the land that -- so the instructions that were passed
22 down to us, not in writing, is that we walk that narrow
23 line. Don't get involved or take a side. If they ask
24 questions, respond. If you don't know the answer, follow up
25 with the area office, as Paul has indicated, stay in the

1 state office. And Owen Perry was the chairman of my board
2 and he was good. Couldn't ask for a better chairman of the
3 board. And it was a give and go, but I think it worked out
4 well.

5 MR. BARR: What board was that?

6 MR. BOHATY: Here, Lancaster County.

7 MR. BARR: Lancaster County.

8 MR. BOHATY: Supervisors.

9 MR. BARR: Yeah.

10 MR. BOHATY: And they had a number of -- the
11 article I just showed you here, there was an article in what
12 we call the Soil Conservation Magazine when David Landis,
13 brand new attorney, wanted to become a member of the board.
14 And so they had a little history here. Owen Perry took him
15 under his wings and, you know, they got him going. Big
16 asset. They had a legal counsel they didn't have to pay
17 for.

18 MR. BARR: Oh, yes. At that time some of the
19 districts were pretty resistant to the idea of natural
20 resource districts. Do you want to comment on any of that
21 or --

22 MR. SMITH: I wish I knew who it was, but I can't
23 remember anything really bad. I mean, I had explained to
24 them that this was a change, just like converting from
25 districts to NRDs. And they still had local control and

1 they could still talk to a live person. And so I really
2 didn't have a lot of --

3 MR. BARR: Did you have any -- work with the
4 Nemaha NRD area or --

5 MR. SMITH: No, it was just -- at that time just
6 the NRD. I was only there two and a half years.

7 MR. BOHATY: But that was the conservation
8 district.

9 MR. SMITH: District, yeah, conservation district.
10 The NRDs were not in existence.

11 MR. BARR: What was your experience with the
12 natural resource district as it -- well, I guess we've moved
13 into the area where the districts were starting to form and
14 how did the transition from the Soil and Water Conservation
15 districts and the inclusion of the other multi-purpose
16 districts, how did that work out?

17 MR. BOHATY: Well, I told my staff that we were
18 supposed to be kind of neutral and a lot of times they kept
19 -- our office was in the basement of the -- anyway,
20 basement. So we could hear a lot of that stuff going on at
21 Auburn. And then up here we had our own office. The NRD
22 had their own office. And everything we did went smooth and
23 I was hearing, you know, concerns throughout the state but I
24 didn't have a problem because everybody was aware and
25 everybody was communicating through me or with the

1 directors. If they needed to see somebody in their local,
2 I'd just say, well, give them a call and I would call the
3 person ahead of time that this person would be calling you.
4 And they all accepted that. I don't know if they were
5 different than -- this is the way my father did it. This is
6 the way I did it. We didn't have that problem.

7 MR. BARR: You worked with the Lower Platte South
8 NRD and Hal Schroeder had been the executive of the Salt
9 Valley --

10 MR. BOHATY: Yes, yes.

11 MR. BARR: I can't remember the exact name of
12 that.

13 MR. BOHATY: The Salt Valley Watershed, I think it
14 was called. Yeah, so we had their cooperation and he
15 expected me to do our part. We just didn't have any
16 concerns. I'd go to these meetings and they were discussing
17 things and I didn't have that problem. I got lucky.

18 MR. BARR: Did you have any involvement in that at
19 all, Paul, or --

20 MR. SMITH: No, I can remember a lot of arguing
21 and some rightly so. Each district as you cross the state,
22 the problems are different, and each district may have
23 unique problems which they were trying to protect. The NRDs
24 took over a lot of other districts, such as drainage and
25 irrigation districts, which was a good consolidation. But

1 some of those were opposed. We did not get into a lot of
2 arguing around in northeast Nebraska. When it first
3 started, reorganization talk first started and they had
4 information meetings, I was in West Point, Cuming County
5 Soil Conservation District, and they really didn't have any
6 opposition or any reason to oppose. I think they had one
7 iffy watershed program so they were a little unique in that
8 regard.

9 Going back a little further, the soil conservation
10 districts were organized, and I can remember we happened to
11 live on a farm owned by Ed Dahl. Now Ed Dahl was, I
12 believe, an SCS background or maybe employee, but he worked
13 with Extension. Part of his job was organizing districts.
14 And I suppose that's how my dad got involved. And as early
15 as 1944, I was only seven years old, we had guys over on the
16 neighbor's farm showing him how -- the SCS people from
17 Lincoln and around the state came there and I was there,
18 too. I was only seven years old. But I can distinctly
19 remember that and probably led to my career.

20 So the transition, one example of that, my dad was
21 chairman the first 22 years in Burt County. He was not in
22 favor of NRDs because he really treasured local control.
23 And they had made their own money, paid their own way. He
24 didn't make any organized efforts. He just didn't agree
25 with it in his own mind. And, in fact, before the interim

1 board was named in Burt County, he resigned or did not -- he
2 didn't resign. He didn't run for another term. So that's
3 just a little added background there.

4 Some of the transitions were a little tough,
5 mainly involving those parts of the state in my experience
6 that had other districts that were being taken over. The
7 small watershed programs, Public 0566 federal watershed
8 program, was one of those because it had to have -- at that
9 time you had to organize a watershed conservancy district
10 that had the power of taxation. Soil conservation districts
11 did not, which was one of the impetus to reorganize in
12 Nebraska. So we were kind of unique in that regard. But
13 most of the opposition hinged around some of those other
14 areas and around the local control issues. And some people
15 didn't want to pay more taxes either. You always have that
16 group, perhaps rightly so.

17 MR. BARR: You've both been involved in the
18 national organization to some extent, I assume. What kind
19 of observations have you made about the Nebraska system with
20 natural resource districts versus the other parts of the
21 country where that hasn't developed?

22 MR. SMITH: Well, different states have different
23 laws. Some are funded through counties, through county
24 taxes. But then you have another board involved, like the
25 county commissioners. I lost my train of thought. But in

1 Nebraska, we were kind of unique. Whenever I worked in the
2 area office and later more so when I was in the state
3 office, you would attend regional and national meetings,
4 talk to other people and they were rather envious of our
5 natural resource district program. I know people in
6 Nebraska on many occasions were asked to be speakers in
7 other states or send information, that sort of thing. And
8 we would have tours, particularly in Beatrice where the
9 watershed program was big, we had a lot of visitors down
10 there, some interested in the organizational process that
11 Nebraska had. I think it was envied by other states and, to
12 some extent, copied. I don't know how much at this point.

13 MR. BOHATY: I was not involved in that part of
14 it. That's why I asked Paul to go ahead. But looking at
15 this article that I'm going to share with it, it was written
16 by John Cross, our information specialist in Lincoln. And
17 what it is here, the article is talking about a young
18 attorney, Dave Landis, that just graduated from law school
19 and he was 23. I'm quoting to the article now. "Landis was
20 23 years old, was elected to the district board while still
21 a law student. He was interested and wanted to serve." And
22 so during his career, supervisors at that time, and I'm
23 again looking in here, said we were wondering what we had
24 here, Dave Landis, Owen Perry, chairman of the board. What
25 we have in Dave is a man willing to listen and learn. A man

1 willing to listen and learn and who cares about the thoughts
2 of every issue. We older recognize the gap between the
3 generations, but Dave filled that gap for us.

4 And, again, quoting here, Owen Perry, a board
5 member for 21 years, Harvey Ehlers, a farmer with 20 years,
6 Fred Rath, a farmer east of town here, four years, and
7 Bernard Sullivan, a farmer with six years. And so we had
8 someone that was definitely interested in this and so it
9 come out good.

10 MR. BARR: In the Lower Platte South you had a
11 district with a fairly strong urban involvement. How did
12 that have a -- how was that different than some of the other
13 more rural districts?

14 MR. BOHATY: Well, we discussed earlier, you
15 brought it up, Hal Schroeder was manager here and so all of
16 the contacts for the watershed part of it were already
17 covered. And are you familiar with Hal Schroeder? Have you
18 ever met him or visited with him?

19 MR. BARR: Well, actually, when I was with
20 Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Commission in 1971, I
21 started the water quality program. And so we had a contract
22 with the Salt Valley so I worked pretty closely with Hal
23 during that and then during the time we developed the state
24 interim water quality plan. So at that point I was working
25 pretty closely with Hal.

1 MR. BOHATY: Yeah. See, he had the contacts in
2 the city where we needed a lot of -- the population was.
3 And he was employed with the right people in the right job.
4 He had no problem -- he didn't keep enough notes when he
5 went to meetings. He'd pick me up or I'd pick him up. He
6 took it with him and he could just talk to you, ask you
7 questions like he had the questions in front of him. But we
8 were very, very lucky and Owen Perry and the directors that
9 I had here, open-minded and they talked -- farmers would
10 call them and I'd get a call back after I referred a farmer
11 to say, Owen Perry, and I called Owen and he was going to
12 call. Never did -- Owen call back where the farmer say, I
13 didn't get what I was looking for but --

14 MR. BARR: Hal had had a background with the
15 Corps, hadn't he?

16 MR. BOHATY: Yes, Corps of Engineers. He was a
17 colonel, I think, or --

18 MR. BARR: I think so.

19 MR. BOHATY: Yeah, full colonel, I think. You
20 could tell the military part of it. Everything was
21 organized. You'd go to meetings. You'd didn't have to
22 wonder how it was going to be. We knew we would start on
23 time and we normally ended on time. Don't laugh, Paul. I
24 had a good NRD, gosh.

25 MR. BARR: Did you work with the NRD in the David

1 City area, Paul?

2 MR. SMITH: I did, yes.

3 MR. BARR: Did you want to make any thoughts about
4 how that worked out and perhaps --

5 MR. SMITH: Well, maybe I should take the fifth.
6 I noted in Hazel Jenkins' summary and history of the
7 organization of NRDs mentioning of a lawsuit involved with
8 the manager of the Lower Platte North NRD, Al Smith. When I
9 went to -- I helped on the Nebraska State Water Quality
10 Planning staff for two years. When we completed writing
11 that plan, I had no place to go. My term ended with the
12 Commission and David City was the only place open. So I
13 volunteered. And Benny Martin said, well, I really don't
14 want you to go up there. I'd rather you go out of state for
15 a promotion or something like that, but there wasn't any
16 openings there particularly either. But he said, you can go
17 up there two years and then you get out. Well, that's
18 exactly what I did.

19 But, you know, this is one of the objections to
20 the NRDs to begin with, that there are some fears that there
21 would be some strong managers that had money behind him that
22 would create their own little empires. And I guess you
23 might say a little bit of that happened, but not in a major
24 way, because for the most part NRDs hired some very capable
25 -- they hired some people with good backgrounds and it

1 hasn't become what it potentially could, as evidenced by the
2 Lower Platte North NRD, which they got straightened out
3 anyhow after I left.

4 MR. BARR: What kind of a board did they have?

5 MR. SMITH: Well, they had a board entirely of
6 farmers. They didn't always agree with their manager
7 either, but the thing of it was, a lot of it was done under
8 the table that they didn't know about. I think it's a
9 little like supporting a poor politician, which is current.
10 But, you know, if you don't have proof, what can you do.
11 And so you have people supporting who maybe, if they really
12 knew all the facts, would make different decisions,
13 including the chairman. The chairman is somewhat key to
14 that because he works almost on a daily basis perhaps with
15 the manager.

16 MR. BARR: Just looking at the natural resource
17 districts and how they were originally formed and objectives
18 that were there at the time and then seeing them develop
19 over the 40 years or so that they have done, do you have any
20 observations you'd like to make on this process, not only
21 the beginning of it but as they have developed over the 40
22 or so years since they were started?

23 MR. SMITH: Well, I think that -- maybe I'm
24 prejudiced because I worked in the watershed program with
25 SCS, but I mentioned it earlier, too, that it really

1 benefited those kind of projects because they were operating
2 on base and boundaries, basically, based on their drainage.
3 That was probably one of the bigger things they done. The
4 other thing probably is in the field of information where
5 that burden fell pretty much on the SCS representative in
6 each county to take pictures and write the news items. In
7 the older days, which we all did, sometimes I can remember
8 talking the district into buying me a camera out in Curtis.
9 But we took a lot of pictures and the district, of course, I
10 have a copy of the annual reports here, many of the pictures
11 I took at the time.

12 But nowadays they have their own information
13 specialist. That's another area that has really helped as
14 far as a public image. And also all the battles that go on
15 with groundwater and irrigation drainage and so on. NRDs
16 have been able to provide a lot of services there that
17 otherwise would have been left up to some other entity of
18 state government. So that is three things that I can think
19 of that -- that and the staffing, not only they provided --
20 and the old districts did, too, provided clerical help to
21 keep that office door open during the week when the men are
22 in the field. That continued and in some cases increased
23 and increased technical field men, too, to work with the SCS
24 technicians and so on. So that's several areas where I
25 think NRD had more capabilities than the old districts.

1 MR. BOHATY: I'd have to agree with Paul. They
2 had the taxing authority, and as Paul mentioned, the
3 secretary. And then we had all the help. Glen Johnson
4 said, if you need help, you let us know and we'll get you
5 part-time help. And so Glen was a great manager for us.

6 MR. BARR: Still is.

7 MR. BOHATY: Yes, I was just going to say, just
8 like that. I've talked to, Paul knows, over the state, they
9 didn't have that working relation thing. It was a people
10 problem more than the policies and stuff like that. If we
11 needed something, you know, go for it.

12 One other thing I might share with you. When I
13 came to Lincoln, Nebraska, in '71 our office was on the
14 second or third floor of the Sears building, state office
15 was. I would go downtown and I was there for three months.
16 I seen two farmers. I wasn't used to that at Nelson,
17 Nebraska, and Auburn, Nebraska. And so I talked to Owen
18 Perry and I said, what's going on? He said, well, that Dale
19 Harlet, maybe you heard of Dale.

20 MR. BARR: Yeah.

21 MR. BOHATY: He told it like it was. He says,
22 here I am in my boots, walking through the hog manure on my
23 boots, in my dirty pickup, I can't drive downtown. I've got
24 to change. So, again, a lot of this is who you know, not
25 what you know. Anyway, Floyd Hudkins was a county

1 commissioner which I knew and he was in Kiwanis. Again, I'm
2 sure that's -- Kiwanis, I was complaining to him. He said,
3 Val, he says, get a place on the edge of the town. He kind
4 of agreed. I said, wow, you've got to move the
5 commissioners. Not a problem, two to one. And I got lucky,
6 got that land. In the first month I bet I had over 20
7 farmers either call, thank you, thank you. They could come
8 in with their dirty pickups. They couldn't believe. I
9 said, not what you know but I think who you know on that
10 thing. And just again what you know. And then why would
11 they be in the inner city? So I'll put that on the record.

12 I'd go to Hickman. On occasion I would be going
13 through and I'd stop for coffee. I'd be in there and there
14 were farmers there. They said, Val, what are you leaving
15 for? What do you mean? How come you're not playing pool
16 for these dividers? That's what your predecessor did. He'd
17 spend the afternoon here. Did not make my days. And these
18 kind of -- just one of those things. You just don't know.
19 But, yes, you've just got to have the right people working
20 for you. And this Dave Glanis was excellent, too. He was
21 an attorney, gosh.

22 MR. BARR: Looking at the condition of the land
23 from say 1940 to present time, just looking back and over
24 that period, how would you describe it and how would you
25 evaluate it in various periods of time and practices and

1 that sort of thing? It's kind of a broad, open-ended
2 question and you can kind of approach it however you want
3 to.

4 MR. SMITH: You know, the Soil Conservation
5 Service always promoted -- well, we typical -- tillage,
6 keeping cover on the ground, particularly on the hillier
7 land. And we had a heck of a time convincing people they
8 really didn't need to plow. But going back as far -- and
9 that was one of the things that happened. When I was in
10 West Point, when the NRDs first came in, Steve Oltman was
11 the manager of the NRD and he was stationed in Norfolk. I
12 was in West Point with the SCS. But we got together and
13 promoted a conservation tillage day in West Point and that
14 was in 19- -- well, when NRDs first started, '73 or along in
15 there, had to be 2 or 3. Of course, at that time the
16 Buffalo planter was about the only one that could handle the
17 trash very well. Some of the major companies had not got
18 into it in the early '70s. So we worked at that for a long,
19 long time. And now it's entirely different. But it took
20 35, 40 years and now most farmers, that's the way they farm,
21 even on the irrigated land, that they really always thought
22 they had to turn that ground. Well, it did a few things
23 like plant weeds and you lost moisture, which is kind of
24 foolish when you were having to pay for irrigation.

25 So those are some of the things. You know, we

1 worked awful hard at that with conservation tillage days,
2 promotions. And wheat was a little easier to come by and
3 probably started keeping cover on in the western part of the
4 state when I was out there. They were doing a pretty fair
5 job most of the time. Some farmers didn't. And you could
6 tell on a windy day which ones it was because I seen Highway
7 30 east of Chappell pretty dark with dust on a windy day.

8 MR. BARR: In central Nebraska I talked to a
9 gentleman who was, among other things, flew. And he said he
10 could tell the county lines between counties based upon how
11 well their preservation program was working. Val, do you
12 have any thoughts on that?

13 MR. BOHATY: That's true, yes. You've seen all
14 these orange risers sitting out there, haven't you? Anyway,
15 I'm the one that got those started. I was lucky enough with
16 several farmers in parts of the county, and so we got those
17 put in by Ron Raikes' company, Conservice, what he called it
18 later. I got several farmers starting to do that. And what
19 I did, instead of having these point rows, these allowed you
20 to have parallel terraces on the contour and then you could
21 make a fill land or cut on the ridge. So they started doing
22 this. Once we got those started, we had a list of a page
23 and a half always of people wanting that. So this really
24 made a big difference in putting these in. And we got
25 better with them.

1 And the other thing that we got started here
2 before I retired, the area office in Lincoln, state office
3 in Lincoln, but I have terraces that are straight, okay.
4 From ridge to ridge, they're straight. And since I have
5 been retired in '97, I had lots (indiscernible) because they
6 still believe that you got to have this. Farmer has a 30-
7 foot or 40-foot planter. You cannot make that turn.
8 There's a guy by the name of Allen Ratzlif over here, just
9 north of Lincoln here. If you go to that gas station on
10 84th Street and you're going up to Waverly, you go to the
11 first intersection and go four miles. He has a half section
12 there. And three years ago now he had me out there in the
13 still spring. And I had put three terraces out there
14 earlier with tile and he said, I want to finish the farm.

15 So I went back and luckily I had that. I
16 installed those October of 1997, parallel to the road. So
17 we're driving along and so I asked Allen, I said, how often
18 have you cleaned these out? And he stopped his pickup and
19 he turned to me and he says, you mean with a dozer? I said,
20 yeah. Never. I put six more terraces on there and we're
21 talking maybe 15, 20 foot up, and then he commented and I
22 said -- and he says, well, Val, if they silt in after a big,
23 heavy rain, I get a dozer in and clean that up. The
24 convenience of these straight -- he said, if I plant it, I
25 can't shut off two rows. At that time the planter was

1 either in the ground or on the ground. And after I retired,
2 farmers in the Lower Platte South got up to \$7,000. Every
3 one of them -- I was asking them, Jim, how do you want the
4 terraces? I want them this way. And then they say, well,
5 if I get cost share, how will they be? They will be this
6 way. Forget the blankety, blankety -- I've had Allen use
7 these choice words. He says, have them come over and see me
8 if they don't -- clean them out with no-till. They don't
9 plow any more. Everything I have done in Otoe -- not Otoe
10 but in Gage County down there, the farmers get the money and
11 it's all parallel to a degree. It's just one of those lucky
12 things that I just can't -- I can't believe that they
13 wouldn't switch over.

14 And I have a letter I got from Craig Erickson who
15 I praise. He is a state conservationist of NRCS. I have a
16 letter that says I can't state cost share projects. I
17 opened the letter that evening by my mailbox and my wife was
18 getting supper. And I opened it up and I says, whoopee.
19 What happened? I said, I have a letter now that I can't
20 state cost share, because I was trying to tell the farmer.
21 So you get \$7,000 and these will be there for at least 20
22 years.

23 MR. BARR: Yep.

24 MR. BOHATY: What is that cost of double planting?
25 Insignificant. And then another thing I found, okay. Jim,

1 if you had these in '97 earlier and you had me back and back
2 and back because you have only so much money, if they were
3 so bad you'd say, Val, that's the dumbest thing you ever
4 gave me, recommended to me. They want more of them, Jim.
5 And so you've got to be looking.

6 Now, here again, I will take you back to Otoe
7 County. I came out of the service. I was the third soil
8 conservationist. Henry Baylor and I can't think of the
9 other guy's name -- Oral Bass. Anyway, when the drainage
10 come in, Jim O'Donald would get the engineer out to probe it
11 before the tile goes. After a few jobs he says, this isn't
12 going to happen. He says, one of you three are going to get
13 trained. Val, you're it. I wasn't too happy when I went
14 home that night. Best thing that ever happened. I did tile
15 lines in all the counties. And the thing that you have to
16 learn is you need to know where to put the tile, the
17 drainage. You have to understand the soil.

18 And when I was in Auburn, Nebraska, there was a
19 big land owner by the name of Ed Heely, and he had a son, I
20 can't think of the son's name, Gene, Gene Heely, officed in
21 the basement of the courthouse, down in the boiler room.
22 And Gene come in there and I went out to -- he come up to --
23 drainage, looked at the soils, and I said, you need a tile
24 line. And I could hear him still to this day. He says,
25 Val, if this doesn't work, I'm going to come in and I'm

1 going to hang you by your thumbs. And he was loud enough
2 and everybody in the office and the janitor -- so I went out
3 there and Gene says, here's where the wet spot was. And I
4 walked -- I was looking at it, probing. I walked up the
5 hill and I paced it 300 feet. And Val said, what the blank
6 are you doing over here? My wet spot is here. And I found
7 that clay layer at approximately three feet. Where he had
8 the water I couldn't hit it with a six-foot probe. It was
9 still loose ground and wet. And so he came in the office.
10 Val! I'm sitting there and everybody -- they knew when he
11 come in there. They was all listening. He says, Val, come
12 up here. I walked up there and he went, you were right.
13 And I have trained others and to this day I just -- tile
14 lines, they just the greatest thing that ever happened. And
15 I had a good career, too.

16 MR. BARR: Any other final thoughts you want to
17 observe on anything kind of related to this topic?

18 MR. BOHATY: If you have a question about this,
19 give me a call and we can meet.

20 MR. BARR: Sure.

21 MR. BOHATY: If you have a question about any of
22 this or need more detail, we can do it over the phone, I can
23 meet you at the coffee house or my house or something.

24 MR. BARR: We may get these transcribed and then
25 we'll probably --

1 MR. BOHATY: That would be fine. We could meet
2 together or individually, something like that.

3 MR. BARR: Very good. Anything else, Paul?

4 MR. SMITH: No.

5 MR. BARR: Thank you, guys, for coming in.