**Judy Harder:** We started Jubilee Fruits and Vegetables, that’s the name of our farm here. We are a farm that is located in Mountain Lake. We have about 20 acres located in the city of Mountain Lake, which makes for a unique kind of setting. We are having to work within city ordinances and that kind of thing. So we started Jubilee Fruits and Vegetables about three years ago with the focus on the CSA, Community Supported Agriculture. My husband Steve and I felt like that was something missing in this part of the state of Minnesota, the southwest corner. There had been some others that are sort of working in that area, but not so strongly as a CSA. We are also wanting to use organic procedures and manners on our farm place. So that is something completely different than what is around us, because all around us, when you drive this area, is all monoculture. It’s either all corn or all beans. Just the other day, planes are flying over and spraying crops, doing what they need to do, and we’re just this little piece of land in the middle of this huge agribusiness all around us, trying to make a different statement. Anyway, so three years ago we started. We started out fairly small. We had 11 or so members, and they would come each week and pick up their share of the harvest. It was quite nice. It was something I could manage. I worked out of my kitchen sink. We don’t have a processing area yet, and that makes life a little challenging, because a kitchen sink isn’t quite large enough for all the things that need to pass through. We started out with a summer season and then went into a winter season. Over the course of time, now at this point, we have three seasons. We start in May and we go through the end of November. How we are able to do this is that we have two moveable high tunnels that are located on our area. I don’t know if you can see them through the bushes behind me. They are moveable in that there are seven plots; these high tunnels can move from plot to plot depending on the season. We are able to start our tomatoes very early, so that they’re ready a month earlier than your normal types of produce that you would have planted outdoors. Our cucumbers and our peppers we have started in our high tunnels. They are coming to the end of their season. We get lots of them because it is several hundred plants growing there in that high tunnel. We started that, and this is the first year that we have had three seasons. We decided to have a spring season, a summer season and we have a fall season. Folks sign up, pay ahead, pay us upfront for that season, for that period of time and then they come each week with their market box and then we, as farmers, have a variety of produce there that they take their share of the harvest and they fill their own market boxes.

This year, the new thing is that our son has come to join us and he is farming with us. He just came back from Bolivia, having worked there with organic farming and such. We have done a lot of different things this year, working with him and all his ideas. He was sort of trained in this area.

We have been looking more at the term “Jubilee.” You can take that all sorts of ways. It means a party. It means having a fiesta. It means enjoying what is set before you: the people and the creation, in terms of a jubilee. So if you look at our logo, you can see vegetables flying out of the word jubilee. It is sort of a fiesta, a party time. The other jubilee kind of idea is that it is a biblical term. A jubilee year is a year of taking a break. The land is at rest. It isn’t just push and push and push to produce as much as it can and get the biggest dollar and that kind of thing. That is an aspect that we are still working on. If you need something from May
to November, and if you want to set land aside for a jubilee year, then you are needing to have enough land so that you can rotate around and have that much land in rest as you move around. We are still working in that area. We haven’t quite arrived there, but that is sort of the goal. It’s looking at, not having the same mental… We need to make money and be aware of that bottom line, but how are we stewards of the land that we are able to manage it in a wise manner? I think those are the only two things for the name “Jubilee.” At this point, we have about 30 to 40 members and that isn’t quite enough in terms of a business. This is a business now, and we are needing to be aware of that. My husband and I are volunteers. This isn’t a business that is making a lot of money. It’s a real challenge in that department. That’s the area that we are needing to get more efficient in what we do. It is sort of a balance, more efficient in what we do, but not having that drive of, “Okay, now we need to push this thing to its uttermost.” It is sort of a fine line and we are still trying to figure that out amongst us.

Now that we are three farmers, that makes life a little more challenging because we come at it from all different perspectives. Our son has also encouraged us to think in terms of permaculture. In our front yard now, we are looking at why all these trees around us? This is a major house. We sit on a lot of acreage that isn’t producing anything. It is just beauty. Can beauty also be paired with something else that would be something in terms of food, sustenance, or other kinds of things? Our front yard, we took down three or four major trees this year. If you haven’t visited here for a while, it’s like, whoa! Our neighbors were all asking, “What are you guys doing?” Folks were aware and we were right out front. They would stop by and ask, “What in the world are you doing?” We took up three quarters of our front yard, which is pretty major, and put in a Three Sisters Garden on one side and then we used “hugoculture,” I don’t know if I am pronouncing that right, where you chop the trees and you just lay them down. You use the trunks and just cover them with soil and plant on top of that. This is the first year for that; it’s sort of an experiment. I am not real impressed quite yet. The soil was just soil that we had back there and we just piled it on top of the tree trunks. It wasn’t composted and nutrient-rich or that kind of thing. The brussel sprouts that are growing there look a little peaked at best, but it is our first year for that.

The idea there was the other concept they were trying to do was to think in terms of where water is coming from. This summer was an awful drought. It started a month before last year. That was most challenging. In terms of thinking to the future, where is our water going to come from? Currently, we get all of our water from the city, which is fine, but water that has been purified by the city has chlorine and other things that we’re not really wanting to keep watering our plants with. That only degrades the soil. In our front yard, the idea is to try to capture as much water that falls on our land, to try to keep it on our land, not to have it rushing down the street. Again, we’re in a city, and the concept of the city is storm sewers and “Quick! Take the water off the land and rush it out of here!” You don’t want it sitting on your property. That’s a real mind-switch to think of now. We want the water to sit here and percolate down through the soil. Our raised bed that is there on top of the tree trunks is sort of in a curve, but facing the house, so any water coming off stops there. That is part of the concept that you don’t necessarily notice as you come in the yard. Again, it is our first year working on it and we are wanting to continue on that line.
On the other side of the driveway is a huge area that used to be beautiful green grass, but grass doesn’t produce anything. We covered it all up with some manure and wood chips and all. In that area is going to go fruit trees and nut bushes and things. After the huge tree was cut down, now it opens it up to the sun. It is on the north side of the house, so we are having to be a little more aware of the sun as it passes over and how it falls on the land. We always have more discussions of how many trees need to be cut down. I am a tree hugger. I plant trees and I don’t like taking them down. I am very careful. When I look around, I don’t know that I want that tree down or this tree. We go at it slowly. We are wanting to open up more space and make the land able to produce and also beauty and how that all ties together. We aren’t just wanting to put corn and beans everywhere.

Peter Shea: Sounds like this is a farm, a garden, built on ideas.

Judy: Very much so.

Peter: Can you say a little bit about where those ideas came from? What kind of conversations resulted in this farm?

Judy: To start out with, it was just my husband and I. We were wanting to make a difference—to make a statement for folks in this part of the world. Professionally, I was a registered dietician. My husband is a medical doctor. We feel very strongly that we aren’t making the best choices for our health, for the creation that is around us, for our families and a lot of that is based on food. We wanted to be able to, rather than just preaching the word and saying, “You know, you need to be eating better and exercising,” and whatever else comes down, you know, just preaching it out of the mouth. That to be able to show the way and trying to show, you know, one could do something different with one’s yard, so to speak. One could try these certain vegetables. We grow vegetables that most folks will say, “Now Judy, you are going to have to give us some recipes for this because I have no idea what this is that you are putting in my market box.” For example, that might be swiss chard; it might be fennel. What did we give out last week? Kale, collards. You know, southwest Minnesota, we are pretty much corn and beans. To have this variety of vegetables, it is like, “Wow, what do you do with fennel?” We are all learning. I didn’t grow up on fennel either, but that is a kind of vegetable that grows well here and gives diversity. There’s no magic to it, but it is something different that we can enjoy eating together. The idea is, if I am one saying, “You need more fruits and vegetables in your diet!” That is how I would preach as a dietician. I go to the grocery store and what is there is there and that’s all that I get. Much of what is there comes from lands far, far away from here. The idea is, what can we do right here that can extend the season and can we eat locally and support locally and have that all in the same package somehow? That is sort of what we are trying to push. It’s not just local, we are trying to be sustainable. We are still using gas. We are still using diesel. We are still using city water. Those items aren’t a guarantee in a hundred years from now. We are really needing to seriously look at what non-renewable resources we are using and all of that. We can’t get there from today and tomorrow. We are there. We are needing to keep working at it and seeing if we can make a difference so that other folks who are watching can say, “I could try doing that, too,” or “I would like to support you and I’d like to be a member.”
Peter: Have any of these teaching seeds you’ve planted sprouted yet?

Judy: Among some families there is real enthusiasm. It isn’t like CSAs in the metro area. They may have hundreds of members. We have 30 or 40. So it isn’t like the numbers say you’ve made it. It is exciting when folks come and go, “This is so wonderful!” Trying new things and they’ve never tried a certain kind of vegetable before. That’s a lot of vegetables that you get in a week. It’s like a half a bushel for two people. If people are used to eating meat and potatoes mostly, which is what most folks eat around here, and now they’re getting fruits and vegetables. Those have to squeeze in somehow. Many families are eating much better now and are losing weight and learning how to cook. That, to me, is like, yes. That’s the purpose for what we are up to here. Trying to make changes in a comfortable way and opening doors to new ways of going about life. In terms of getting into schools, three schools around here purchase from us: the Windom school, the school here in Mountain Lake and the school in St. James. Nursing homes purchase and who else? There must be some more wholesale accounts. That’s another area where we’re seeing some support. They have a weekly order, which makes life simpler for us. I don’t always have to phone and say, “What do you want?” It’s like each week we are going to take this many cucumbers, tomatoes, etcetera, like that. They really appreciate that, too.

Peter: Any particular challenges working with institutions like schools and nursing homes?

Judy: Well, schools take a whole summer off. So what’s the challenge with that? They take a vacation when everything is growing. When they come back into session, everything is petering down. That is a huge challenge. To have schools set up that way, I think why they were set that way is from years ago because farmers had to have their kids at home. They would teach them when they didn’t have to be in the fields. I’m not sure. Our system is a little off. We gather all of our kids into a building and then there’s nothing growing in the fields around us. How do we do that? We don’t charge cheap for our vegetables and public schools don’t have a lot of money. Someone told me they have changed the school program and they’re only offering six cents more for something. I’m not sure. I don’t know where that’s going. The point is there isn’t a lot of money to spend on fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables, what we grow, are not cheap. They are not cheap. There are three of us working and we are trying to provide a salary for one person. That’s a huge challenge. There isn’t money in this area. You usually are a farmer and then you have your other job that helps support your farming habit. That has to switch. It takes a lot of energy and effort to provide decent fruits and vegetables. How do you do that now when the economy is an issue? There isn’t a lot of money for a school to say they will buy all of our cucumbers and tomatoes. They do the best they can, but we are still learning.

For folks that aren’t farmers and aren’t used to purchasing local and in season, that’s a huge switch. If you are used to going to the grocery store and seeing broccoli there or cauliflower or beans throughout the whole year, you’re not aware of when it actually comes due in your locale. It is completely different. A school menu is set up by folks who aren’t that aware of what is coming due locally at that time and place in that area. To change all of that is going to take years. We are taking one step at a time. It is sort of like we fit in. I live in Alaska, is the menu built around that place? Is the menu built around what is available in southwest...
Minnesota? One school called and asked if we were going to have sweet corn. School doesn’t start until the end of August and they wanted sweet corn then. I don’t know if you saw on your way here. Drought! We have had a horrible year with sweet corn. I think sweet corn is this big this year. The rains didn’t come. The plants didn’t get above my knees. There’s no corn. No, sorry. School still has it on their menu. They will find corn somewhere else, but we didn’t have corn.

**Peter:** I wonder if you could return for a second to your days as a dietician. How did it look from that standpoint, this business of feeding people in the schools? Were you working with the same schools you are supplying now?

**Judy:** I just knew of our school here in Mountain Lake. I’m not working with it anymore, so I don’t speak with a whole lot of authority, but the challenge is always the bottom line. It is the amount of money that is reimbursable. This area of the world is not a wealthy area. We are in a high poverty area. There is no money for extra things. When one goes shopping, if you have two tomatoes and one costs one and one costs three, which one are you going to choose? Or whatever! Folks around here are very frugal. It isn’t like, they are growing organic so I am going to go buy over there and I know I am going to be spending more. That’s sort of a new concept. We don’t have a lot of people flocking here. So back on schools, it’s the same thing. I work in the food shelves. Not to pick on the schools, it is a similar commodity kind of thing. The commodities that we get at the food shelf, I’m assuming the schools also get. I am not impressed. I don’t think the government...I don’t think we care for people’s health. Big business, big agriculture is not in the same place it was years ago where the farmer cared for what was happening. I think money has gotten in there. It has made a big mess of things. You have these huge farms and they’re like corporations. I don’t know a whole lot, but I’m not impressed looking from the outside and thinking that someone there is looking out for me, I don’t think so. When I see planes spraying, when I hear that spraying a certain field affected somebody, killed tomatoes in their garden, I’m thinking something is not right there. We are not paying attention to the land and the chemicals we are putting on it. We are following the big dollar. We’re not caring for land like we should, but that is nothing new.

**Peter:** You have actually persuaded schools to buy vegetables that cost more than they could get other places.

**Judy:** Yes. They taste better.

**Peter:** And that’s the argument?

**Judy:** Well they taste better and they are better. I haven’t asked that question of them. If you go to the grocery store, our tomatoes are more expensive. Our cucumbers are more expensive. Is everything more expensive? It may or may not be. I don’t know the prices over there all the time, but they know that there is going to be quality there. Our tomatoes aren’t the kind that you can bounce on the ground and there’s no damage to the tomato. It is going to split. Same with the cucumbers, they’re just awesome. Also I think the tricky thing is that the schools are being encouraged to purchase local and then they get a grant to purchase local with. When those dollars disappear, I don’t think they are going to be able to support local so much.
because it is the bottom line. They would be switching right back to commodities. It hasn’t switched enough yet that it is a level playing here and again, I don’t know a whole lot. I don’t have time to do much studying with farming. I have a sense that in the commodity department, when you grow fields and fields of corn, you are getting government dollars somehow, for commodity programs and all of that. For fruit and vegetable people like we are, there isn’t anything. We have what we have. There isn’t anything else coming to help us do anything. This is what it is. The price that we are charging is more the true price. We don’t have huge fields of cabbages or cauliflowers and we’re driving our big tractors down and having cheap paid help. It is completely different. We are doing a lot more by hand. We are trying to be really careful with the amount of diesel and gas that we use.

Just Saturday, we were given a field over here. We have two alfalfa fields that another farmer does. He works it up. They had been in a corn/bean rotation and had been thus sprayed. We wanted to get it away from that so they could be organic. They have been three years now in alfalfa. We’re wanting to be able to use some of that land. It is our land, but to convert it into fruit trees or vegetables or something. Back on Saturday, the farmer had forgotten that alfalfa and it had gone to flower. It was too late for him to bale and sell. He had known that we had wanted the alfalfa at any time. He said he would chop it if we wanted it. So we said, sure. On Saturday, it was just an awesome thing. I have never worked with alfalfa. I didn’t grow up being a farmer, but I’ve seen movies of people out there with their pitchforks. You know the old-time movies: people getting their bales and doing it all by hand. We don’t have any animals. We were out there with this flatbed. We’re novices at this. We had our pitchfork and I was thinking I was going to have to go down all the rows and pitch all of this alfalfa onto this trailer and lo and behold, the alfalfa just rolls up on itself like a snowball. It was just beautiful. We were just out there with our muscles and all, rolling up the alfalfa. I had to take off for something else, but the rest of the family pitched… it wasn’t just pitching as you went down the windrow, but you had big snowballs of alfalfa, and that was put on the trailer. That was sort of fun. It was like old-fashioned farming. We brought that over and are starting a windrow for composting. Then in our plot seven behind here, on our high tunnel, we are going to try to do a new thing next year. We put all of the alfalfa down and it is about a foot thick now and we put our tomatoes out in March or April of next year depending on the weather. We are hopefully going to leave the alfalfa there and instead of tilling up the soil, because every time you till up the soil you are messing around with all the little microbes in there and you are messing around with the soil structure. The less that you can till, the better. We are trying to figure out how you do that with vegetables. So we put this alfalfa on and it is going to go down. I have never done this before, but I’m sure somebody has. It will diminish and then in the spring, when we move the high tunnel over that, we will plant our little tomato transplants right in the alfalfa. That will be a new thing because usually we till it up and we put in our tomatoes. We are hopefully going to not have to till that time. That’s the hope.

**Peter:** We were talking about schools a bit ago. You mentioned these grants to buy local. Is that what is now allowing the school to buy your vegetables?

**Judy:** Correct.
Peter: So unless you can somehow make the case during this time when they’re going local under the grant that this is a good thing to do, that market is going to dry up when the grant disappears?

Judy: Correct. It’s always a good thing. We don’t have a question that it’s a good thing, but what is the bottom line? I don’t have money for it. That’s always an issue for us. My husband and I have our own jobs, but how do you make the business support the business? That’s its own thing. That’s separate from what we do here. That’s the business. There is one person working for that business who is getting paid, but then there are three of us working, probably almost three full-time jobs, working at it and trying to learn to be more efficient. That’s always my thing. What we are charging isn’t too much if you are figuring it is taking three people to do this, unless we are being the most inefficient possible. I don’t think so. It’s a huge learning curve, so that’s understandable. One has to purchase some things. Your first years in a business, it is sort of hard to know, in any business. The grant is a false positive. It’s a false sense of security because there is no security. This is what we charge and we don’t try to compete with places south, east, or west. This is what we need in order to have it be a viable business for a farmer to work on. We aren’t there yet, obviously. Whereas the nursing home that purchases, those aren’t grants. It isn’t all grants. I think schools are under a real hard bind in that there isn’t that much money for the cafeteria, the school lunch. They used to get like $2.64 per meal. That’s pretty cheap. I mean, can you go out and buy a meal for $2.64? No, you can’t! That’s just squished down and you don’t have much choice there.

Peter: This seems like an unsolvable problem. The school can’t afford your food. The grants come in to kind of give them a taste of what it would be like, but grants won’t go on forever. Have you got any ideas about how to maintain the relationship to the schools apart from this artificial “false-positive” kind of funding?

Judy: That’s always our discussion here. I guess we could go at it in a variety of ways. I don’t know how to answer that. I volunteer at a whole bunch of things. I have had to quit all of those volunteer jobs in order to do this job. What’s wrong when I volunteered in all of those other jobs? I’m still volunteering. I’m doing this farming. I’m volunteering. I’m not answering the question, but it’s always in my mind. I also make donations. I can donate money to the church and to a whole bunch of other kinds of things for people to do the very thing I’m doing here somewhere else. It could be in another country helping farmers XYZ. What’s so wrong with me doing that right here? So that’s how I’m sort of surviving thinking about my life at this point. Instead of me paying you, for example, to go far away and do the same thing over there, what’s wrong with me trying to make a difference here, learning new things, encouraging people to eat differently, think more globally and how I live here affects everyone around the world? That isn’t something you learn in a day. That’s a generation change. I haven’t answered your question, but I’m in it for the long haul.

Peter: Do you think that way of thinking and teaching has a foothold in the schools?

Judy: What do you mean by that?

Peter: In your schools, in your local schools.
Judy: What way of thinking?

Peter: A way of thinking that values where the food is coming from, that pays attention to the ethics of its growing, that integrates it into the plan.

Judy: We are still working towards that. A lot of folks feel that way. We are still working on that, all of us, me included. To be aware of what I do affects not necessarily what’s right in front of me, but it affects a whole bunch of other things.

Peter: So once you get schools to teach ethics, your problem will be solved.

Judy: Yea.

Peter: I had to toot my own horn.

Judy: I’m not on the school board anymore, but that would really concern me. It would just bother me. We had a nutrition policy. We are talking elementary schools and we are talking tight budgets. It’s been tight ever since I was in there and I was on the school board for 13 years. It was tight the whole time. Tight has to be put aside at some point. I am looking to the future. I’m not thinking about how tight things are. Is what I’m doing now going to affect me in the future? It sure is. When I first got on, I said, “We need to be looking at what in the world we’re feeding the kids.” I am fully aware that parents back home feed their kids whatever they do, but we as a school community need to be doing it differently because it is for the future. Where are we at 20 years later? We are at far worse diabetes. We are at far worse health kinds of issues. For the next 20 years, what are we going to do differently? The same thing could be said for the land. What we are doing now might look okay, but in 20 years from now, am I going to be happy with GMO crops, with spraying, with whatever. Is that where I want to go with my world? No, it isn’t. Let’s walk down this other path and see if others will follow. It’s generational. Our agribusiness, how long has that been? That’s since World War II. Isn’t that when things started changing and going differently? That is many years ago. It’s going to take that many years to go differently. I am just way out here in the middle of nowhere and I don’t have a whole lot of other contact, whereas I think in other areas, there are probably a lot more people that try to do things like we do and they have more community and are able to talk to each other more.

Peter: What kind of community do you have?

Judy: In terms of farming?

Peter: Yes.

Judy: Not much at this point, but that’s probably my fault. I am just really busy. I start work at 6 or 7 in the morning and get to bed at 10 or 11. There’s no time to sit around and talk like this much. It’s in the winter months when I have time to try and connect with folks.
**Peter:** Worse backgrounds in the winter. You don’t get this nice green stuff.

**Judy:** Yes, right.

**Peter:** We talked about schools a lot, but you also mentioned a connection to a nursing home. How’s that going? How did it get set up? What reason do they have to buy the expensive tomatoes?

**Judy:** I think they know quality and I think last year there must be a client who really appreciates cherry tomatoes and that’s all she likes to eat. They like to buy that. The hospital in Windom gets cucumbers and tomatoes. Folks have that on their menu and so they use it. It’s the price. Iceberg lettuce coming from California, its fields and acres, thousands of acres, it’s genetic and it’s meant to be that way. It is meant to be able to transport that way, just like any tomato or other vegetables that we see in the grocery store. We have gotten used to that. That is what lettuce is. If you think back to before iceberg lettuce, that is not what lettuce is supposed to be. There are all kinds of lettuces and a variety of things one could have in a salad. We need to make a mind change on that and it comes with a cost. We don’t have a lot of extra money right now. There are no easy answers. Junk food is cheaper than good food.

**Peter:** At least a nursing home and a hospital have decided it’s worth the extra money.

**Judy:** They get some of the stuff, tomatoes and cucumbers. Not the other odd things that we have.

**Peter:** When we talked the last time, it was in the context of a grant report on a project to work with new immigrants. Now we are a couple, three years out from that. I’m curious. You were doing some pretty interesting things with new immigrants back in those days. What’s happened with that? How are those relations?

**Judy:** Well, since I’m farming now, I haven’t been able to keep up those relations daily or weekly, but when I pass friends, we know each other and we respect each other. We talk a bit. The community garden there at the apartments is a thriving garden. I run by it on my runs each day and they’ll be out there in April already and they keep working clear through. It’s awesome to see that and the amount of food that comes out of that. Vegetables aren’t planted in rows. It’s just awesome to see how it’s done. There are little dikes around it and when it rains, the little dike can be switched and then there’s a place for the water to run out. It is very much on an Asian kind of farming system, much to the chagrin of the manager, because they are used to regular rainfalls every day. Since we didn’t have regular rainfall, they’ve been using a lot of city water, which isn’t that necessary. One has to get used to not having monsoons all the time. I’m sure their water bill is a little high. I’m sorry. I don’t know what to do about that. The manager will have to figure that out. The garden is awesome. People will go out there, especially the elderly, farmers who know how to farm, and their little grandchildren will be out there. Other folks in town who know such-and-so has that garden plot are welcome to harvest too. It’s a really nice space. We should have more space like that, but we don’t. We do have another community garden by the Heritage Village, but that hasn’t worked out so well because that is a walk for everybody to get out there. People don’t own
that as much as a space by their place of living. That one took off, which is really exciting to see.

**Peter:** So this is an example of a grant-funded enterprise that didn’t collapse when the grants went away.

**Judy:** That’s right and I went away. That part of it really worked. That garden came out of community meetings in the apartment building. The children and I bought makings for picnic tables. We got the wood and metal pieces and we made two picnic tables together. If you go by, they are moved all over. They are used frequently. Out of those meetings also came the need for garden space. My husband and I tilled up the land and found out there was more interest, so we needed to till up more land. Out of those meetings with the same grant was an interest in having space for kids to play. There is also a basketball hoop there. Those have worked for the grant. Some of the other things sort of went by the wayside, but those were very helpful.

**Peter:** I’m curious how you would manage a little foundation if you had one.

**Judy:** I do have one.

**Peter:** Well, tell me how you manage it. Where you are investing money that can’t go on forever, that can’t keep being invested for 30 or 40 years, like the start-up money for healthy foods in the schools or the start-up money for the community garden. Where you are investing that way, given what you are interested in out here, where does it make sense to put that seed money?

**Judy:** My husband and I do have money in the Southwest Initiative Foundation. So in a sense we have a Harder Fund in a foundation. I don’t know if that is what you are talking about. Folks give heavily to church kinds of things and that’s well and good and wonderful. We feel really strongly like this community has been a huge giver of missionaries and all sorts of things through the church, but then if one looks at the community, not much of it stayed in the community. It all went. You can harvest from the ground a couple years and when you put your tomato in there after three years of never having put nutrition back in the ground, you don’t have much of a tomato plant. The same thing goes with financial or whatever. This is a community and we felt real important. Half of our money goes elsewhere in the world, but some needs to stay here and support what’s here. It might not necessarily be church work, whatever that means. We’ve worked overseas with church; money that goes elsewhere doesn’t necessarily go to…people give money to have mission workers start community gardens in other countries. It could also be done right here and why isn’t it? That’s my question. Church groups can send their youth off to Chicago and Denver to do rehabilitation and whatever. Why isn’t that also done here in our own little town. It hasn’t been done. So those are the issues. When we started up a family fund, our fund then is for local kinds of happenings that we perceive as being important. We have given money to a variety of things locally. There is money there under our Harder Fund for Mountain Lake stuff and we do other stuff elsewhere.
Peter: So imaginably, some fund or other could continue subsidy for healthy fruits and vegetables in the schools.

Judy: I have thought about that. I have thought about giving from our foundation, giving money to the schools to purchase local. One could do that, but then you have that false sense of “what are they doing?” In a sense, the government is giving money to the schools. That would be an interesting discussion to have. The schools get money from elsewhere. They get money from my taxes, from the government, from the state, from whatever. It is funding. The school isn’t earning its money. What is so wrong with people in town, be that me or whoever giving money to the schools to purchase locally, not just from me, there are other farmers around here. Why wouldn’t that be neat? I haven’t done it yet. I am thinking. Is that a false positive? Is that something that community members could do? They could say, “Yes, I’m going to give you a couple thousand dollars to purchase your honey, your meat, and your vegetables.” That couple thousand dollars won’t go very far because it is many hundreds of kids to feed. Wouldn’t that be a neat thing? To start the wheels turning so that folks learn that honey comes down the road, the pork is over there, and beef is over there. I’ve thought about it, but I haven’t done it yet.

Peter: When I talk to farmers, a lot of farmers, I get one recurring theme: they really hope their kids will come back. They want to pass their operation on to somebody. Even if they don’t much like their operation, they want to pass it on. It’s funny. You actually got a kid to come back.

Judy: He’s come back, but I’m not sure if he is going to be happy here or not. I don’t like to speak for him, but it is hard for a young person to come back. It’s been written about and everybody knows that. Imagine I am a young person and I come back. I’m thinking this way and all around me is completely opposite to what I am wanting to do and think. Can I survive in that situation? That is the hard thing. For example, we are able to have bees on our property. We are in town. This is rural Minnesota. Fortunately we have a buffer, but everything is sprayed, up and down the street and all the corn and beans that you see. Everywhere is sprayed except for this little piece right here. That bothers me greatly. I think we have been blindfolded into thinking it’s safe. I have heard people say that you can take a bath in Round Up. Whatever it is, I don’t believe it. I am coming back and I am one person. I am to plunk myself down in the middle of all of this and think I am going to make a difference and be able to survive. I am also a person who is wanting to say we are using too much gas and too much diesel and be aware of the amount of water we are using, the amount of fuel we’re using and the amount of non-renewable resources in the schools, in the workplaces, and in our city government. Where’s the discussion? There is no discussion. If I am feeling like nobody is listening, I don’t know if this is the place to come and settle down. We’re working on trying to get a few chickens. There’s an ordinance against chickens. Again, we have these 20 acres and we’re on the edge of town. We have bees. We finally got bees and they’re making honey, honey, honey, because we have raspberries and buckwheat and all sorts of things blooming all around and all the time. They are making lots of honey. Now we want some chickens. We are not planning to build a huge chicken barn and sell thousands of chickens, but we are wanting some chickens. That has to go through the whole city. People are upset and not wanting chicken feathers. If we’re needing to think, “I’m living here. Where’s my food coming from?”
Like, Peter, where’s your food coming from? Is it coming from around me or is it coming from far away where the chicken feathers can be. It should be coming from around us. We shouldn’t hear all of this truck traffic going by us so much. We should be more sustainable, would be my point of view.

**Peter:** You were starting out talking about the difficulty of a kid coming back.

**Judy:** Yes, so if I have all of those points of view as a young person and I come and plunk myself down in this kind of environment, I don’t know if I am welcomed with open arms. My ideas are just too far out. That’s the difficulty. It has been nice to have our son come and join us. He also got married two weeks ago, right here, behind us. That’s been real fun mostly. Whether it is for the long term, we aren’t real sure yet. I am not moving anywhere. I’m not sure if he’s going to stay around.

**Peter:** I hope, at a later time when things aren’t so busy, to get a chance to talk to him. In the meantime, how’s he thinking about this project? How is he thinking about coming back to the home-place after being in Bolivia? What ideas are moving?

**Judy:** He would have to speak for himself, but he’s more into permaculture. I’m not really familiar. I haven’t had the time to read the books that he wants me to read. The concept I get with permaculture is, and again I haven’t read anything, there needs to be a reason, more than just one, for how things are placed in your yard. If you’ve got your house, then what’s directly around your house is zone 1. That should be what you use the most and need the most. Zone 2, you pattern your yard and the place where you exist in the manner. Then you look at the water and how that flows. You look at the sun. You are aware of creation and how things are set. This is already built and our trees are in certain positions. He had wanted to cut down a whole bunch of trees. No! I’m not cutting down all of those trees. Give me time to understand this. That’s sort of a difference of opinion. The other thing is, if something is planted in a certain place, why is it there? I haven’t had to think about that. Why am I putting this here? Give me three reasons. No, I usually I just say, “This is where I’m planting.” It is more in depth to understand the flow of life and how it all relates to each other. It’s not that I’m contrary, but it’s a new way of looking at life and farming.

**Peter:** So the farm is becoming a negotiation exercise.

**Judy:** Yes.

**Peter:** We have about three minutes to wrap up. I’m curious about your 10-year plan here. You might not have one, but if you do have one, I’d be curious what it is.

**Judy:** We hope to still be here. My husband and I feel like we’re pushing 60 and you never know what is going to come in the next hour. One could die. We feel full of energy. I have aches and pains, but we probably have 10 to 20 more years that we could be active, sort of. Our energy level is going down, but we could be doing something here that could be useful. We are hoping to stay and be able to work here. We are hoping to have something that we are able to enjoy and go to bed feeling like that was a good night. I like the concept of CSA. We
had hoped to be able to move an older 1800s building in and have a vegetable preparation area. We’re needing coolers and such. It needs to be something that large quantities of things can come in easily. We have a hard time getting through the little door. We need that space. We have talked about doing some building either over there or back in there. Some trees need to come down. The point is trying to think where best to situate that in relation to the water, in relation to the lay of the land and that kind of thing. We are wanting to build a few buildings so we can be more efficient in our time management. Other than that, just keep working on folks. We attempted a little bit in the farm market. I’m not real impressed with the farm market personally and that I have to go sit there and hope that somebody buys a few things from me. I don’t enjoy that. I enjoy a CSA more where people come and they are scheduled to come and I know how much to grow and how much to harvest for them. We are hoping that that can continue to maintain and maybe grow a little bit. We don’t have a lot of population out here so we aren’t looking for hundreds, but wouldn’t it be neat if the nursing home thought of getting a share each week and we’d deliver that share, that kind of thing. Wouldn’t that be fun? We’ve also looked at having more of a connection with the school. We aren’t there yet. This has been a new year, having our son join us and all these different things. Schools do make visits here and it would be nice to have more of a connection with youth, even the agriculture class, in order to present a different outlook. All of us eat, and where is your food coming from? How is it affecting the world? What are your choices? What are you doing in that area?

**Peter:** Thanks for your time.

**Judy:** You’re welcome.