

INTERVIEW WITH BILL MEYER
BY JIM BARR

December 18, 2013

1 MR. BARR: This is Jim Barr. It's December 18th,
2 2013. I'm in a Lower Elkhorn NRD office in Norfolk visiting
3 with Bill Meyer. Bill, would you kind of like to give a
4 little background on yourself before we really get into the
5 NRD stuff?

6 MR. MEYER: Well, I was born on a farm northeast
7 of Columbus, Nebraska. And when I was ten years old, we
8 moved to a farm by Madison, west of Madison. And then,
9 three years later, we moved into town on an acreage by
10 Madison, so I graduated from Madison High School. While I
11 was in the high school, I joined the Army Reserve. I
12 was 17. And so, I spent -- that was in January of '57, and
13 so as soon as I graduated from high school, I went into the
14 Army and spent six months in training. And then spent the
15 next five years in the Army Reserve. In 1958, I went to
16 Wayne State College and spent a semester and a half there.
17 And then transferred to the University of Nebraska. And I
18 spent a year and a half there, and then went into business.
19 I didn't graduate at that time, but I started -- the renter
20 on my dad's farm left and so I took over that and I started
21 a greenhouse business with my brother, and we raised
22 tomatoes. And I did that for about three years. I kept on
23 farming, but the business needed to expand, you know, for
24 both of us to make a living there, so my brother took over
25 the business and I went to Wayne State and finished up

1 there. And I graduated in 1966, and got a job with Allied
2 Chemical Corporation. I was a district sales manager for
3 fertilizer and farm chemicals for seven years. And after
4 that, my good friend from Madison, Jon Moyer, whose family
5 owned a lot of land, we decided that we were going to be big
6 farmers. So, we started -- we had about 2,000 acres of farm
7 ground and cattle and hogs. And we did that for several
8 years. And after that, I decided to -- I had bought two
9 farms, and so I decided to farm on my own. And then,
10 luckily, an irrigation company asked if I would be their
11 sales representative for irrigation, and we hit just the
12 real good years of 1974 to 1978, and we all thought we were
13 just tremendous salesmen. So, that was good. So, you know,
14 I've been around a lot of the irrigation development out in
15 western Nebraska around the O'Neill and Stuart and that
16 area, and was just really aware of what those folks were
17 doing, as an altogether different type of farming than we
18 did back in Madison or Pierce. I actually moved up to
19 Pierce, Nebraska, after I got married. And I was the first
20 guy in our area to put irrigation down in 1970. I had a
21 sandy quarter and started irrigating it. And I was very
22 interested in irrigation and in farming. I'd spent a lot of
23 time going to the University of Nebraska station at Concord,
24 and the folks there, they had meetings all over. They were
25 very, very helpful.

1 And so, when I -- I wasn't involved in the
2 conservation movement hardly at all until I had heard that
3 the NRDs were coming in. And I was -- so, the first chance
4 I got, I ran for the board in 1974.

5 MR. BARR: That would have been the first year --
6 elected year.

7 MR. MEYER: The first elected year. And I think
8 there were four of us that were running that year, and I was
9 lucky enough to win. And so that's --

10 MR. BARR: So, how many elections have you won
11 consecutively?

12 MR. MEYER: Ten.

13 (Laughter.)

14 It sure hasn't impressed people that were looking
15 for people for higher office, though.

16 (Laughter.)

17 But it's really been interesting. And we had to
18 make a lot of tough decisions during that time, but probably
19 none tougher than the last few years when we've -- when our
20 NRD has limited and then banned new irrigation. So, that is
21 really tough, and especially the last couple years where we
22 have individuals that, according to our rules have broken
23 the rules and they come and ask for a get-together with our
24 board and we have to make an individual decision on whether
25 they can go ahead and advance. That's been really tough.

1 That's probably about as tough, but all through the NRD,
2 there's been a lot of tough decisions with basins and dams
3 and things like that. And the overriding issue has been
4 water, right from the beginning.

5 MR. BARR: Going back to the beginning of the NRD,
6 at least, do you remember, were some of the interim board
7 members elected to the first board?

8 MR. MEYER: Oh, yeah, I'd say a good portion of
9 them were.

10 MR. BARR: Any particular early leaders that were
11 involved in the legislation, for instance, that you might
12 remember or mention?

13 MR. MEYER: You know, I don't know how involved
14 they were. Ray Vogel (phonetic) was one from Battle Creek,
15 Richard Alexander from Pilger that I can just think of
16 offhand. Richard was our chairman for several years. And
17 then on our first elected board was Val Peterson, former
18 governor, former cabinet member, former ambassador. And he
19 gave us quite a history, you know, of the dams on the
20 Missouri River. He was instrumental in a lot of that. And
21 so, it was -- he was very interesting.

22 MR. BARR: Was he retired at the time?

23 MR. MEYER: He was teaching some classes up at
24 Wayne State, but, yeah, he was pretty much retired. But he
25 was -- and he helped us a lot. You know, our first

1 meetings, you know, they went on and on and on into the wee
2 hours of the morning, some of them past 12:00 and 1:00. And
3 he said, "This is crazy." He says, "You have to get
4 organized here." And so he was instrumental in getting us
5 to set up committees and that had kind of a rough start,
6 because we had one committee and then those meetings would
7 last forever. And so, finally, we decided to have two
8 committees, but then, at different times, we all meet the
9 same, and then everybody'd be in on one meeting and then on
10 the other meeting, say, "Hell, this isn't working." So we
11 said, "Well, we'll have to trust each other." So, we've
12 had, like two committees, main committees, and that split it
13 up. And that's really helped, because usually, what comes
14 before the committee, we get a report. And so, by the time
15 our board meeting comes, we can -- we're pretty well up to
16 speed, and that has -- our board meetings now last probably
17 about two hours instead of seven or eight.

18 MR. BARR: Other districts reported somewhat
19 similar. What were some of the original projects or
20 programs that you worked -- that the NRD worked with in the
21 first few years?

22 MR. MEYER: Well, we were -- basic was the terrace
23 program. And we were the first to get money from the
24 Development Fund for a dam down by Maskenthine down by
25 Stanton, which was very controversial at the time. And

1 landowners were pretty vocal, but not as much as a later
2 project. But that was an exciting project and really turned
3 out nice.

4 MR. BARR: It was multi-purpose?

5 MR. MEYER: Multi-purpose, you know, and a lot of
6 people complained because there was a recreational component
7 in it. But, you know, that has been just a wonderful part
8 of the dam. And water, early on, in 1976, which would have
9 been just two years after we started, we started our program
10 of checking individual wells for water quantity. And there
11 was some efforts in those early years to put a damper on
12 irrigation or to shut it off entirely. And we thought,
13 well, there's just tons of water out here, so, you know,
14 we -- and it's such a great economic mover and development
15 that we decided that we would watch it. And so we started
16 checking wells in the fall and in the spring, and that kind
17 of quieted some of the people who thought that this was a
18 terrible thing, you know, that they're taking water out.

19 MR. BARR: Did you have some of the early
20 conflicts up here between private wells -- or personal wells
21 and irrigators? I seem to remember Vince Dreeson being up
22 for a court case up here. I can't remember anything else
23 other than it seemed to be up in this area. But I don't
24 remember when that would have been.

25 MR. MEYER: Yeah, it could have been. It was not

1 a major thing, because we've always had so much water. You
2 know, there's been problems, especially in the Pierce area
3 where I live, you know, where there's a lot of sand points.
4 You know, drove a pipe down in the ground with a little
5 screen on it and we've had some of those just until recently
6 still working. Of course, there was a problem then with
7 quality, too, you know, with the --

8 MR. BARR: And it might have been on quality. I
9 don't remember.

10 MR. MEYER: Yeah, I don't remember particularly
11 that case, but it doesn't surprise me if we were involved in
12 some of that.

13 MR. BARR: One of the other early ones, as I
14 recall, was the Maple Creek Watershed. Was that
15 significant?

16 MR. MEYER: That was huge. I think it was PL566,
17 14 dams or something like that, and our general manager at
18 the time, Steve Oltman, had been brought up to Clarkson to
19 manage the Maple Creek Watershed. So, he was very
20 knowledgeable about it.

21 MR. BARR: He would have been actually working for
22 that district when it was combined into the NRD, is that
23 right?

24 MR. MEYER: Yeah, he was, and then, of course, he
25 was our first general manager. And actually, before that

1 came, we were building a -- or wanted to build a dam up in
2 Pierce, the Willow Creek. And that's two and a half miles
3 from where I live. So, I was in the middle of that when I
4 was called everything but a nice guy on that thing. And it
5 was a tough thing. Of course, now it's a shining star
6 example of how nice it can be to live around Pierce,
7 Nebraska.

8 MR. BARR: When did that go in, roughly?

9 MR. MEYER: 1982, I think. And as I recall it is,
10 we just had finished it when the Maple Creek really came on,
11 and there was a concerted effort at that time to -- and I
12 might be wrong on those dates, but -- not on Willow Creek
13 when it came it, but when the Maple Creek thing was. But it
14 was a very well orchestrated campaign against that thing.
15 And the wonderful thing about that would have been that was
16 a federal project. So, the local funds would not -- I'm
17 sure there would have been some local funds there, but
18 the -- or maybe it was that we were just getting over Maple
19 Creek -- not Maple Creek, but Maskenthine. I think maybe
20 that would be the better time line, that we had just gone
21 through a very rough time with Maskenthine. I believe
22 that's it. That was the time line. And so then we started
23 in on the 14 dams on Maple Creek, and we thought that it was
24 hard to get the Maskenthine thing going, but, man, I mean,
25 that was some real tough -- and they took a little different

1 tactic, I mean, more of a ridicule-type campaign, you know,
2 that we were out of touch and everything like that. But,
3 you know, really, there were some terrible floods after that
4 project, and it was even a gentleman was killed down in one
5 of the little towns.

6 MR. BARR: Did some of those structures eventually
7 get built?

8 MR. MEYER: Well, we built the first one just
9 recently.

10 MR. BARR: Okay.

11 MR. MEYER: That would be the Maple Creek at Leigh
12 was the first structure. And so --

13 MR. BARR: Non-federally funded or --

14 MR. MEYER: Non-federally funded, yeah. It was
15 Development Funds and NRD funds. And that took 10 years.
16 So the -- I don't know if 14 dams will ever be built on the
17 Maple Creek, but -- and the federal government is not
18 interested in doing that sort of thing anymore, so, yeah,
19 that's -- it seems like whenever we get a majority of new
20 board members that haven't gone through building a dam, then
21 we start another one. So, I think most of the board members
22 that are on the board now, have gone through the Maple
23 Creek, so it might be a while.

24 MR. BARR: So, it's kind of a one-dam limit per
25 board member?

1 MR. MEYER: Boy, I'll tell you, and I've been on
2 three of them, so I'm a real brute for punishment.

3 MR. BARR: Did you have recreation in all of
4 those?

5 MR. MEYER: Yes.

6 MR. BARR: Did you have an other recreation-
7 related projects that were over time in the district, trails
8 or --

9 MR. MEYER: Yes, we've had trails. We built a
10 nice trail around Willow Creek and into town. There's some
11 trails around Maskenthine. There's trails at Leigh. We had
12 some trails there before we built the dam. And now there's
13 trails around the lake. And we have a program where we help
14 individual towns with their recreation needs, and we've
15 funded some trails there, and we've funded some -- helped
16 these folks with playgrounds and other recreational things.
17 So, yeah, we've done a lot.

18 MR. BARR: Some districts have had some
19 urban/rural conflict within the district on projects. And
20 how is that working in the Lower Elkhorn?

21 MR. MEYER: Well, we've had our share. You know,
22 Norfolk is our biggest town and the Norfolk mayor and city
23 manager wanted us to cost share on the storm sewers. And we
24 politely told them, no, we didn't do that. You know, we
25 didn't want to get in the storm sewer business, and we just

1 don't have the funds for that. And one of the city council
2 members got on -- ran for the Nebraska Legislature. And his
3 first bill was to secede from our NRD.

4 MR. BARR: Which one was that?

5 MR. MEYER: I'll think of his name here. So, we
6 all went down and testified and the state senator was
7 testifying with this committee and they asked him, "Well,
8 what do you think the Norfolk NRD should be?" And he says,
9 "Oh, we'll just take the Elkhorn River on up." Well, which
10 would have encompassed about three or four NRDs. It never
11 got much traction, but it was --

12 MR. BARR: You had kind of a reverse effect on
13 that, too, didn't you? Didn't your manager serve on the
14 city council for Norfolk for a period of time? Steve?

15 MR. MEYER: I don't think he did.

16 MR. BARR: I thought in the interview it said he'd
17 been on 14 years.

18 MR. MEYER: On the city council?

19 MR. BARR: I was going just by the interview and I
20 kind of remember him being on it. I just was curious if
21 that had any effect on relations with --

22 MR. MEYER: This would have been after Steve had
23 left, but --

24 MR. BARR: Well, yeah, Steve would have been
25 there, you know, whenever he was up here. I don't remember

1 what year, exactly.

2 MR. MEYER: You know, I don't remember that, you
3 know.

4 MR. BARR: Okay, that's fine.

5 MR. MEYER: I don't remember everything. So, you
6 know, this was some of the things, and just recently a state
7 senator has put some law in about the open meetings law for
8 NRDs. And, you know, we're very careful with open meetings
9 law here and we've been -- while I was chairman, I think we
10 were up before the Attorney General three or four times with
11 complaints, you know, and all were found baseless. So, it's
12 something that we're very aware of and very careful.

13 MR. BARR: What sort of -- that's a good area to
14 explore. I mean, what sort of public interactions has the
15 NRD had that have been interesting or --

16 MR. MEYER: Well, when the DNR initially said that
17 we were fully appropriated, we had several very large
18 meetings, 5- to 600 people. And lately, we've had some big
19 meetings where we were trying to establish some sort of
20 mechanism to -- for irrigation development. And we've had a
21 lot of things. And, of course, we've had all of the dam
22 projects, we've had big public hearings, you know, that got
23 very contentious and very tough.

24 MR. BARR: What kind of regulatory activity have
25 you had?

1 MR. MEYER: Well, the irrigation thing is probably
2 the biggest, and we spent a lot of time when we were, for
3 three years, you know, we had limited irrigation. And we
4 went with the Soil Conservation Service to set up perimeters
5 and then, so you would apply, and then you'd have to get a
6 test well, and we'd take that into consideration. And then
7 all the things that the Soil Conservation Service had put
8 down, and it was quite extensive, and it's quite a long list
9 of things that people go through. And if somebody applies,
10 they come in and get a number, there's nobody on the board
11 knows who's applying. You know, so there's no interaction
12 there with your buddy, you know, try to get him in or
13 somebody you don't like to try to keep them out. So, nobody
14 knows where it is or anything, and it's just strictly a
15 numerical thing that they go through. And I think that's
16 worked pretty good, but since we had a year ago since we had
17 real conflicts up here, we just stopped all irrigation
18 development. And the strange thing is, is our readings,
19 really, I mean, they've been -- we've had some of the lowest
20 readings in our well this last few years as we've ever had,
21 but there's still tons of water down there. The biggest
22 concern now is a real surprise to me, is that in-season
23 irrigation, that it's where -- if we have real heavy use of
24 irrigation in season, that we can lower the water table
25 enough so that there are people without water, domestic and

1 irrigation wells. And I think the board right now, probably
2 our most adamant for enforcing the rules are our farmers.
3 And we have some areas where they're on allocation. This
4 was a good year, though, that no one used their allocation.
5 But it's the pumping in-season that is causing our problem.

6 MR. BARR: Is this throughout the district or do
7 you have specific areas where there's a major problem?

8 MR. MEYER: Well, probably throughout the
9 district, but, you know, this NRD has a lot of aquifer
10 formations, some that are confined, some that are small, and
11 some of them that are in the Ogallala Aquifer, you know,
12 that are huge. So, you know, you get down around Leigh and
13 Clarkson and that area, and those are pretty confined
14 aquifers. And where I live in Pierce, you know, we're in
15 the Ogallala. And the problem we've had in Pierce, oddly
16 enough, is that we've always had so much water that we've
17 had a lot of development out in the country where people
18 want to live out in the country and they put a well down,
19 and the well drillers drilled it down deep, but, you know,
20 there's so much water there, why should I put my pump 200
21 feet when I can get by with 100? And of course, when they
22 ran out of water, then the well drillers came out and just
23 lowered the pump and then we had water again. You know, it
24 was a pretty good wake-up call for us.

25 MR. BARR: Did you have any quality regulatory

1 actions?

2 MR. MEYER: We've had a Phase II water quality in
3 the Osmond, east Pierce area, for it's got to be close to
4 ten years, now.

5 MR. BARR: Is that nitrate or something else?

6 MR. MEYER: Nitrates, yeah. And we even have a
7 staff member that his main job is to watch that. Of course,
8 he's a very talented guy, and so when we had all these other
9 water problems, he helped out, so -- but yes, we're water
10 quality, too. And the -- and, of course, we have our rural
11 water systems.

12 MR. BARR: That's another thing I was going to ask
13 you about, if you want to go into that a little bit.

14 MR. MEYER: Well, yeah, and, you know, there's a
15 lot of these towns the water quality was so bad that it's
16 really been a really good thing. We have two water systems
17 and now working on a third.

18 MR. BARR: Where are these roughly? Is that over
19 in the eastern part?

20 MR. MEYER: Yeah, the eastern -- around Oakland
21 and that area, and then there's one up at Coleridge and
22 Magnet and in that area. And, of course, this other one is
23 south of Norfolk. And hopefully we work with the City of
24 Norfolk, and Madison has extra water, and they're talking
25 all the way to Clarkson from that, Humphrey. So, I mean --

1 MR. BARR: Pretty good sized area.

2 MR. MEYER: -- that thing could be huge.

3 MR. BARR: Have you had any -- I remember some
4 talk at one time of rural water districts in more than one
5 NRD together. Did that ever develop?

6 MR. MEYER: Yeah, we actually have two of them.
7 We have -- well, the Wau-Col they call it is up at the --
8 Mosier's NRD, what is that?

9 MR. BARR: Lewis and Clark.

10 MR. MEYER: Lewis and Clark up there. Some of
11 that land goes in there and then, actually, I think that we
12 go into the Papio with one of the things. And inside our
13 NRD we have a water district that was in there before, a
14 rural water district around Stanton. So, they're still on
15 their own.

16 MR. BARR: Yeah, originally, they were not brought
17 into the NRDs, but any future ones would have to be with the
18 NRD, is that right?

19 MR. MEYER: Yeah. Yeah, there's quite a few water
20 districts out here.

21 MR. BARR: I'm trying to think. I heard an
22 interesting story reading the transcripts of some of these
23 interviews. And one of them was that Terry Carpenter voted
24 against the NRD legislation, but when somebody approached --
25 Steve, I think, approached him later, he said, "Well, you

1 know, if you had talked to me, we'd have probably voted yes,
2 but the main reason I voted against it was the mosquito
3 abatement district it would have included." I didn't
4 remember that particularly until I was reminded of it. Is
5 that an issue that was ever up here?

6 MR. MEYER: Not that I know of. And, you know, I
7 really wasn't involved in that real early. Actually, in
8 '74, when I came on the board, it was probably, you know, I
9 was involved in some other things. And I was always kind of
10 interest in politics, so I kind of paid attention.

11 MR. BARR: Was the original district one person,
12 one vote? Or was it --

13 MR. MEYER: No.

14 MR. BARR: Did that eventually change?

15 MR. MEYER: It did change. And I think the first
16 ones, we were in districts. And I don't know if we ever
17 were all at-large or not. You know, I can't remember, but I
18 know that we set up the districts that was one man, one
19 vote. I think that's the way it was. You know, we have one
20 board member that's voted at-large, and the rest of them are
21 districts. And that's changed. And the number of board
22 members has changed. You know, we're down to -- we're 15
23 right now and there used to be, I don't know, 19, I think.
24 And so, that's changed some.

25 MR. BARR: Was there a significant difference

1 between once you had switched from the one form of electing
2 to the other, did that make any significant difference in
3 the board composition or the way people approached things?

4 MR. MEYER: Well, it did. We got a lot more board
5 members from Norfolk, but our board members from Norfolk are
6 very much interested in agriculture. They don't vote
7 against agriculture and just vote for town things. I mean,
8 I think they're very even-minded. The board is -- it's kind
9 of interesting. You know, there are some people that run
10 for the board that are single-issue people, and once they're
11 on the board a while and see the multitude of things we have
12 to deal with, you know, things kind of smooth out and even
13 out, and we're not always all on the same page, but there's
14 good, honest debate and good, honest voting. So, I think
15 our board now, we do have some more -- quite a few younger
16 and they're just excellent. They're smart and up-to-date
17 and good talkers. They don't have to sometime be
18 embarrassed by my long pauses while I was trying to think of
19 something to say.

20 (Laughter.)

21 MR. BARR: You've been -- only, basically, had two
22 managers, general manager, I guess.

23 MR. MEYER: That's right.

24 MR. BARR: Any comment about either the general
25 manager or the staffing or anything of that nature?

1 MR. MEYER: Well, you know, our first board, we
2 had a general manager, assistant manager, and a secretary.
3 And that's the way we wanted it. We wanted to keep the
4 bureaucracy, you know, down. And as we -- you know, we got
5 more and more -- we're asked to do more and more things, you
6 know, we just had to have a staff. And this water thing,
7 our biggest department now is the water. And so I think
8 that -- I think both managers that we've had, they had
9 different ways of doing things, but I think they've been
10 very successful. I'm proud of all of them.

11 MR. BARR: Well, you probably wouldn't have just
12 had two if there had been a problem.

13 MR. MEYER: Well, you know, there's always
14 problems. You're working with 15 board members and the
15 general manager makes one of them mad, they say, "Well, you
16 know, I know how to take care of this problem. We're going
17 to get rid of the manager." But, you know, we've weathered
18 those storms and we're in good stead now, I hope we are,
19 with our manager.

20 MR. BARR: In your time in the board, have you had
21 interactions with either neighboring districts or were you
22 involved with NARD with the association or anything like
23 that?

24 MR. MEYER: Well, I attended every legislative
25 meeting in January except one when I was ill. And that's

1 always been real source of getting to hear what the governor
2 has to say, and they're usually very complimentary except, I
3 think it was two years ago when there was so much trouble
4 with the Republican River and the big lawsuit with Kansas.
5 The Governor came up, must have been in a foul mood anyway.
6 He says, "You guys are going to have to straighten up. I
7 don't want a mess like we've got down there in the
8 Republican River." And, of course, then the next -- that
9 was the year that we were slapped with being fully
10 appropriated. I don't know if that was a coincidence or
11 not, but -- and, of course, I was proud of our people in the
12 basin, because we thought it was not good science. And we
13 banded together, we hired a consultant, and we showed the
14 DNR that they had made a mistake and that they weren't doing
15 it right. And so, they had to come up here and rescind
16 that. And I know that that was an embarrassment to the
17 Governor and to the DNR.

18 And I don't know if this last time around when
19 they've changed their way of calculating whether you're
20 fully appropriated or not, but they hired the consultant
21 that we hired to -- so, I don't know if that was done right
22 or if they did such a good job, they wanted to have them on
23 board, but we won't be able to hire them again.

24 MR. BARR: They didn't do that just to take them
25 away from you, did they?

1 MR. MEYER: Well, some people have thought that
2 maybe. But I would hope that they hired them because they
3 were really good and had some real good expertise. And we
4 have a new DNR head, which has made life a lot easier for
5 all the NRDs. He's really, I think, a top -- he's working
6 with us and not adversary. And that really has helped a
7 lot. So, you know, the fear of the DNR isn't as much as it
8 used to be. And, you know, we've gone through some scary
9 times where, you know, maybe we are fully appropriated, I
10 don't know. I never thought that we probably ever would be,
11 but, you know, we'll find out.

12 MR. BARR: Have you had any specific relationship
13 with the Upper Elkhorn?

14 MR. MEYER: Yeah, we have a basin meeting every
15 year. And, of course, we elect our board member for the
16 Commission. And in years past, it's been kind of passed
17 back and forth, but there's been a little break in that, so
18 the gentleman's agreement was broken, we thought. So, now
19 we've had the board member for the last, oh, I don't know,
20 ten years or so. But, you know, when we started out, it'd
21 be four years. And then the next guy would be four years,
22 and we'd go back and forth. But so, other than that, you
23 know, we work real close.

24 MR. BARR: Probably kind of exhausted my general
25 area of questions, but I mainly now is just basically

1 looking back on it and -- well, first of all, have I missed
2 some things about -- that the NRD's been involved in or
3 anything that we should mention or that you -- and then just
4 get into a general discussion of how you've seen things
5 evolve over time and your overall evaluation of it and all
6 that sort of thing.

7 MR. MEYER: Well, after I was elected and on the
8 board, they had the fall meeting. And so, I was very
9 interested in that. I was -- you know, wanted to see what
10 was going on. And the big buzz down there at that time was
11 trans-basin diversion. And the story was that T. Boone
12 Pickens was going to build a pipeline and suck all of our
13 water, get it down to Texas. So, that was a big discussion
14 and I came home and told my wife about it, and she says,
15 "Boy, you must have had quite a discussion. You made the
16 paper." So, the Norfolk paper had a big article on it and
17 the Omaha paper. And, wow, there's some --

18 (Laughter.)

19 And, of course, I found out through the years that
20 making the paper wasn't all that neat sometimes. But we've
21 been very fortunate. The *Norfolk Daily News* has been very
22 supportive of us and what we try to do. You know, there's
23 no rubber stamp, by any means, but have been generally
24 pretty supportive. And we've had a newspaperman that's
25 covered us just about as long as I've been on the board, so

1 that's kind of amazing.

2 MR. BARR: Interesting.

3 MR. MEYER: Greg Wees. And he's very good. And
4 so, I appreciated that. And, you know, it takes a lot of
5 time. We spend a lot of time on it, and I was involved in a
6 lot of other things during this time. I was on the Corn
7 Board and ABN, and a lot of other farm organizations.

8 MR. BARR: ABN is?

9 MR. MEYER: Ag Builders --

10 MR. BARR: Oh, sure, Ag Builders, right.

11 MR. MEYER: -- of Nebraska.

12 MR. BARR: I just hadn't heard the ABN.

13 MR. MEYER: Yeah, ABN, that's what we said. And,
14 you know, I never had a hired man, so when I was gone, Nancy
15 had to kind of take over, and so -- she never has complained
16 about the time I was gone. When I was on the Corn Board, I
17 went to -- on a trip to Japan and Korea and Taiwan in kind
18 of a trade deal. And, you know, she's been really good,
19 so -- you probably have one of those wives, too, that --
20 when you were gone.

21 MR. BARR: Yes, I was gone quite a bit, too.

22 MR. MEYER: But, you know, it's been interesting.
23 I've been chairman three times. We decided that we didn't
24 want one chairman to be chairman forever.

25 MR. BARR: Yeah.

1 MR. MEYER: And so we decided we'd -- and that's
2 the way with all our officers, it's just two-year terms.
3 And then you have to be off and then you can be on again.
4 So, I've been three times chairman, one time vice-chairman,
5 and one term as treasurer and one term as secretary. So,
6 had that covered. But I did not serve on the NARD board.
7 There were other people more interested in that. I was more
8 interested in the local stuff. And so, I never got involved
9 too much with what they do down there.

10 MR. BARR: Looking back what you might have
11 expected when you came on the board in '74 and how the NRD
12 has evolved since then, any thoughts on that general
13 evolution?

14 MR. MEYER: Well, and it was an evolution. It
15 took quite a bit of time. You know, we'd get more
16 responsibility. We had to add a staff member. And
17 sometimes the Legislature asked us to take on more
18 responsibility or there was just more responsibility
19 developed. And so that is a surprise that we have as big a
20 staff as we do. And they're all busy. But we're expected
21 to do a lot of things, and a lot of real technical things.
22 So, we really have a good staff here and dedicated staff.
23 That's surprised me. If you'd have told -- I don't know how
24 many people we have working here now, but if you'd have told
25 me that in 1974 that we'd have that many people, we'd have

1 just been shocked and aghast, you know, that couldn't be.
2 This isn't what we want to do. And what, you know -- over
3 it all, the water's been the most important thing. You
4 know, when we first were in -- in '74, we were putting in a
5 lot of terraces, a lot of tile waterways and things like
6 that, not so much anymore. It's all no-till. And there's
7 some problems with no-till. We just had a contractor talk
8 to us at our last committee meeting. He said that most of
9 his work now is to fill in the ditches from the no-till, you
10 know, from the -- and he says some of it's serious. So, you
11 know, that might come back, and rather than terraces of
12 putting in basins.

13 MR. BARR: I had Steve Thick (phonetic) tell me
14 that the formula that they use on minimum till is very good
15 in terms of sheet erosion, but there's absolutely nothing in
16 there on gully erosion. And it's purely just arbitrary how
17 that's been. And that, apparently, is an issue that's going
18 to surface more and more as the time -- I've noticed it in
19 our area, too, that we're seeing that. Every year, people
20 will bring in the dirt and fill them in. Well, at some
21 point, that will have an impact, I assume.

22 MR. MEYER: It has a big impact, it will. And
23 pretty immediate, too, because that's gone.

24 MR. BARR: Another thing, apparently, is the
25 Atrazine -- or not Atrazine, Roundup has kind of made it

1 inconvenient to stop for waterways.

2 MR. MEYER: Yes.

3 MR. BARR: And I don't know if precision ag will
4 overcome that by automatically turning sprayers on and off
5 in certain areas, but right now, I think that's also been
6 one of the issues that have brought our ways out of the --

7 MR. MEYER: And I think that could, with GPS that
8 could do that. But I know that the contractor that was
9 talking to us, he says, right now, you know, the big
10 sprayers come in and spray it and your waterway is gone.
11 So, they're talking more tile outlets, but you can't have a
12 tile outlet unless you have a basin. So, yeah, there's some
13 things coming. And a lot of it's because of the bigger
14 equipment.

15 MR. BARR: One other area that the University kind
16 of raised the question, this Water and Food group about
17 whether the NRD idea might have applicability worldwide.
18 And on the other hand, Nebraska's still the only state
19 that's adopted it. Do you have any thoughts on why it might
20 have worked in Nebraska and why it's not picked up by
21 anybody else?

22 MR. MEYER: Well, you know, I don't know. I know
23 that I used to go to the national meeting, and now I kind of
24 let people that haven't been there go. But in talking to
25 those folks, it's almost like their conservation -- soil

1 conservation districts are as much social as they are doing
2 conservation work. And I think a lot of -- it would be hard
3 for some of those to give that up. And that's just kind of
4 looking from the outside. And, you know, a lot of them have
5 told me they don't have any taxing authority. They'd love
6 to have that, but, you know, to carry on some conservation
7 work. But I don't know, that's pretty well entrenched.

8 MR. BARR: Well, at this point, if you just have
9 any kind of observation at all or anything you'd like to
10 mention, have at it.

11 MR. MEYER: You know, it's been -- I can't believe
12 it's been -- I'll be starting my 40th year. A lot of
13 meetings. And I think that it's been worthwhile. I hope
14 I've added something. I know I was sure dragging my feet on
15 any kind of restriction of irrigation until a year ago.
16 Boy, I'll tell you, then on -- when irrigators come in and
17 say, "I'm out of water," that's scary. Where I thought we
18 would never be out of water. And like I said before, it
19 looks like it's an in-season thing, because they've come
20 back, and we haven't had a lot of rain. We're dry right
21 now, and Willow Creek Recreation Area, the dam area has
22 really receded again. It's really low, which is a pretty
23 good indication that it's really dry out there. So, it's
24 something I'm really happy to see some younger people
25 willing to serve. And they're really bright, really

1 articulate, really good, and real leaders. And I think this
2 system really works, because there are good people that are
3 willing to step up. We've had a couple resignations and
4 we've had some people that have applied and I don't know how
5 in the world we're going to pick one, because they're all so
6 good, bring in great backgrounds. So, I think it's worked
7 out well, and there's still good people willing to serve.
8 And once in a while, we'll have a single-issue person, but
9 I've never seen that after a while that that hasn't changed.
10 And so, you know, I think it works. I think it's a good
11 deal, and I hope it continues.

12 MR. BARR: Have there been competitive races for
13 the board spots?

14 MR. MEYER: We've had a few. I know my first
15 three or four were competitive. After that they kind of
16 quit, but --

17 (Laughter.)

18 So, I'm up for reelection this year again, so I
19 don't know how that will go. You know, 40's a nice round
20 number.

21 MR. BARR: Well, you don't look any older than you
22 did the last time I saw you.

23 MR. MEYER: Yeah, right.

24 (Laughter.)

25 You either, Jim.

1 MR. BARR: Thank you, thank you. Well, unless
2 there's something else you'd like to mention, I really
3 appreciate you doing this.

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