



A Century of Extension in the Klamath Basin, July 14, 2015

Title

Klamath Extension Grains and Grasses Agent

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Klamath Basin Research and Extension Center, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

Summary

Rodney Todd begins his interview by providing an overview of his family background and his upbringing, including his early contacts with Extension. He then traces his education at UC Davis and Colorado State University, and describes his first job following the completion of his master's degree, working as an engineer and manager for the Tulelake Irrigation District. Todd next discusses his move to the Klamath branch of the OSU Extension Service, and comments on his early duties, individuals with whom he collaborated, and the interplay between the Klamath branch and the main OSU campus in Corvallis. Other topics covered in the interview include Todd's personal experiences as a rancher; his research on the use of goats for weed control; his participation in barley stripe rust mitigation efforts; and the impact that was made by a host of varietal research demonstration projects. The session concludes with Todd's memories of the 2001 water crisis and his thoughts on the continuing role of the Extension Service in Oregon.

Interviewee

Rodney Todd

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/klamath/>

Transcript

Note: This interview was recorded to audio only.

Chris Petersen: OK, today is July 14th, 2015, and we are at the Klamath Basin and Research and Extension Center in Klamath Falls, Oregon. And I am with Rodney Todd, who is a retired Extension agent here from the Klamath branch, and this is an audio-only recording.

So we will talk a fair amount about your career, Rodney, and also about your time working for the Klamath Extension and various issues that arose over the course of your career here in Klamath Falls, but I'd like to begin at the beginning and try to capture a bit of a biographical sketch of your early life. So, where were you born?

Rodney Todd: Red Bluff, excuse me, I grew up in Red Bluff, California. I was actually born in Porterville, California. We moved to Red Bluff when I was about five years old, and my family operated a diversified irrigated ranch south of Red Bluff. I went to Tehama County schools, Red Bluff High School. Upon graduation from high school, I went to the University of California at Davis, got my bachelor's of science in what became the Department of Water Science and Engineering. My diploma actually says, "Irrigation," one word, but it was a multidisciplinary engineering, soils, crops, and even water policy curriculum. After that, I did a master's degree in Agronomy with an emphasis on soil physics at the Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

CP: So I'd like to talk a bit about your upbringing and would be interested in knowing a little bit about your parents' backgrounds.

RT: My mother's family was originally from Colorado. She was born in 1917, her mother died when she was ten years old. They lived in Leadville, Colorado, an area of high elevation, harsh winters, and grandpa moved his two daughters and son to California to be with relatives in a warmer climate in 1927. My mother attended schools in the Porterville area. My dad's side of the family had come from Minnesota. They had farmed in Minnesota, had various other business enterprises including a sawmill. Had farmed on what was a large scale for the horse days, I guess, in North Dakota. And the climate in those days was pretty harsh. My grandmother's physician recommended that she move to a milder climate so they moved out to southern California in about 1910, I believe; before my father was born. And they had some land in the area that is now Pasadena, California [laughs], sold that and moved over into the growing orange production area of eastern Tulare County. That's where my dad was born and grew up.

Interestingly enough, my father and I were both born at the same hospital in Porterville, California, thirty-one years apart. And that's where my mother and father met. My aunt – my dad's next older sister, he being the youngest of ten children – his next older sister was, I think, the only one to get a university degree in that generation. She attended UCLA and was a very prominent teacher in the school system in Porterville, California. My mother worked for the superintendent of schools and my aunt introduced her friend to my dad, and that's kind of our early history in southern California. My dad had citrus and olives, and purchased a cattle ranch in the Shasta County area in the late-'40s, and we moved to Redding with the intent of raising cattle there. One of the contractors from the recently completed Shasta Dam project cashed him out for a considerable profit on his cattle ranch, and so we bought the place in Red Bluff where I grew up.

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I had two younger brothers. One was born shortly after we moved to Red Bluff. The other was also born in Porterville, California. I'm the oldest of three brothers. My dad was previously married and I've got a half-sister who is four years older than me. She attended Oregon universities, got her degree at U of O and I can't remember where she completed her master's, but she eventually taught as an English professor at the college in Monmouth. She's now retired.

CP: So what sort of operation was the ranch that you grew up on?

RT: We had cattle, we had irrigated pastures that we ran the cattle on. It was also diversified with some orchards. My dad had the orchard background and so we had almonds, olives, walnuts. I remember spending a lot of days – I'm sure it wasn't meant to be punishment, but it really wasn't my favorite thing to hoe the little irrigation basins around trees in mid-summer heat in the Sacramento Valley, but we did quite a bit of that. And they weren't huge orchards; we had about a

thousand acres all together and there were only about sixty to eighty acres of orchards at any given time. It still seemed a forest that went on forever when you were a small boy with a hoe in your hand.

CP: Yeah. Well any kid that grows up on a ranch is going to have plenty of chores, I'm sure.

RT: Yeah. I liked the cattle end a little bit better. I always enjoyed the irrigation; it was fun to turn things green with water. We eventually put over 600 acres of that ranch into irrigation, all surface-flood irrigation in that day, in the '50s and '60s.

CP: Did you have horses?

RT: Yeah, always had horses. I don't know if we want to get into personal history, but I have a personal history with horses in that I've always had to own horses, I still own horses today. I'm not a great horse lover. I always wanted a bicycle. I had, I think, five horses before I ever got a bicycle. And once I got a bicycle, I moved on to motorcycles. I've not been without a motorcycle for over fifty years. That was more to my liking. I like mechanical things – I like the science and mechanics of agricultural engineering, water engineering, things of that nature.

CP: Were horses part of the work though, that you experienced growing up?

RT: It's difficult to get along with horses in a real beef cattle operation. Even a pasture operation like we had years ago, the tradition was to have horses. I think today those kinds of operations can be managed in other ways, but thirty-five years ago I purchase a little mountain ranch that needed a lot of work and rehabilitation up in the Bly area of Klamath County, and I've got horses today because you can't manage a ranch like that without being able to chase cows up the side of a mountain and down a draw and so forth. And I've tried. [laughs] Motorcycles and four-wheelers, they take a back seat to horses in certain situations.

CP: Was the ranch that you grew up on, did it incorporate migrant labor?

RT: No. We always had a full-time, we referred to him then, "hired man." It's like part of the family and they worked full-time alongside the rest of us. We would occasionally – I say no to migrant labor, but we occasionally hired a small crew when we were picking olives. The family was able to do – with the early attempts at mechanization, the nut crops for example, we did those ourselves. We did the prunes ourselves. Once in a great while, I think my dad would hire some additional seasonal labor to do the pruning of the trees and so forth. But as far as having any great number of migrant farm workers employed, we did not. Dad had had a history of that though, when he had citrus in Tulare County. He had a nearly 100-acre orchard operation of olives and oranges in Tulare County, so at that time he relied on pickers and other workers. But I was too young to remember this; again, we moved to the Red Bluff ranch when I was five years old.

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CP: Did you or your family have any connection with Extension or Experiment Stations when you were growing up?

RT: Certainly with Extension. To me, a prominent agricultural figure in our community was the University of California farm advisor, which was the Extension agent. My dad was active in Farm Bureau for example. Often, you would find the Extension people – in those days, the early '50s, and all through the '50s and early '60s – Farm Bureau, for example, would invite Extension to help present programs. I remember that as an important factor in my outlook on what careers and kinds of education were important.

CP: So you saw these people and you thought that's something you might want to do?

RT: Yes. In fact, I guess you might say at one time I thought, "you know, that might be kind of a dream job to be associated with the university and, at the same time, live in a local community and work with the farmers and help them achieve their goals both agronomically and economically." I thought, "what a neat job."

CP: Were you involved with 4-H or FFA?

RT: I was briefly involved in 4-H. We lived in an area just remote enough that it required more travel than my family thought was – well, anyway, we didn't do a lot. I attended 4-H meetings, belonged to a 4-H club, had a couple of small projects. But I didn't get involved in, for example, livestock that involved showing animals and things of that nature.

CP: What did you do for fun? Was it a hunting and fishing family?

RT: My family basically wasn't, but as small boys living on an area that had creeks and so forth, we kind of learned to fish a little bit. My dad was not an avid outdoor sportsman but we consumed Field and Stream magazine and saw how to put the worms on the hooks. I suppose Dad gave us a little help with that. But any hunting was more like jackrabbit control and things of that nature. Didn't do a lot of it until I became a fairly avid hunter later in life after college, after moving to the Klamath Basin actually, where it's really part of the Klamath Basin lifestyle for farmers and ranchers.

CP: [rumble of nearby airplane] As we have another airplane fly overhead... So, I'm interested in community life. It sounds like you're a little ways outside of town.

RT: You mean presently? Or when I was growing up?

CP: When you were growing up.

RT: My family was oriented around church life, we attended church regularly. Other events include Farm Bureau meetings, they hosted a picnic in the summertime that we always attended. Some of the local growers had an after-harvest picnic that brought people of the immediate neighborhood together. My dad liked to travel. We did a certain amount of family travel. By the time I was in college, I had been to the East Coast and the Southwest on family driving vacations.

[0:15:43]

CP: What was school like for you growing up?

RT: I found school enjoyable. I was an avid reader. I did well in school. I always enjoyed school. I was more of an academic than an athlete. There again, I think my athletics had a back seat to academics because in order to participate in athletics, it took quite a bit of travel when you lived – it was way out of to my folks, today we would think of it as a fairly short drive. But us kids got to do what we could provide our own transportation for - in other words, bicycle or walk – and it was too far to town to do a lot of the activities that my more athletically inclined friends participated in.

CP: So you read a lot. Were there books that made a particular impact on you?

RT: Oh, I suppose the boy classics of adventure. Mark Twain and books of that nature were probably ones that I found most enjoyable.

CP: You mentioned that, at least in your father's generation, there was only one that went to college. Was it something that you thought you would want to do?

RT: I said the only with a university degree. I think several of them attended junior college, they were education-oriented, but my aunt was the only one that completed a degree and then an advanced degree at a university in those days.

CP: Is this something that you had always set your sights on growing up?

RT: I'm not sure that I did any more than my mom and dad. Of course, my mom had worked in the school system in Tulare County. I think my dad greatly admired his sister who completed her university degree. He had another sister who had attended a theological seminary and went on to be a missionary in China in the 1930s, the pre-World War II era. The family were very supportive of advanced education.

CP: How did you decide on UC Davis?

RT: [laughs] Frankly, it was a better bargain than, say, Stanford. I went down, Stanford was awesome, Davis was great. Coming from a rural area, I'm not sure I even grasped the significance of some of the technology that was being developed at Stanford, whereas I could more relate to the agricultural technology. And given that University of California

at Davis was a prestigious agricultural school, I had no trouble getting in and it was a relative bargain for my parents to support. It made the choice easy. Both my younger brothers graduated from UC Davis as well, and then my middle brother went on to get his master's at Oregon State University in the Entomology department in the early '70s. He's been an agricultural consultant in the Willamette Valley for over thirty years.

CP: What was the adjustment like for you going to school?

[0:19:49]

RT: I don't know that I had a serious adjustment. Probably the freedom of being on my own was the biggest adjustment and it was an easy adjustment, it just made it too easy to have too much fun. I did get reasonably good grades eventually at University of California. I started out with a not too stellar report card or two, but I had really good grades and got the departmental citation at graduation, eventually. And then when I went on to Colorado State, I don't know, I shouldn't be too flip in an interview like this, but I wrote home, "this is like 'Sandbox University' compared to the University of California." I got one non-A in two years of graduate school at Colorado State. The killer course when I went to UC Davis was Physical Chemistry and I had friends that aspired to be veterinarians and medical doctors that washed out because of Physical Chemistry. So it kind of scared me when my advisor signed me up for Physical Chemistry as my first Fall semester course at Colorado State University, just enough that I studied more than usual. And I didn't merely pass, I got the highest grade in the class, which there's something wrong about this. This is not my academic history to be able to do this. [laughs]

CP: Did you settle on this focus on irrigation pretty early on at Davis? Or did that come along later?

RT: No, I picked an agricultural curriculum that was plant- and soil science-based, that embraced a wider, less-focused curriculum than any other, frankly. I've always been a reluctant specialist; I like to know a little bit about lots and lots of things, so that's what I thought was the, eventually, Water Science and Engineering program offered there at UC Davis. Everything from water public policy to the agronomy and developmental history of irrigated crops.

CP: Davis is a town that's often compared with Corvallis. I'm wondering what it was like to be there when you were there in the late '60s.

RT: Well, the population was around, I'm thinking 35,000 or so, when I was there. It was a small town but it was nearly ten times larger than Red Bluff, California [laughs] and just a short hop away to Sacramento and not even that far to the Bay Area. One of the perks of being an academic nerd at Red Bluff High School was the California Scholarship Federation, which provided twice annual trips to those of us who had high academic achievement, to San Francisco. And we would go down and spend a couple of nights and go to first-run movies and run around the city like little wild men. I can remember walking over to Van Ness and sitting in the very first new Jaguar XKE that arrived at British Motors and thinking, "you know, there's more out there than we see in Red Bluff."

CP: You mentioned the impact that the Extension agent or the fellow from the Experiment Station made on you growing up, did you have any more connection with Extension or Experiment Stations when you were at Davis?

RT: Not really other than to be acquainted a little bit with some of the things that professors in the department were doing with Extension. I can't say that I had an involvement with, just an acquaintance with.

CP: It was still something that you were aspiring to though?

RT: It continued my favorable impression of the role that the Land Grant universities had in working with the actual producers out in the rural areas.

CP: So you finished up at Davis and you had a degree, and instead of deciding to go back to the ranch or a life actually farming, you deciding to pursue more schooling and pursue a more academic career. Was that something that you had decided by the time you were done at Davis?

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RT: I think advisors helped me decide that. We had a little conflict going at the time, the Vietnam War. It seemed like a possibility of hiding out a little while and doing something that was more interesting to me – my family was never heavily involved in the military, going back a hundred years or so. I could only name a couple of individuals that were even in the Civil War, for example. They were farmers, woodsmen, not inclined towards military pursuits, and I wasn't either.

CP: How did you decide on Colorado State?

RT: The skiing was better than, say, North Carolina State or Rutgers. I think I had about three offers. My mother, having been from Colorado, there seemed like a little bit of a connection. And I could drive there. It was a one-day drive when you were nineteen years old – I guess I was twenty-two – but yeah, you could coffee-up and, with a short nap, drive the twenty hours straight through to California. I did fly, took the train a couple of times, but I drove several times during the two years I was back there.

CP: Well, it sounds like the classwork was a bit of a disappointment, but how about the research side?

RT: No, it wasn't a disappointment at all. Who doesn't mind being an over-achiever? Definitely not a disappointment. I think, I won't say the competition was less, I found the presentations stimulating and somewhat less intimidating, shall we say, than the University of California.

CP: So you did some research then?

RT: I did a graduate assistantship that gave me a full ride and I worked on a soil physics lab project with Doyle Kemper, who was well-renowned at the time. Our paper was published in Soil Science Society at the end of my program. Lab research – I wasn't terribly research-oriented. I mean, that was the job, I enjoyed doing research, I think I got more of a kick out of understanding and interpreting the research of others that I found useful and intriguing, and explaining how it might work for those who could put those new discoveries into production. And that was exactly what the Oregon State University Extension job was when I first went to work for it. We were encouraged to do a certain amount of research ourselves; I'd seen enough real research to know that the resources that we had at hand were more conducive to demonstration than they were to true research. It takes some serious manpower and money to do a statistically valid replicated research program, and when you're encouraged to do them on cooperators' farms and you come to realize that the survival rate of those projects past a single season is virtually nil, "oh, oops, the hired man plowed up the field," you know. "Yeah, the plot was down there and we didn't get it all." It just seemed, it wasn't where I was positioned at the time to do a lot of research.

I did quite a lot of demonstration projects; I always had some of those going that were, if you will, replicating the research of others. I wasn't shooting for the next big discovery. I, again, really liked demonstrating the efficacy of new research discoveries with sometimes even redundant demonstrations. But it got you a reputation and a following locally that enabled you to have the ear of some of the key producers that really were putting these practices into field use.

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CP: Very much keeping with the mandate of Extension.

RT: Yeah, I always thought so. And I always thought that it was a cyclical thing where no part of that team was more important than the other part. The idea of research that's never going to be applied seems not very intriguing to me, so the kind of research that can be put on the ground with producers that could then offer feedback to the research people and, not only that, let's just be frank about it, at some point the people that support Extension need to support it through the budgetary process. It seemed like a team effort if you will. "We'll see that you get the money for your research if you're turning out research that we can put into practice. And our political support will go to your supporters when we see that you're being productive with the money that has been allocated to your program." I thought that was pretty neat. I thought that's where we were coming from that gave me some purpose.

CP: So you finished up at Colorado State and you had a job before Klamath Falls.

RT: Yeah, I was the engineer/assistant manager, if you will, at the Tulelake Irrigation District, just across the state line down here. I was there for a little over three years. It gave me boots on the ground with the local farming community;

I got to actually see what they were doing. I was in charge of making sure that the water got delivered. A little bit of hydraulics, but there again, I wasn't developing anything new. I was following the footsteps of who I feel are kind of giants of a previous generation of the Bureau of Reclamation that had some fabulous engineers that built this project, starting in the days when they did it with teams of horses. As part of my duties, I would go around and design and rebuild replacement structures that were then getting to be half a century old. So I'm out there with, in those days, optic surveying equipment, saying, "man, these guys were good." You follow a line down a canal for a couple of miles and you hit it within a hundredth of a foot. "These guys were good." Using the tools and techniques that they had at hand, they built a fabulous project here. In retrospect, the only thing they didn't have was today's perspective on societal needs. It was designed to do a limited number of things very well. As soon as we said, "and it should also provide," let's say, "these environmental benefits," the project became strained at that point. People are fond of saying, "oh, the water's over-allocated or over-promised" or whatever, that wasn't a fault of the original designers.

But anyway, I did that for three years and, again, when the opportunity to expand my horizons and actually do a larger number of things for a larger farming community – the whole Klamath Basin – came open, I went "wow, give me a shot at that."

CP: So this job came open, it appealed to you immediately.

RT: I've led a sheltered life in a way. I've never had any kids; I've always been about my work. I've never been fired from a job, I've only applied for a very few of them, and I've held them for as long as I cared to.

CP: Well, you came here in 1974, what was the status of the branch at that time? Of the branch of the Research and Extension Service here in Klamath Falls?

[0:35:10]

RT: Well again, there was probably more of a separation between Extension and the Experiment Station, at least physically, of course, than there is today. We had our own office downtown, the Experiment Station was out here, and there were different faculty with a different mission. It was an exceptional day for a researcher to step into the role of educator with the farming community, and it was a somewhat exceptional day for the educator that had daily contact with the farming community to actually do some phase of research plot work on the station. But we did cross over some; we knew each other, we were part of a team.

CP: What were your duties at this point, initially, working here?

RT: My program areas were soils, water, and the field crops - grain and forages. We had another person who did the row crops, which were nearly all potatoes in those days; onions came along later and briefly we grew some sugar beets and some other vegetable crops here, but principally it was potatoes, which I did not do. So I had everything else that wasn't potatoes, including irrigated pastures that put me back into the cowboy mode a little bit. And as a result of that involvement, particularly with the irrigated pastures, I developed an interest in – and we kind of got to write our own job descriptions in those days – I'm also interested in conservation and riparian management, restoration of watersheds, that sort of thing. That was the thing that I did more field research on than anything else over the years, is research and demonstration on various livestock management programs that could protect and enhance environment concerns.

CP: So that was a real need that you identified in this area?

RT: I didn't personally identify that as a need so much. It was obvious to everyone that we had stretched the systems a little bit in those days. So that gave me some involvement in the Rangeland Resources department. I was primarily Crop and Soil Sciences, but it also gave me Rangeland Resources. We really had the freedom to work with whatever department offered the resources that our local producers needed. So I worked with, I'm going to say, separate disciplines here that are now combined into single departments. You know, Horticulture and some of those, Botany and Plant Pathology, those were all relatively autonomous departments. They had some administration at the top that strung them together, but they weren't one department like they are today, for example.

CP: Were there any colleagues that you worked particularly closely with or that you collaborated with?

RT: By that, you mean colleges?

CP: Colleagues.

RT: Oh colleagues, excuse me. The hearing aid again.

Oh yeah, am I supposed to name names? I can remember some of the really great specialists mainly, at the university. There was a time when many of our faculty within departments on campus were designated as full-time Extension specialists. They weren't necessarily expected to teach and lead research programs, but many of them did. And I think they probably cast the mold for those institutionalized changes that mandated that, "yeah, you'll do all of these," in some cases. Back then you kind of saw a need, you did it, you reported what you did, and if all was good you heard about it, and if it wasn't good you heard about it too.

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Now, I think one of the things that I found a little dismaying was when we had to write everything down and write our expectations up in advance. And I understand why, with public funding, that's necessary. But we kind of felt we were good-hearted and well educated and "trust us, we'll get the job done. And if you don't like it, then let us know." But it evolved to where you had to say in advance what you were going to do and you wouldn't get any credit for doing anything else which, to me, constrained my freedom and creativity in, let's say, an unpleasant way at times. You know if you stepped out and spent half your time on a new issue that you didn't write up in advance, it wasn't held in near as high esteem as the one that you promised to do and then did exactly what you said you would do.

CP: So it sounds like there was some sort of continuing connection with Corvallis and the main campus in Corvallis, is that what I'm hearing?

RT: Well I think you're missing the whole point if you think continuing connection is something – absolutely, that's how we worked. There's no question about that. We were-

CP: I'm just trying to get a sense of the interplay between Klamath Falls and Corvallis.

RT: There really wasn't a difference between us and them. We were on the same faculty system, same evaluations. It wasn't for nothing that I was eventually promoted to full professor. We worked on the same team, the same issues and so forth. In fact, I've always been more than a little skeptical of those issues that come out of "where? Who asked for that?" And the Extension model, as I said before, we were a team with a continuous feedback of success and support.

CP: So you mentioned the ranch in Bly, it sounds like you purchased that in the early '80s?

RT: 1980, actually. I was looking for a cabin where I could hang out during hunting season and go fishing once in a while, and it came with a hundred-acre meadow, so I put some cows on it. Then I got to dealing with the riparian issues, the year-round stream that flowed through it, and got involved with some of the related issues with livestock grazing and so forth. But there was a time when I had enough energy to do that on Saturday and Sunday, and get back to town for the real job. And now that I'm retired, I still have it, it hasn't got any bigger, and it's all I get done. [laughs] I get out there once a week in the summertime only. I've always had a cow/calf operation where the cows went to California in the winter so I didn't have to look after them in the winter and didn't have to put up hay. I'm not a farmer. I know how and realized that you need to attack it at a larger level than I'm capable of. It's easy to be a small-time cattleman.

CP: In preparing for this interview, I was very interested to learn about your work with goats.

RT: You know, that was a brief period. I'm not the goat man. In fact, when I had goats, they weren't my goats, they were a gal that worked for the Bureau of Land Management out of Burns, and she had been doing some research projects and we knew that she had these goats available. So when we did the goat project, we borrowed some goats. It was mainly a weed control demo. It was a photogenic experiment, shall we say, with all these little white goats eating noxious weeds and so forth.

CP: Did it make an impact?

[0:44:57]

RT: I think so, but weed control is something I've been involved in since my early days hoeing around trees as a child. But also that was one of the things I was in charge of on a few hundred miles of ditch bank on the Tulelake Irrigation District, and then through educational programs with the weed scientists at Oregon State University. But to say that we've solved any weed problem or conquered any weed would be a stretch. Yeah, it was successful in that you could suppress weeds, and it's a non-chemical means of doing so. Whether it's more successful than other options, others will be the judge of that.

CP: You were also on a barley stripe rust team?

RT: Yeah, we had a number of both insect and plant disease programs come and go. Here's an opportunity to mention a couple of those faculty members that I worked with a lot. Paul Koepsell was the university plant pathologist. Again, a team, people you knew, a circle of friends. I dated his lab tech at the University of California and then here he is with his Ph.D. when I come to Oregon State, so I remembered Paul. We always hit it off well and he was *the* expert in cereal diseases. So I worked with him. I also worked with some of the plant breeders that were working on resistant varieties and so forth. But my work was more bringing people together; being a catalyst, if you will. I didn't go out there and discover a new control for stripe rust, that wasn't where I was at. I made sure that all my producers that were exposed to the stripe rust problem knew what it was and understood the present state of technologies for managing and controlling it. That's where I came in. And then when somebody came down and said, "we need help with our budget," a guy that had 5,000 acres of grain that you may have saved from stripe rust was willing to go to the state legislature and say, "hey, these guys helped me."

CP: Which of the demonstration projects, or these conversations that you're helping to catalyze, do you think were the most impactful over the course of your career? Or that stand out in memory?

RT: Stand out in memory. I don't know. I think, in terms of long-term history here in the Klamath Basin and the way that ag production's gone, probably the varietal research programs. There's one that, when I first got started, alfalfa breeding programs were largely the province of the Land Grant universities. And then it got to be where there were some commercial companies involved. And we were hopefully an academically sound, unbiased producer of results. Like a lot of other agricultural programs that we helped introduce or pioneer, the commercialization involved a certain amount of advertising hyperbole. [laughs] And suddenly – you've asked me to name the most important program, well, what they were always asking us to do was, "name us a best alfalfa variety." Well, it's not a game where we have a winner today. "Here are some better choices for your situation because..."

Alfalfa variety research helped localize variety selection so that our producers could get the kinds of yields they'd only heard of prior to the distribution of some of these better plant materials. We saw yields literally double during the years that I was involved in Extension in about a thirty-year period largely because we had better-adapted varieties that had better genetic potential, and there were any number of those. The question still got asked, "what's the very best variety?" And certainly there were commercial companies who said, "well, ours." We were here to say, "ok, not always. We don't have enough years of data to say this is always going to work best, even in this particular climatic niche that you're farming in." But we had sound information. We were able to engage them on a, let's say, a broader base of knowledge. I always liked – it could have been a crocheted sampler on the wall that my colleague Ron Hathaway had, it said, "we've not succeeded in answering all your questions but we are now confused at a higher level and about more important things." [laughs]

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And truthfully, people want simplistic answers; things are not simple. To me, that was the beauty of the university. We were able to engage in these larger issues and talk about them like there wasn't going to be a single answer to an agronomic problem. And if there were a single agronomic answer, there was a societal debate going on that might make that not the best choice anyway. So the fact that the issues are complex and we were able to engage local producers in the debate and both demonstrating and then giving feedback to the research scientists and to the administrators that were in charge of deciding who gets the dollars, I think was a very important role. I felt engaged in something that was bigger than all of us on the team; something that I might have some small contribution to.

CP: I'm interested in trying to figure out the vehicles by which the questions were asked and the problems were identified that needed answering. Was it as simple as driving out to a farm and looking at a grower's piece of land? Or are they coming to you? How are we developing some sort of sense of what the needs are in this area?

RT: Well, all of the above. If you wind up being immersed in a local community and viewed as the liaison with the present state-of-the-art research at the university, and not just *that* university, but *the* universities – in fact, one of the things I felt best about in my career here, and I'm not sure that it's maintained those relationships into the present, we were able to cut across state lines. If you look at some of the directives at the federal Department of Agriculture level, their funding suggests that this should happen, and yet I think we made it happen more, particularly working across the state line here with the University of California with their Tulelake Branch Experiment Station and the scientists that were there. And the specialists with Oregon State University getting to know some of the specialists at UC Davis, for example, that were here and were participating in Field Days back-to-back so that our scientists saw what each other were doing.

To me, that kind of engagement was important and the growers would attend these, in some cases, by the hundreds; we'd have up to a couple hundred farmers attending some of these. It became not only cooperative but a little bit of friendly competition, if you will. We used to joke about who put on the best lunch at the Field Day. [laughs] You know, "Harry Carlson won last year. Ken Ragpost was the next year," this kind of thing. But we got to know one another and during these things, the producers that were really engaged in solving some of their problems got to know the scientist that was working directly on it, that had a national and even an international community of scientists working on the things that they were interested in. Who's to say how – you're not going to name one thing – how did this come about? Many ways. As soon as we look for a simple answer, we've quit looking.

CP: Well, it seems to me that an important moment for the Extension service here came about in 2001 with the water crisis. Can you tell me about that period of time?

[0:55:01]

RT: Frankly that was a political thing not an agronomic thing. I'm not particularly fond of Oregon politics and this was one of the darker moments as far as I'm concerned. My understanding of western water law and what enabled the irrigated agricultural systems that we see today in the West were dependent upon a unique set of laws which we refer to, in general, as western water law. Completely different than the Roman riparian law that worked for Europe that many classically trained scholars – certainly legal minds that went to Harvard instead of University of California would say, "oh, it's the people's water, it's like air." If water were like air in the West, we'd still be as arid as the desert that we found here in the beginning.

And it was our failure, politically, within Oregon government, to stand up to the federal entities that decided that there were over-weaning issues that dictated that we no longer allocate the water that was previously adjudicated. There was ample reason why a state's attorney general in Oregon could have said, "whoa, water rights, state's rights," and they sat on their hands and did not do that. Well, I'm sure that's a very simplistic view of why they didn't – they didn't literally sit on their hands, of course – but the prevailing administration was more beholden to environmental interests than they were to farmers, or at least they thought they were.

CP: It sounds like the Extension service here as part, or maybe central, to trying to get everybody on a similar page as far as the water issue was concerned.

RT: Well, I think we tried to educate people about what the issues were. We certainly weren't in a position to be advocates for any one particular position. Our goal was to educate people about what the issues were and what the competing interests saw. But I still think it's a failure of various entities – and the farming community is equally culpable – the failure to exert existing water law and water rights until new determinations could be made. This was not done judicially, it was done administratively. They simply said, "oh, we've decided that the water goes somewhere else."

You've probably followed this a little bit, we've finally got around now, better than a decade later, to adjudicating water rights. The reason they weren't adjudicated was because it would cost a few dollars and we were busy farming and every dollar was precious. There's no question in my mind – I don't think there's any question in virtually anyone's mind – if those had been adjudicated thirty, forty, fifty years ago when water was first appropriated and developed for agricultural

uses, it wouldn't have been so easy for the federal government to administratively decide, "well, we're reallocating." Somebody would have said, "no, this is my personal property, it's been adjudicated, I own this." They still might have made changes; I'm sure they would have, society needs to make changes as time goes on. But you're not just going to shut me down and take it, if I actually have the water right certificate adjudicated by a state court. I think the presumption was, "when we get around to this, our water rights will be upheld." And the state's attorney general, in my opinion, could have said that and forcefully asserted his state's rights versus federal rights so that things played out differently. I'm not so sure we ever saved a fish, nor have we saved a fish yet, due to the reallocation of agricultural water in the Klamath Basin. Others can determine that. But I think the way they went about it was quasi-legal at best.

[1:00:27]

CP: There's a package of legislation that's sitting in the U.S. Congress right now, I believe, that is – my understanding anyway – is that it's proposing a new architecture or system for water in the Klamath Basin.

RT: I'm not an expert on this – I probably shouldn't even get started on it – but somewhere along the line, I liken this to the famous flocked wall art of dogs playing poker. [laughs] We're trading things that don't belong to us anyway. I just think that it's a process that I've determined not to involve myself in – I could go to an early grave trying.

CP: Well, my next question was going to be in you thought we were better prepared for the next water crisis, but I have a feeling I know the answer. I mean, water is something that's being talked about all the time now.

RT: I have no idea what the shape and size and complexion of the next water crisis will be, so I don't know. We're better prepared for one exactly like the last one, which, since it only happened once in a century, odds would say it might not happen in the same form.

CP: I want to ask you about a couple people that are topics of other interviews I'm doing here. I don't know if you met either one of them, maybe you did, but Charlie Henderson and Guy Reynolds. I'm talking to family members of both of them, I'm wondering if you have a sense of the impact that they made on this area.

RT: No, I didn't know either one of them personally. They're a generation before me.

[recording paused for interruption]

You know, the reality is that science at the public university level is pushed and pulled by public policy and economics. I just turned this over [holding Chris Petersen's business card] and I see Linus Pauling Online. We've had some great scientists come out of here that, I think, it would sure be nice to have them show up and tell us what they think about what's going on now. We're thinking, in my case, of Norman Borlaug and the green revolution, and I've read not a lot of his stuff but just enough to know that he'd be livid at the accommodation that we're making to the anti-science contingent that criticizes current agricultural practices and research. He's made a statement like, "you choose which third of the planet you'd like to starve," yeah, we could do that.

CP: Well, the last thing I want to ask you about is the continuing role of the Extension service and the future of the Land Grant mission, and how you view that in Oregon and in the Klamath Basin.

RT: I'm not a futurist. I don't even know where we are today. I can tell you a little bit about where we were and what we were trying to do, but I don't really view that as particularly appropriate for me. I'm not a visionary; my vision has, in many cases, diverged from the vision I once had. And I think modern political and economic expediences have changed what people can and will do. That's probably all I can say about this. In my more flippant moments, I tell people, "I just want to ride my motorcycle and not be hassled by The Man," [laughs] and that's what I do.

CP: Alright, well thanks Rodney, I appreciate this.

[1:04:57]