

Excerpt of Interview with Matthew Hughes

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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Hughes: Well, my first job out of graduate school then was I moved to St. Louis and worked for Doane Marketing Research. And they're a firm that specializes in agricultural research. They're the people that a lot of farmers are going to—or even city people will appreciate this. You know, you get those telemarketers asking you survey questions, but they focus on the agriculture, they focus on calling farmers, and sending out surveys, and asking them what brands of corn they plant, and what kind of feed they use for their livestock and things like that.

So that was my first job, was a project director for Doane Market Research, which means I worked with clients to help develop a study that would address a specific question they had. Ultimately, I ended up taking charge of one of the bigger projects, which was called their seed study, which answered the question of what brands farmers used and what's the market share of all the brands. And then that was a study we would sell to most of the major seed companies. And my job was basically to develop the questionnaire and design it so farmers would understand it, and to teach the interviewers how to ask the questions properly, and then to collect the data. And then my next job was to take that data and make sure it was valid, and turn it into results that my client could use, and then to present those results to my client, and then to help him use it.

DePue: Did you find that to be an interesting and challenging job?

Hughes: Yeah, it was very interesting, because I got to really relate to a lot of farmers. I was a unique individual at that time because I was working in a corporate environment, coming straight from a farm. You know, I was almost a farmer working in a corporate environment, and I could really relate to what they needed. And I was working alongside computer programmers that had no concept of what agriculture was, worked aside university professors that had not even grown up on a farm. So they were always leaning on me to get the production, practical aspect of it. But the same token, I was a classically

trained economist at this point. I understood statistics and how to program statistics and do all that. So I was really an integral go-between who really could explain things from the farmer level but also could understand it from the academic standpoint at this point. So I became a pretty unique commodity. I'm the kind of individual that as long as I can see I'm in a unique position, I'm providing some value that nobody else can, I'm excited. (laughter)