

Excerpt of Interview with Matthew Hughes

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: What kind of farming was your dad doing?

Hughes: We had a cash grain and beef operation, and then I added some feeder pigs to it as I got into high school. But mainly corn, soybeans, and wheat, and some hay, and then Black Angus cattle.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about what you did on the farm in terms of chores growing up.

Hughes: Oh yeah. You know, it was really a life-building experience. It was the old traditional, you know, something to do in the morning and night. Go out and take care of livestock before you go to school, and then when we got home at night, do all the chores again, and feed them—bed the cattle with straw and feed them corn and hay, whatever we needed to do. And that was typical, year-round, and then of course we had the seasonal things where if we were planting season, I'd get out, and we'd have to work ground and plant it, and back in those days, we would still walk beans and did a lot of hand labor to take care of the weeds after we did the mechanical work. And of course, got in harvest, and that was always the funnest time for me.

DePue: But what exactly does "walking beans" mean?

Hughes: Oh, yeah. (laughter)

DePue: I think I know, but in case for some people who don't.

Hughes: Well, walking beans is literally... We probably take every measure up to then with mechanical beans. After the crop was planted and started to come up, you'd run a rotary hole through it to try to get rid of some of the smaller weeds, and then the crop would get a little bit bigger, and you'd take a cultivator through the middle of the rows and get out some of the bigger

weeds. Eventually the crop would just get too big to run equipment through it anymore, and of course, back then, we didn't have the chemicals we have today, so the weeds would still keep on coming. And so then it was time to resort to your feet, and you'd start walking up and down the rows, typically in the soybean field. It didn't happen too much in corn because the corn would get ahead of the weeds and shade them out, but the bean field, you'd typically take a couple rows and just start walking up and down, and take a weed hook, which was a sharp instrument to cut the weeds off, and you'd cut them off and just keep walking back and forth. And over the course of a day, you'd cover maybe twenty acres, and then go back and do that the next day, and over the course of a week, you might get across all the soybeans you had. So.

DePue: Well, how many miles a day would you be walking, then?

Hughes: Oh, boy you know...you're talking about a half-mile field that's... You're going to walk... Heck, I probably walked twenty miles a day, easy.

DePue: Yeah, and that's obviously going on in the summertime when you don't have school. What time would you wake up in the morning to do chores while you were in school?

Hughes: Oh, when I was in school, typically I'd be getting up about... The bus would come about—when did the bus come? I think it was about 7:30 I'd get on the bus in the morning, so that meant I had to get up... We kept the chore schedule kind of light in the mornings, but usually I'd get up about six o'clock and go out and do about half an hour's worth of work, and come in, get cleaned up, and get ready for school, and get everything packed up.