

12-27-2007

Hugh Gramling

Hugh Gramling

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/west_florida_land_use_ohp

Recommended Citation

Gramling, Hugh, "Hugh Gramling" (2007). *West Central Florida Land Use Oral History Project*. 12.
https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/west_florida_land_use_ohp/12

This Sound is brought to you for free and open access by the Floridiana - General at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in West Central Florida Land Use Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Land Use Oral History Project
Patel Center for Global Solutions
University of South Florida

Interview with: Mr. Hugh Gramling
Interviewed by: William Mansfield
Location: Seffner, Florida
Date: June 26, 2006
Transcribed by: Wm. Mansfield
Edited by: Hugh Gramling & Wm. Mansfield
Audit Edited by: Jessica Merrick
Audit Edit Date: December 6, 2007
Final Edit by: Nicole Cox
Final Edit Date: December 27, 2007

WM: We always put a label on the disc by saying, “This is Bill Mansfield, from the Patel Center for Global Solutions, talking to Mr. Hugh Gramling, in his office here in Seffner, on June 26, 2006.

Mr. Gramling, we always get people to start out by having them state their name and tell us when they were born and where they were born. So let her go.

HG: My name is Hugh Gramling. I was born in Plant City, Florida, May 17, 1947.

WM: Okay. What is our current occupation?

HG: My current occupation is—my title is the executive director of the Tampa Bay Wholesale Growers, and I manage the Nursery Trade Association in Hillsborough County.

WM: Okay, so you got into the nursery business early?

HG: Fairly early. I have a degree in public relations from the University of Florida and my dad started a nursery, out of bankruptcy, about 1966, or 1967 and I became interested in it. In 1973 I left the public relations field, the job at the University of Florida, and started working at the nursery and managed that nursery for twenty years.

WM: Okay. Tell me about the responsibilities and duties of the Agricultural Advisory [Committee] for the Southwest Water Management District.

HG: Okay. The Southwest Florida Water Management District has had an Ag-Advisory Committee for a long, long time, probably twenty years or so. The purpose of that committee is to provide input to the staff and the governing board about agricultural issues and the impact of regulation and policy on the agricultural community. [Agriculture] is somewhat of a specialized field. Those people [in the Southwest Florida

Water Management District] are hydrologists and geologists and they don't have a first hand knowledge of agriculture, so they have set up a device—the advisory committee—to seek and gather input on a regular basis.

WM: Just to make sure I understand you, you tell the folks at the Water [Management District] how their decisions affect agriculture?

HG: That's correct. We provide them with all kinds of information, not the least of which is—Hillsborough County has a rather extensive agricultural program and we provide the district with information through that program, the [Agriculture] Economic Development Council of statistical information on the nursery, excuse me, the agricultural community, not just nurseries, but the entire agricultural community.

We review policy. When they have a proposed rule that they are considering, they run that by each of the advisory committees. There is an advisory committee for the green industry, which is the commercial side of the nursery industry, that'd be landscape, retail and lawn maintenance side. They've got a well drillers advisory committee. They have a government advisory committee and I think there is an environmental advisory committee also.

We're charged with representing the agricultural community. We're made up of representatives from each of the commodities that are located within the district. The statewide organizations or regional organizations provide the membership to the advisory committee with the advice and consent of the district staff.

WM: Now is that a larger statewide organization? Or is that just—

HG: This is a region wide [organization]. It's the thirteen, or so counties of the Southwest Florida Water Management District. But the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, which is based in Orlando, submits a name for a member [of] an alternate that resides within the district and represents that organization, just like the nursery association does. Just like the Strawberry Growers' Association does, Citrus Association, all of them provide membership to that committee.

WM: And you said you provide information to *SWIFTMUD* [slang for, Southwest Florida Water Management district] what kind of information do you provide?

HG: We provide them with things like acreage information, estimated dollar sales. We collect that on a countywide basis and we're more attuned to that, than I think other counties in the district are. I'm not sure how much [information] they provide. But [they're] the “go-to-person” for the district staff to use when they're in need of information about a specific commodity.

Either they bring ag-community wide issues there, or they go directly to the representative to get specific information that may affect that particular commodity.

WM: You said that all of the different commodities in Hillsborough County or the *SWIFTMUD* service region are represented?

HG: Yeah. Now there are some minor commodities, like blueberries and some of those others, that [are represented by] organizations like the Farm Bureau, or Florida Fruit and Vegetable they provide representation for. We have local organizations for tropical fish, the strawberry industry, and the nursery industry. [The later] being the one I represent. Those have seats on [the Agriculture Advisory Committee]. But the rest of them are statewide organizations.

WM: And you said that this advisory committee has been in existence about twenty years?

HG: Yes, Quite a while.

WM: What, that would be 1986 I guess?

HG: That would be close.

WM: And how long have you been serving on it?

HG: I was on that organization when it originally started and then for some reason (I don't even remember why) I quit participating in it. I've been back for the last ten years, which would be [since] 1996 working with that group.

WM: How has it changed over the years?

HG: I think the relationship, between the commodities and the District Staff has changed considerably. I think we've gone from an antagonistic standpoint to a true information exchange. I would have to say that the District staff is a lot more amenable to agricultural issues than they once were. I think they have decided that agriculture is important to the area.

WM: (Chuckles)

HG: Both [to] the economy and open space and those kinds of things. I think they are sincerely trying to do a good job in making sure their regulations don't have an [unnecessarily adverse impact on agriculture].

WM: You said you felt it was somewhat antagonistic in the early days?

HG: Oh, very much so. It was. The ag-advisory committee came into being because of implementation of permitting rules. Before the early eighties we had no rules. If you wanted water, you drilled a well and you started pumping water. With the increased recognition of water as a limited [resource] then the district decided they were going to grant you the right to pump water, since water is owned by the state of Florida.

Under eastern water law the state owns all of the water resources and they allow you to use them. [That's] much different that it is in the west, where if you own the land, you own the water. But, that's not the way it is in the east.

That relationship caused a great deal of concern. The ag-community felt like they were not going to be able to get the water they needed to produce their crops, whatever that crop may be. And they figured that they had always done well and water is an economic issue with the farmer. They don't generally waste it, because it costs too much to do that. So whether it was real or not, there was an implied challenge to the farmer's way of life, by implementation of those rules.

And then some of the early regulations that they started imposing when the Water Management District found that the resources were more limited, or becoming more endangered than they thought it was were a severe challenge. The relationship at that time was really antagonistic. In fact there was a lawsuit that the members of the ag-community [brought] against the District, about a set of rules regarding the Southern Water Use Caution Area. Which, after quite a few years was settled out of court and set the precedent for starting a relationship that would work together.

WM: Dr. Hinton told me about this dispute [See Chip Hinton's interview with Bill Mansfield 2-28-06]. It might be the same one where they wanted to drill, I think about eighteen different wells. If I understand it correctly, the farmers feared it would dry up the aquifer and make it harder for them to get water. Is that right?

HG: I'm not sure they actually thought it'd dry up the aquifer but they certainly thought it would make an impact. The Water Management District tries to allocate water, evenly across the board. And those big public supply wells (I believe that's what they were) would have negatively impacted the farm community. That would cause an extreme draw down which basically would have left the ends of the pipes high and dry, even though they may be two or three hundred feet in the ground.

WM: Uh-huh.

HG: Chip was more involved in that than I was. That was during the period when I was not active with the representation on the Water Management District.

WM: When we were talking earlier, before the interview started, about oysters and the environment and stuff. And water is something I take for granted. You expect it to be there. I guess the Water Management District was restricting water access and that alarmed the farmers?

HG: That's correct. There is a competitive process for permission to use the water. Part of the problem the farm community had is the perception that their ability to continue to farm, or expand their to expand their farming operation, or to allow new people to farm, would be challenged by extreme growth, particularly in Tampa and Pinellas County [and]

western Pasco County. Those people have, traditionally moved more inland, into the farming areas to withdraw water. When you put a big public supply well in that area it causes a draw down and the water resources may or may not rebound when they stop pumping. It's been a challenge for the farm community against who has the right to the water there.

WM: I'm just trying to understand things. You talked about them expanding eastward. Moving inland, and so is this the Water Management District itself, or developers that—

HG: This is public supplies??. Before there was a severe permitting issue, the West Coast Regional Authority started sinking wells in the northern, western part of the county. I was trying to remember when they did that in relation to when the rules were being structured. Even if it wasn't during the period when they started the permitting process, the competition for the water wasn't as severe. We didn't have the understanding of hydrology [that we do] currently.

When the lakes started drying up in northwest Hillsborough County-Pasco County, that really put a whole different twist on the competition for water. What we were seeing were the municipalities were coming more inland, to get water. Either there was brackish water, or unsuitable water quality the closer you got to the coast. They were coming [east]. Pinellas County reached the point quite a few years ago, where they didn't have much land or water resources to take care of [their increasing] population. So they came into Pasco and Hillsborough Counties, seeking water and basically bought the land and drilled the wells. As they've done more ecological damage, we've had a whole different scenario; a whole different paradigm shift in how water is allocated and water is used.

The Water Management District, of course, has exercised their right to do the permitting and gotten much more proficient in recognizing the geology and hydrology of what happens when you put down these tremendous sized wells, that they were having.

WM: You said that you had to educate yourself in hydrology?

HG: I don't pretend to be a hydrologist by any stretch of the imagination.

WM: (laughs)

HG: No, the longer around it the more you pick up on the lingo [as well as] a little of the understanding. I certainly don't feel like I've educated myself [well enough] to be a hydrologist.

WM: Like I said, water is something most people take for granted.

HG: You know, being in the nursery business we have a more direct link with water and our customers than do, say a strawberry farmer. A strawberry farmer is concerned, basically, about his ability to get enough water to produce the crop [and] protect the crop

from cold damage. Once that crop is harvested, then his relationship with water has pretty much ended.

In the nursery business, we generally have enough water that we can grow our crops without much interference. But when they start imposing restrictions on the homeowners and the commercial landscapes, it impacts us greatly. Basically the scenario is during the big drought of the century (What was it, '91, through 94, somewhere in there?) we found that we could grow the plant material, but we were losing our ability to sell the plant material and for homeowners and landscape companies to install that material. Some of these municipalities were the hardest hit by lack of water supply and consequently water restrictions.

So the nursery industry changed its whole attitude in how we look at these things. Basically we went to the Water Management District and tried to make them understand that the issue is not the need for plant material and landscape to use water, it's the misapplication, by most people, in applying that. [And, in my opinion] the Water Management District correctly identified that the majority of wasted water use is the homeowner's side of the equation, not the farms, not the industry, and not hotels. Even though there is always waste there.

It was in the landscape portion in particular. Some of the statistics I've seen it was as high as 70 percent of home water use is misapplied [and] not used efficiently.

WM: I've often marveled at people watering the sidewalk with these automatic sprinkler systems and also seen the sprinkler systems come on during a rainstorm. I thought that was kind of wasteful.

HG: That's true. There is a state law that says you have to have a rainwater shutoff device on all irrigation systems. For a long time the law said you had to have it, it didn't say it had to work. Those things are notoriously poor for malfunctioning in a short amount of time. They may last two months or they may last two years. Now the law has been changed to say that you have to have them and they have to be in working order. But they traditionally fail.

We've done a lot of work in creating information for homeowners [and] landscape professionals, to teach them the correct applications. We worked with different partners, like the Florida Irrigation Society, to come up with those standards. Obviously you don't want to water a sidewalk, it doesn't do any good. It runs off. Properly runs in the street and doesn't do any good. And there are other things that we have done to try and make that scenario more palatable. We have created a program at the University of Florida called the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods that follows xeriscape principles. The true ones, not to make every place look like a desert, but to pick the right plant for the right place, apply water correctly, mulch, all of those different things that you do to have a landscape that makes Florida look like Florida.

The University set-up educational programs to teach people how to do that. The Water Management Districts extensively advertise these kinds of rules. We're not making a whole lot of progress, even though we are [making] some, on the effectiveness of delivering that message. The way you determine effectiveness is by changing people's attitudes.

WM: Boy, I could talk to you about landscaping and stuff all day, 'cause we're trying to get our lawn in shape. But we'd better get back to land use and your activities with the Water Management District.

But, you said that, initially it was adversarial because you were contesting the Water Management—

HG: It was adversarial because [we feared] the unknown, imposing regulation where there had been none. The agricultural community's perception that the Water Management District didn't understand what [the farmers] needed and how to do it. That was reinforced by the Water Management District being dogmatic in trying to exercise rules, as they understood hydrology at the time. Quite frankly, it was caused by both sides. It just became more and more combative.

WM: But you say it's much better now. How would you explain the improved [atmosphere]?

HG: I think that lawsuit went a great way to do [that]. The Water Management District looked up and saw how much it was costing and they were making any progress on correcting problems to the resource, because of legal entanglements. At that same time it kind of overlapped with the water wars between Pinellas, Pasco and Hillsborough counties that lead to the establishment of Tampa Bay Water. I think they just realized—I think everybody's attitude matured. The governing board, the staff, the agricultural community. I think everybody's attitude matured and we all of a sudden realized that we were getting nowhere.

“Let's see if we can't work something out and do some compromising, that will allow us to get a better handle on the resource and not cost everybody so much money.”

WM: That's a good move.

HG: It's plainly simple. But it was not plain at the time. Of course it's like a divorce or any other activity, if one person fights then everybody fights.

WM: Uh-huh.

HG: Once you start [fighting] it's very difficult to stop that whole process of antagonism. And there is still some antagonism. I don't mean to tell you it's a perfect system but I will tell you, having been an agricultural person dealing with the District, the relationship is tremendously better than it was ten years ago.

WM: You said that you that you all provide information to the Water Management Board, is that the only impact you have in shaping their policy—presenting them with information?

HG: Well—yes. In the short form, it is. It's more complex than that though. A good example is the Southern Water Caution Use Rule that they just are trying to implement. It's in the very final stages of the legal process to implement the rule. The rule's called SWUCA II—for the Southern Water Use Caution Area.

WM: Could you say that again?

HG: SWUCA II.

WM: SWUCA II? Okay (laughs).

HG: And it's SWUCA—Southwest—excuse me, Southern Water Use Caution Area.

WM: Okay.

HG: SWUCA I is when the agricultural community sued the District and got all the entanglements and a compromise rule came about from the administrative hearing process. So guarantees went down, both ways.

This next rule that they did is to follow the TMDL—Total Maximum Daily Loads. The water level requirement that the legislature has imposed upon them that says their planning process has to set minimum flows and levels for all water bodies, including the aquifer. These goals have to provide regulation that will allow us to achieve that, if we're below it or to maintain it, if we're not.

SWUCA II was the set of rules that looked at [the Floridian] aquifer, particularly as it related to the Southern Water Use Caution Area, which is all of Polk County and State Road 60, in Hillsborough, south. It's a set of rules that is to maintain the water level and to stop saltwater intrusion [into] the aquifer. This process has been going on for a good five years, maybe a little longer. The way the District did this is they set up an advisory group, to seek input that included the agricultural community. It included county government, city government, and environmental groups all of those stakeholders that would be impacted, one way or another, by the rule. We had a series of meetings during that period of time where we talked about what we thought was needed. What we needed to represent our group.

The District eventually came up with a plan, sent it to the group, to review, and to provide input back. Of course each of the groups was protecting their own interests in that process. The rule went through, I don't know how many different revisions, before the final rule came out that was adequate to present to the governing board, for consideration. Once that rule reached that point, the process didn't stop. There were

different questions that arose about how the rule impacted “X Y & Z” over here, or “UTV” over there. The District staff and the governing board sought additional comments and molded the rule to follow along.

That’s exemplary of how we provide input. I also try and assist people within my industry or, if asked, other commodities, in any kind of water issues they may have. If they have an over pumpage complaint, that the District has filed against them, then I try to help that grower reach an accommodation with the district. Either to get additional water or to change his behavior, so that he fits within the permit process that he’s already gotten. We regularly attend the Water Management District [meetings]. There are questions that come up, on a regular basis, about how a different rule or a different scenario might fit the ag-community.

Generally speaking the Governing Board has used us as a resource to help them understand how agriculture works in specific instances.

WM: It’s a real exercise in democracy.

HG: Absolutely.

WM: It sounds like it involves the people in the community.

Well, have—I don’t know if this is the right question to ask, but I’ll ask it anyhow. Initially there was sort of this resentment about the Water Management District imposing these restrictions on water, but have you all come to see advantages to that?

HG: Not necessarily. We’ve come to understand that it is a way of life now, caused by the tremendous growth that we’ve seen in this state. As our areas become more and more urban, then there is increased demand for a limited resource. We’ve seen that.

In the extent that we understand that it is helpful, is once you have a permit, you know that if you are impacted by somebody else, that there is relief through the rules, to make sure, that for the life of your permit, you are not adversely impacted by somebody else coming in and causing unintended damage to you.

But I’m not sure that most growers would do that. Those of us on the association level don’t look at it as personally. As a grower we look at it as a “big picture” kind of item. Of course there is still a lot of resentment among certain growers in every single commodity, where they have an animosity to government rule.

Growers, nursery people, strawberry farmers—any kind of farmers, are fiercely independent. They could not be in the farming business without that degree of independence. It’s basically you against the elements. Here in the last thirty or forty years, here in Florida, it’s you against the elements and the government.

WM: Uh-huh.

HG: There is a certain amount of animosity still out there. We try to minimize that and to make sure that we use the process to both protect and to educate.

WM: I guess that—our discussion thus far brings us to this question, about how water effects development.

HG: Oh I think water is probably one of the biggest single things that does affect development.

You know there are other issues, and I don't mean to minimize the impact such as zoning and land use categories, those types of things, that unless they're applied development doesn't occur. But there are processes in place that make your ability to get those changes [that are] necessary to [make] development more reasonable.

Water is a finite resource. We're seeing more and more, particularly with the imposition of concurrency laws, at the state level, that water is going to be a big limiting factor in how we are able to grow.

Already, water use, by some of these developments is, under increased scrutiny by the Water Management District. And rightly so! They're trying to protect legal permitted users and uses. If you have a big development come in there are imposing rules that are sometimes very costly on the amount of water that you can get. They've set per capita levels of water that a community or a system should be providing to the population.

They have changed the whole paradigm of wastewater. Treated wastewater, at one time was a headache to dispose of. Now it's gotten to be a precious commodity for outdoor uses that [offsets] what people need to pump from the ground or take from surface sources.

To do things like fountains, water features—those kinds of things.

Of course we have laws now that say, when you do development you have to do—

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

HG: —landscaping. So we're also mandating a need for the water, in addition to the things that you normally think about. You don't build a McDonalds' without putting a minimum amount of landscaping around it. Those rules were imposed by the environmental community, for obvious environmental reasons. Strangely enough the nursery industry wasn't the one that started that.

WM: (chuckle)

HG: It was the environmental community. It's had an impact that increased water use as a result.

WM: It's like as Tampa and Plant City grow together and the developments move out into agricultural land, the competition between water, for farming, and development, it seems like that would be another contentious area.

HG: It has the potential to be. We're at a very critical point, where the competition for that water is increasing to a point where we're going to have an urban/rural interface that [will] make that a bigger issue than it was. I am only aware of one specific instance in the last ten or so years where a farmer applied for additional water resources under his permit and was turned down, do to a well field being in the vicinity. That uh—sent shivers down everybody's spine, including the governing board and the ag-community. It kind of was a wake up call. [Now] you're going to have to be efficient in the use of your water, and you're going to have to do those things necessary to keep your permit in good shape.

According to law, there is not a priority in being granted a water permit, simply because you had one [before]. [Now you must] compete with everybody else that has a permit being considered at the time. If your permit for a certain amount of water comes due and the municipality wants that water at the same time, then there is a test for the public good. [The] Water Management District tries to determine the answer to [that question] in granting that permit. So it is very important to make sure that you qualify for all of the useful conservation measures that you can do.

WM: I just want to make sure that I understand you properly. The Water Management weighs the advantages and disadvantages of granting a permit. [They ask,] "What would serve the public—

HG: The public good the best.

WM: So they might have to decide between "Luxury Acres" and water for "John Doe's" strawberry farm? Is that [it]?

HG: At some point, that's going to be the [decision] the District is going to have to make. Now to be considered against the "Luxury Acres" against the strawberry farm, those permits have to come up at the same time. If one of them is in existence and the other applies for a permit and the District determines, through their modeling, that there is an impact to the existing user by the applicant, then the permit probably won't be given. Or, there will be conditions that will minimize that impact.

For example, they may pull from different levels in the aquifer.

WM: I don't guess it's first come first serve, but the preexisting permit holder—

H G: I'm not sure there's a difference first come-first serve and preexisting, but yeah, its preexisting permits certainly have the right to the water. They've been given legal use of the water and they have that until the expiration of their permits.

WM: And how long do they have their permits?

HG: They vary in length. Six or ten years are generally the rule of thumb, now, depending on various circumstances. There is a provision in state law to allow a twenty-year permit. And the agricultural community is encouraging the District to grant those wherever possible, to protect that existing water use for the longest possible time, that we can have access to it.

WM: And when a permit comes up for renewal, would it be contested by—Well the farmers would be there first, that's my understanding of it. So would the permit be contested by developers or be contested by farmers?

HG: It could very well be. I'm aware of a case in the Apollo Beach area where, a farmer had a well permit come up for renewal and there was a contest from the Apollo Beach community. It was a group from within that community, since that's not a formal entity, that challenged the permit and the water use of the permit.

There is standing not such that the District found that their challenge to cause environmental harm, so the farmer did get the permit. But that happens in a lot of scenarios.

As a neighbor, you have the right to challenge any permit that impacts you.

I mean you can't go to Dade City, if you live in live in Tampa and challenge one up there. But you can challenge one that may impact your water. You may very well be able to go into eastern Hillsborough County, which is the source water for Tampa Bay Water and the City of Tampa, since they are a member government, and challenge a permit out there. Because you think it may impact. The District has to weigh that challenge against the public good.

WM: Well, like I said, I'm just amazed at the complexity of it. It's not nearly as simple as one would imagine.

What would you consider the greatest accomplishment of the Agricultural Advisory Board?

HG: Um—I think the biggest accomplishment is probably participating in the exchange, a healthy exchange, with the Water Management District's staff and the governing board. I think the farm community is not necessarily aware of how protected they've been through the efforts of ag-advisory committee. I think there were a lot of times in the past where the farm community stood a good chance of being adversely impacted and the advisory committee helped minimize that impact.

WM: This is the other side of that question. What would you consider the board's biggest failure?

HG: That's a tougher [question].

WM: Well that's a good answer, if you feel like answer if you feel like it is hard to come up with one.

HG: (laughs) This is a growing process. This is just like a marriage. Our arguments of the past build the communications for the future. So I'm not sure that I necessarily think that we've had failures. I think we've had some rules [adopted] that were not in our best interests. But the other side of that equation may be that the impact of those rules was greatly minimized by the relationship [between] the committee and the District staff. So I'm not sure there's been an outstanding failure. I think it is all part of the development of the process.

WM: It sounds like a very dynamic relationship.

HG: Oh, it's extremely dynamic.

WM: Is there a development advisory board? A counter [part] to the Agricultural Advisory Board? That presents information the Water Management District that would be supportive of development and industry?

HG: Not that I am aware of. The homebuilders association is very proficient at representing that group [to] the governing board and with the municipalities. Generally speaking, the developments don't go to the District to get water. That's the reason there is not one of those. It would come to the Public Supply Advisory Committee, which is made up of governments. Most often, with the increased growth, [developers] go through a public supply to provide their development with water and sewer services. So, that would be the group that they would deal with. A developer may not necessarily deal with the Water Management District. He would deal with Tampa Bay Water or the City of Tampa, or the city of Plant City, to provide him with water.

WM: Could you think of someone I could talk to on the Public Supply Advisory Committee?

HG: Ah—I can get you a name that may be of [some help] I'm not sure what you're looking at. There is a chair of that group and I'm not familiar with who it is. But I can surely find out and let you know.

WM: I think it'd be worthwhile to hear them talk about their [experience] in affecting water permitting and their vision of what the future should be. So if you can provide me with that, I'd appreciate it.

HG: Yeah, I will try and do that. I'm not sure that the chairs are listed on the *SWIFTMUD* Web site, but they may well be. I will certainly get you that information.

WM: I'll be talking with the *SWIFTMUD* person too, so they might could provide that information.

HG: Richard Owen is the director of planning, for the Water Management District and as the director of planning, his job is to interact with these committees. He's an excellent resource and has a better handle than most people, on both the process and the implications of the process on future land and water use.

WM: Okay.

HG: I have his number if you'd like to have it?

WM: Sure! That'd be great.

HG: Richard also deals with the advisory committee, so he can tell you who that chair is.

WM: All right.

HG: You can call his through the 800 number, which is 1-800-423-1476 (EX 4403).

WM: Okay.

HG: And since you're going to talk to him, you can ask him who's the public supply chair is. If you have problems with that let me know and I'll help you get it.

WM: Okay. And I'll tell him that you're the one that set me on to him.

HG: That's fine.

WH: Thanks.

HG: Richard has more longevity with the district than most people. We worked on some of the first water restrictions together, back in the late seventies. So he's been there a long time. And he is, like I said, better prepared than most of the staff to understand the big picture.

WM: What do you see for the future of land use and development in Hillsborough County?

HG: I don't think there's any way that we're not going to see increased development. If we do, and I don't think there is any way that we're not going to. If we shut down development we shut down the economy. It would be a recession, or depression of the magnitude greater than the Great Depression. We depend on growth, whether we like it or not. You know [development] creates markets for strawberries and tomatoes and certainly nursery plants. So we need to fit that need. We increasingly compete for the resources that each of us need.

One of the things that occurs, because of development is that it makes the ability of the farmer more financially secure to farm. Modern farming, generally speaking, requires borrowing money. Because of development impacts, the value of the land increases significantly. That increases the borrowing capacity of a farmer. So the last thing we want to see is the farm being limited to just a farm, forever, because that will minimize the impact of the increased value of the land.

I think the biggest challenge is going to be dealing with the interface between the urban and the rural. The noises, the smells, the competition for roadways and water and all of that infrastructure out there. The more urbanized we get the more difficult that will be.

I suspect Chip told you that while agricultural land has decreased in the county over the past twenty years, the value of ag-production has increased. That's because of efficiencies and better use of the land. We no longer are seeing the levels of orange groves and cattle [ranching] that we once did, because of the pressure of the economy on those land uses.

And we're seeing more nurseries, more strawberry farms, more fish farms that utilize the land more efficiently in dollar output from the land. That will increase. I don't think farming will ever go away from here. In fact in the state of Florida, the biggest urban areas are also the biggest farm producers. Out of the top five, at least the top four biggest counties have the most agriculture in them. I hope that's what you will continue to see.

I think it will shift in focus. I don't think you'll see all of the thousand acre cattle ranches any more, but I think you'll see more strawberries, more nurseries [and], more tomatoes. Those things which utilize the land more efficiently.

WM: What about resolving the conflicts and competitions for roadways, because people get behind farm trucks and they find that aggravating.

HG: True.

WM: How do you see those things playing themselves out?

HG: I think its going to be very important that there be input from the agricultural community into the government process. Chip and I will tell you that, that would be job security for us.

WM: (laughs)

HG: That's very much true. The farmer has his hands full [with] farming and he doesn't have the time to be spending to effect changes in the regulatory process. He has to rely on his representatives, like Chip and [me].

When we have an issue coming up of a proposed regulation it takes a phenomenal amount of time that a farmer cannot take away from his farm. So he needs to use that representation. I think you'll see, as time goes on, the farming community will become more sophisticated in its ability to deal with government and the urban interface. I think there is an increased awareness, among the individual farmer of those things he's got to do to survive, if he has a subdivision going [up] next to him.

I think he is going to give consideration as to when he cranks up that pump that may not have a muffler on it he may need to put one on it. Spraying is going to be something the farmer has to give more thought to than he had in the past, to make sure there is less drift. More importantly, the perception that [spraying] is a problem for the neighborhood.

I think there will be a maturity that [evolves] as we increase urban pressure.

WM: Well, it's like you said, urban growth has caused farmers to be more efficient and I guess that will just continue.

HG: I hope it does; that's all of our hope.

You know, the farm provides some many different things besides the food and the fiber and the aesthetic qualities, in terms of water recharge, open spaces, [and] habitat for wildlife, all of those things. And it would be a tremendous loss to the community to no longer have that.

WM: That's something that Chip Hinton said, was that—um—the urban areas and the city planners didn't realize the many contributions that the farm made to the community. There was less demand for public services, and the aquifer recharge, the open space, the wildlife habitat, plus the productivity of the farm itself.

Would the Agricultural Advisory Committee be the kind of group that would point that out?

HG: Yeah, it is, but you're talking about two different areas. The Ag-advisory committee is specific to *SWIFTMUD*. It's important, in Hillsborough County, equally, if not more so, that we have an Ag-Economic Development Council that does the same function on a county level. This group is appointed by the County Commission. It is made up of commodity representation, like the *SWIFTMUD* Advisory Committee. We've been able to effect tremendous amounts of change in that whole paradigm of urban/rural interface.

That's a group that acts the same way as *SWIFTMUD* but I don't think you're necessarily going to see an expansion of *SWIFTMUD* advisory committee, beyond the relationship dealing with that specific group.

WM: Uh-huh.

HG: It may be a model that communities use to set up, but that group is geared specifically towards water use and the Water Management District.

WM: I'm going to talk to some folks on the agricultural advisory council, so I guess I can direct that question at them.

HG: That's true. There are—Chip's the chair and I'm the vice-chair of that group, but since you've already talked to us there are others out there that you can talk to. Steve Gran is the manager of the Ag-Economic Development Council. [See Stephen Gran interview with Bill Mansfield 6-28-06] He is a county employee whose responsibility is to represent that council and assist them. He is a great one to talk to. His number is 508-excuse me 272-5506.

WM: Actually I'm scheduled to talk with him on Wednesday. So I'll get some good information.

HG: Well, he's exceptional.

WM: Well good. I'm looking forward to that.

Well I've been throwing questions at you for about the past hour. Is there anything you want to comment on that I haven't asked about?

HG: Ah—

WM: That's a pretty open-ended question.

HG: Yeah. (laughs) You know, I think gasoline costs too much. But obviously that's not what you wanted to know.

WM: Well, that will definitely affect growth.

HG: It certainly will affect growth and it certainly affects the ability to farm. The ability of farming to survive the growth environment is going to come down to their ability to be profitable and those things they need to do to stay profitable, to provide the public benefit. [This] includes a PR campaign to point out the benefits they provide to the local community.

There's not going to be a time where you can simply sit back and grow strawberries and do those type things that you have traditionally done. You're going to have to be more cosmopolitan than you've ever have been in the past. And how you do that is going to determine your ability to be productive.

WM: That was one of the things that Chip Hinton mentioned, there is a bias against agriculture. Many people think that farmland is farmed only until you can come along and develop it. [They don't] realize its importance.

HG: I think that is correct. I think the bias is much less than it used to be. It's through the PR efforts that the different groups have gone to. There was certainly a bias within the planning divisions of local government. That we were seeing pop up, that had unintended consequences to proposed rules. Through the efforts of the farm community I think there's been a tremendous educational gap [that has been] bridged and [it's] changed attitudes. That's an ongoing process. We have new people come into the relationship from both sides. Both in the planning side and on the farming side that has never had to deal with these issues. If you want to [get a] farmer active, you threaten his ability to continue to farm. You will see him become extremely active.

When things are going along good, they tend to be minding their own business and dealing with their production problems. They're not there. But if you challenge them by rule, or economic pressure in some manor, they will respond effectively.

WM: Makes me think of stirring up a hornet's nest in some ways.

HG: There are those who would make that analogy. (laughs)

You know there is a great deal of passion among farmers about what they do.

WM: Oh yeah.

HG: Farming is not simply a job, it is a way of life. You cannot do that successfully and long term unless you love that way of life. Farming is seldom clean; it's not always pleasant. You've got to work in the rain and the cold and the sun. You know it gets 98, 99 degrees in this part of Florida. Farming doesn't stop in the summer time. So you have to be able to stand the elements which certainly challenge everyone. You have to be committed to farming to accept those challenges. Generally speaking, farmers make a living. They don't make money. The real money comes when they either sell their farm or their land. That's their investment in the future. They eat year to year and have a life, because of the income from the farm.

WM: Well that sounds like a good place to conclude. I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me and also remind you, again, that the information you've shared with me in this interview will be deposited in Special Collections of the University Library and be available to scholars for future research. There is a release form that I have to ask you to sign, that gives your permission for folks to use this.

HG: That will be fine.

WM: Okay, great. Let me shut this thing off.

end of interview