

Robert E. Rhoades – John Van Willigen:

Oral History Interview for the Society for Applied Anthropology

The following is an interview with Robert E. Rhoades for the Society for Applied Anthropology Oral History Project. The interview was conducted by John Van Willigen on March 7, 2002 in Atlanta, Georgia. Robert E. Rhoades contributed to the development of participatory research methods in the context of agricultural technology development and the development of the specialty of agricultural anthropology. The foundation of these impacts was his work done in the context of the International Potato Center. One can link his efforts there to contemporary practice of participatory rural appraisal and similar approaches. Additional information about Robert Rhoades' impact on the development of applied anthropology can be obtained by reading the *Breaking New Ground: Agricultural Anthropology* (1984, International Potato Center) and "Farmer Back to Farmer: A Model for Generating Acceptable Agricultural Technology" written by him and R. Booth and published in *Agricultural Administration* 11:127-137. The developing context for this work can be seen in Robert Chambers' *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (1983, Longman). The transcript was edited by John van Willigen.

[An Interview with Robert Rhoades]

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes. Okay. This is 3/7, March 7th, we're at the Sheraton Colony Square Hotel in Atlanta, and then. . . this is John Van Willigen talking with Robert Rhoades. And, Robert, I wanted to. . . I found the comment that you made this morning in the session really interesting from the standpoint of the history of agricultural anthropology, and if you would kind of review that, that would be really useful.

RHOADES: Okay. Maybe I . . . to help with that in context, maybe I should say a little bit about myself so you can understand. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah.

RHOADES: . . . my interest in agriculture. I was born on a farm in Oklahoma, and my first degree was in agriculture from Oklahoma State. 1962 I joined the Peace Corps and went to Nepal, and in the course of that experience, which was a very frustrating one, pushing American technologies in a very unusual place, for me, I came back and then slowly began a drift toward anthropology, but I never received any degree in anthropology until my Ph.D.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: I studied in the meantime, more agriculture, more agricultural economics.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And, finally some development sociology at the master's level, and ultimately the Ph.D. which reflected my frustration all along with the other perspectives on what I had experienced in agriculture, first as a farmer, and secondly trying to work in these other contexts. But. . . and, I give that background simply because it. . . my whole history has been in technical agriculture, and when I finally came in to anthropology, I found there to be quite a bit of a disconnect between the fields, and I slowly began to define myself as an agricultural anthropologists reverting back to the agriculture part, essentially after I got my Ph.D., and the academic job market had dried up, and so I started marketing my agricultural skills and found out the international centers, which I'll talk about in a moment, were interested in those, and so that is the. . . sort of the career pathway by which I got to that point.

VAN WILLIGEN: What. . . what year was the. . . your Ph.D?

RHOADES: Ph.D. was 1976.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. I see.

RHOADES: And, if you recall, that was a year when the academic market had really started to dry up. I went from small college to small college, finally quit, because it really wasn't of interest to me. And the Rockefeller Foundation was looking for anthropologists to place in the international centers, and by 1979 I had gone to work at the Potato Center in Peru.

VAN WILLIGEN: You had no particular background in potatoes.

RHOADES: No particular background in potatoes. But, anyway, when I came back and reestablished connections with the anthropological community, around 1976, this was before I went to the Potato Center, but my interests had started in that direction. I attended the first meetings of the culture and agriculture group, the AAA meetings in San Francisco.

VAN WILLIGEN: That was. . . was that the very first meeting?

RHOADES: The very first meeting, which was organized by John Bennett, and if you recall, Margaret Mead was still alive at that time, and Margaret Mead didn't come to those meetings. But, she was there, and she had blessed them, and, but really the person that did the organizing of the culture and agriculture group was John Bennett. And, it was at that point, was the first time I heard this term used, agricultural anthropology.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. It came out of John Bennett's mouth.

RHOADES: It . . . I heard it out of John Bennett's mouth, but it had never been written down by anyone, until I started writing it down when I worked. . . went to work at the potato center as a way to explain. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: . . . who I was.

VAN WILLIGEN: To your colleagues there.

RHOADES: To my colleagues, that I'm an anthropologist, but I'm interested in agriculture, very clearly, and so that little bo[ok] -. . . Breaking the Ground, you know. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I, for some reason, call it agricultural anthropology, I don't know why.

RHOADES: Agriculture, well that's. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I think it's a subtitle.

RHOADES: . . . maybe that was the title, or subtitle, and. . . but that, actually sort of. . . and then in the old practicing anthropology, I published a little article called agricultural anthropology. So, those were the first time that the term had been used in print.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Although it wasn't my term. It's a logical term, but you really have to attribute it back to John Bennett.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

RHOADES: Which I think, then, leads us to that history that I was explaining this morning. As I pointed out in that old book, Breaking New Ground, it's almost absurd to speak of rural anthropology by the very definition of what anthropologists do, are concerned with predominantly agricultural peoples, and if you include pastoral peoples,

that's fairly clear. I mean, obviously there are other. . . hunters and gatherers and so forth that have been key, but I would guess that the vast majority of our studies, 75% or more, have been done in agricultural settings with people who practice some form of cultivation. And, not only in contemporary ethnography, but also in archeological studies and so forth. So, a few years back, in the sev-. . . 60's, if you'd picked up a scientific American, you would have found that most of the articles in there were written on the origins of agriculture, for example, by an anthropologist. But, we really hadn't made that connection over with sort of formal agriculture and research and development. But, in the history of the development, probably the first time that anthropologists began to apply their skills to agricultural issues in a direct way started as early as the 1940's, back when, and I'll call it [the] Mead and Benedict group were involved with the food way studies at the University of Chicago, and they were very much applying anthropological knowledge to issues of rural communities and food that Americans ate, and so forth. You must have some information on that project, and I don't know that much about it, other than what John Bennett had told me. But, of course, all of that got diverted by the Second World War.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: In which, then, Benedict and Mead, so forth, then began to, I guess apply their skills more internationally.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, was that project the last of the kind of New Deal projects? Or, the first of the war projects?

RHOADES: Well, I guess it was. . . you mean the food ways.

VAN WILLIGEN: The food ways.

RHOADES: I don't. . . I think it was right on the cusp of both of those. But I. . . again, I'm not sure of the details, I just know that there was this interest in application of anthropology to food and agricultural issues. Of course Walter Goldschmidt had already done his studies, which was of the communities in California. [Editor: Rhoades is no doubt referring to the work that resulted in *As You Sow: Three Studies in the Social Consequences of Agribusiness*, Harcourt, Brace, 1947].

VAN WILLIGEN: Arvin and Delano.

RHOADES: Yeah, Arvin and Delano, and that was, of course, again, a domestic application, and was very much, to some degree, within, I think the spirit of applied anthropology, I'm not sure what the applications were. And there were a few anthropologists that had been connected, I think, with the Soil Conservation Service. It was all domestic. And the first evidence that I have of an international involvement, obviously came with the first Point Four programs, which then became USAID.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And, this gentleman [Henry] Dobyns, for example, worked at [Tincomaria]. And, on a road development project. And, not much was written about that. Of course, he's better known for this other work on demography, Native American demography, but he was involved at that early period. Of course, then there was Vicos experiment, which ripped apart the Cornell anthropology department, because Cornell became the owner of serfs overnight in Peru.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And, so then the big issue was should anthropology be engaging these kinds of things.

VAN WILLIGEN: And that was basically an ag project, I don't think people think about it in those terms, directly.

RHOADES: Yeah. Well, the way that it was explained to me is that. . . of course, Peru was undergoing land reform, or beginning to think about it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And, that. . . Cornell wanted to know, well, how could you transform these Hacienda systems and these serf conditions into something that would be more equitable and more productive.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And so, they bought an hacienda, and of course, along with it came the serfs, and of course there was this outcry in the anthropological community that this was immoral and unethical, and there was a lot of bitterness about that. Holmberg, Allen Holmberg was the Cornell person that was in charge of that. And, you know, still today, I think we have fought out. What's not known is that the Peruvian that worked with Holmberg on that project, and I think his name was. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Mario Vasquez.

RHOADES: Vasquez, Mario Vasquez, then became the minister of land reform and saw through the Peruvian changes in land reform, which is. . . you know, I don't. . . it's questionable if it was successful, but it's certainly more successful than Ecuador and other countries as well, and that was a direct outgrowth of the Vicos project. Of the thinking which had gone into it. But, by. . . I think by the 1960's, applied anthropology, when I started flirting around with anthropology, had become a dirty word.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: People had. . . I guess enjoying all the luxury of a lot of jobs and academics, and there was an explosion in 1960's. Of course, there was Project Camelot, along with Vicos and other things that gave any kind of practicing anthropology a bad name.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And so when I went to graduate school, it was pretty much, folks, you don't want to do this, you want to be an academic.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see. I see.

RHOADES: This is tinkering, is the language which was used, and you know, articles were written about applied anthropologists as some. . . some sort of sub category of anthropology in which you can't. . . if you can't cut it in, you know, the real world, or academics, than this is where you go, and. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, when did you enroll at Oklahoma?

RHOADES: I. . . actually not until 1971.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: Yeah, not until around '71, but I was teaching in sociology in a small college that I was farming, and I went to an institute, for teachers that weren't anthropologists.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: In Colorado, [?] Colorado, and there I was exposed to, of course, Leslie White, and you know, a lot of the greats in anthropology. But that was also very much an anti-applied environment. So, my first real courses was in the late 60's, 1968, '69.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: But I decided I wanted to be an anthropologist, and so I took these courses, and then I discovered culture ecology, and I said, “my God, this is what I’ve been looking for all these years, as an agricultural scientist, as a farmer, as someone who worked. . . has worked in Nepal, in the Philippines,” and see I’d also. . . I didn’t mention I went to the East-West center. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: . . . in development studies, sociology, and I did my work in IRRI [International Rice Research Institute] on the diffusion of miracle rice, this was all pre-anthropology. But, it still. . . one of these perspectives satisfied what I was looking for, and then when I took my first courses at the University of Oklahoma, a lot of [?] students had come down there, and this was really exciting, it opened all kinds of worlds, because it connected, you know, ritual and ideology with a material base, with social organization, it was, you know, pure Stewartian, but it was a powerful perspective, and I said, “wow,” you know, this is what I. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Julian Stewart.

RHOADES: Yeah, it was Stewartian. . . I studied under Stewart’s students from Illinois. And. . . but I had taken courses from Leslie White, who didn’t quite have the perspective that I needed, but was going in that direction. So, I was very much a product of second generation Stewartian, and of course, more directly from Leslie White, which really weighed strongly on the technological side, but it still allowed for linking with social organization and with culture, ideology, ritual, and so forth, and I said, “man, this is powerful stuff.”

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: You know, then we were reading all about the pastoral studies, the hunters and gatherers, you know, the . . . this was even prior to Pigs.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And . . . but I said, man, this is exactly what I'm interested in, because I can apply my anthropology, my farming to my anthropology.

VAN WILLIGEN: Pigs is. . . you're referring to the Rappaport. . .

[Editor: Roy Rappaport's classic study titled Pigs for the Ancestors, 1968, Yale University Press)

RHOADES: Yeah, the Rappaport book.

VAN WILLIGEN: Okay.

RHOADES: So, in 197-. . . but I did my dissertation on a totally different topic.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: On migrant laborers in West Germany, [inaudible].

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: Again, had nothing to do in agriculture, and I was headed directly down this line of being an academic. And, I got a . . . my Ph.D., and I had been teaching in a small college, and they welcomed me back, and another small college offered me a job, and I moved there. And, I was teaching beaucoup courses and all of that, and not publishing anything, and I said, you know, this is not really what I want to do, so I just quit, and went out to the University of Arizona and spent a year studying Mexican migration to the U.S., but I . . . then I started looking around for another job, and I then realized there were no jobs to be had.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: And, first I got my degree from the University of Oklahoma.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And obviously, you know, the old thing, you're not going to be hired up.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: You only can be hired down.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And so it looked like my fate was to teach in small colleges, and about that time, the Rockefeller Foundation was looking to incorporate anthropologists into the international centers. They'd done it prior with economists and been very successful, and then they terminated that project, and then they said, "okay, we want to now incorporate anthropologists into the agricultural research centers, the IARCs, [International Agricultural Research Centers] CGIAR [Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research]..

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. Yes.

RHOADES: The consultative group. So, in 1979, I accepted a position at the Potato Center. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Was this one of the first of the. . .

RHOADES: One of the first.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: But not the first. . . not the first, but probably the second or third.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: Okay. And, I went to CIP, and the reason that CIP was willing to take anthropologists is because in Peru, anthropology is more powerful than economics.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: That's one of the unusual thing about the Andes, is because of the native populations.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And the history of the country.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Potatoes, is not a grain, it's not a commodity, you know, it's not something that can really be that mechanized, particularly in the Andes, and so they were having a lot of issues in their program with these cultural things. So, they thought it would be a good idea to have an anthropologist. Well, they had already had an anthropologist there about two years before I arrived, his name was Rob Werge. Rob Werge, and Rob was working on the post harvest team, and the center was very new, also, that was the other thing, and the director, a guy named Dick Sawyer was looking to do things different than what the grain centers, the wheat center, the rice center, and so forth, he was going to be different. One of the ways he was going to be different is, "I'm going to have anthropologists."

VAN WILLIGEN: And they were. . . plant breeder kind of dominated, and. . .

RHOADES: Well, actually CIP was too, but there was this other thing, of course potatoes, you know, 80% water, and they have storage problems, they have all kinds of other issues. And, they're not that important in terms of world trade, and so this director said, you know, "I'm never going to be able to compete with rice and wheat, and no way, corn. . . I've got to do something different." So he said, "we're going to talk about marginal people, and women, and underground crops, and so we've got to have an

anthropologist.” Well Rob Werge went down and worked on the. . . he had a choice where he worked, he worked on the post harvest team, and he did a really god job of translating anthropology into something that technical people could understand.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: This. . . this post harvest team. But, it was a very. . . very minor element, and he got hepatitis halfway through his term and then got sick, and never finished, and then went back to the states.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: But, it. . . kind of it paved the way for some really good ideas. Well, he was also a bit of a threat to the economists.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: You know, as they say, murder occurs more frequently inside the family.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: Well, economists and anthropologists, almost from the beginning, we didn't get along.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Anthropologists tended to get along with, certainly the technical scientists better than they did the economists.

VAN WILLIGEN: Feeding off the same food.

RHOADES: Yeah, but of course. . . that's right, but of course, the economists had the power, they were the ones that controlled. So, when the head of the economics, social economics program brought me down, he said, “no, you're going to work here,” all right, he defined very clearly where I was going to work.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And it wasn't going to be in the post harvest team, and it wasn't going to be anything I determined, it was going to be something he determined.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And, this is where the story starts about farmer back to farmer.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Okay. I was assigned my first job to evaluate a project called maximizing potato productivity.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Which was a big project funded by IDRC Canada to develop appropriate potato technologies and diffuse them to small farmers in the Montaro valley of Peru. And, they had been working on this project for three years, and it had a very agronomic. . . agro-economic framework. They did, you know, replications of experiments, they did the cost benefit analysis, they wouldn't tell the farmers exactly what was in their experiments, because they didn't want to mess up what the farmer would do in theirs, and so I was brought on, and I was sent up, within weeks, to the Montaro Valley to find out what farmers thought about this. . . these technologies, and this project.

VAN WILLIGEN: Let me make sure I understand, that that project was. . . there was less involvement of farmers in terms of the experimentation?

RHOADES: There was a survey, which tried to get at what the farmers' constraints were. This was the old constraints [?] where you looked at the yield gap between what they got on experiment station and what farmers were getting, and you explained that gap in terms of these constraints.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: So the whole op-. . . mode of thought was, well, we've got to close that gap.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And the yield.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And the way to do this is to understand what the farmer's problems are, made a lot of sense, actually, and then try to bring their technology up, okay, so that they would get higher yields. It was very much a yield context. So, they sent me up there, okay, I went up there very naïve, and I started talking to farmers. And, I interviewed all 120 farmers, or whatever it was that participated in this project, and I wrote up my results. I came back, and I presented my paper, and the shit hit the fan.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: Because I said, first, farmers don't understand exactly what it is that you're doing, because they know you're doing experiments, but you're not telling them exactly what it is you're doing, because you don't want them to imitate what you're doing, the farmers, and therefore they don't understand. They understand that you talk about a high-cost package, a middle-cost package, and a low-cost package, but they don't understand what you're doing. That was number one.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: Second thing I said is now, these farmers have a very rational system already.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And yield is not the primary thing for them, except in certain, sort of low-lying fields that are oriented toward the market. The higher fields and . . . are . . . could be grown for family consumption, for ritual purposes, for all kinds of things. And, so I said yield is not necessarily the primary thing here, so you're defining this whole thing from your point of view. So, I said that in the report, well, there was a huge blow up.

VAN WILLIGEN: Let . . . this . . . in terms of your thinking and career, the submission of this report is like a pivotal thing, isn't it?

RHOADES: Oh, it was very pivotal.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah.

RHOADES: Because . . . yeah, because of the . . . I was . . . I realized then, that my ideas were not all that appreciated.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right, because the things that you're talking about are stuff that, in this . . . now have become routine, talk . . . you know, routine value orientation, I think, at least amongst many people.

RHOADES: Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so, you wrote this report and you handed it to someone, or distributed it, how did that work?

RHOADES: Yeah, well yeah, these ideas today, these are mainstream, and biological scientists are even more gung-ho about them than maybe some anthropologists, they're saying, "whoa, maybe not so quick."

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. Right.

RHOADES: Yeah, I wrote the report, and I handed it, and I had. . . was so naive, and then it was banned, the report was banned inside the center. It. . . they stopped the circulation of it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh, so this is like an internal working paper?

RHOADES: Yeah, it was. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: That got quashed?

RHOADES: That got. . . right, canned, it was. . . stopped circulation of this paper, because it was seen as negative, it was seen as an assault on a major funded project, then of course they started to attack my methods, “well, how do you know this?” And you know, so forth and so on. So, I was just really overwhelmed by this rejection of what I thought were some new insights, and I was trying to explain to them all of cultural ecology.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: I was trying to explain to them that, you know, these are mountain farmers, they have small fields, they have very complex systems, and so forth. The end result was I was kicked off the team.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mm.

RHOADES: Okay.

VAN WILLIGEN: Why weren't you canned altogether?

RHOADES: Well, because I had. . . I had two years. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: . . . for the Rockefeller. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

RHOADES: . . . thing. So, this was really very early in the game, but they felt they couldn't trust me. Right. So, I really fell into that category of the negative anthropologist that is, you know, always throwing cold water on technologies, and you know. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: You can always say why its wrong, but never tell you what to do.

RHOADES: I was telling them what was wrong, and everything, but I couldn't exactly. . . and so. . . and it was true, in a way. The problem was I had been defined in that role. I had never been given an opportunity. In fact, I said, at the conclusion of my paper I said, you know, anthropologists should have been at the front of this thing, not at the end of this thing, that was another. . . of course, very sensitive issue. Well, so I got kicked off the team, but I still had some time. Well, same team of crusty old post harvest storage types, technical people came over to me and said, "you know, we really want. . . liked working with Rob Werge, would you like to work with us?" And I said, "okay, yeah."

VAN WILLIGEN: They were looking for resources.

RHOADES: They were looking for resources, and they were more sort of systems people themselves, because they dealt with storage units, and they said, "yeah," they said, "we're working on various kinds of consumer storage."

VAN WILLIGEN: Were these agriculture engineers. . .

RHOADES: More engineer types, yeah. Post-harvest processors, and that kind of thing. They designed buildings. So, they had a systems perspective, they were technical people, but they also kind of were in a minority position in the center.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. Right.

RHOADES: They weren't part of the agro-economic breeder powerhouse.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: They were all second class citizen.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, I said sure. And they said, “well, come on with us, and we’ll show you what Werge has been doing, and maybe you can just pick up where he left off.” And so we drove up to the Montaro Valley, of course I’d been up there before, and we went through [Ticlio], which is the high pass, and there were all of these huge storage, potato storage buildings there empty. And these guys, these storage guys says, “look, you know, the UN, FAO, other organizations, millions of dollars, they built these all over Peru, they built them all over the world, farmers don’t use them.”

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: We know that they’re technically perfect. You can store potatoes for eons. Secondly, we know that it’s economical, because we did the economic studies that if the farmers would bring their potatoes there, store them and wait for the market in Lima and just bring them down whenever they’re ready, they’ll make money.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: They said, “but farmers aren’t using this stuff.” They said, “can you help us?” Well, I dug out some of Werge’s materials, but then I started working on my own, and I . . . first thing that I explained to them is that a storage system, in the Peruvian Andes, is an integral part of the house.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: It’s not the image of the separate barn, or the separate storage pit or something, but it’s something that’s integral inside the house. And that’s for many reasons. One is security, they fear things being stolen. Another is evil eye, they don’t

like people looking at their potatoes, and the potatoes are like a bank account, and they take out a little bit.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And, so we. . . and I said, what you've done here, is you've built separate storage units, and you've expected these people to trust, right, the people that manage these, that they're going to do it. I says you're never going to find it in this kind of a system. And, furthermore, we went to the farmers and the farmers said, "look," you know, "we don't. . . we're perfectly happy with our system of storing our ware potatoes, because we can control the flow to the market," and so forth, "from inside our houses," basically.

VAN WILLIGEN: Ware potatoes, you said?

RHOADES: Ware potatoes means consumption potatoes. But they said, "the problem we're having is with the seed potatoes of the new varieties that we like to grow in the lower zones," and they said, "if you could help us with this, this would be great." So, there was a problem defined by the farmers. And by the way, the case study came before the model. The farmer back to farmer. We were working our way through this thing, okay, so what I told them, I said, "look, you can work until you're blue in the face around here on consumption potatoes, you can work forever on traditional varieties, but none of these involves a problem perceived by the farmers." So these guys, the listened, they said, "okay, well, we have some technologies we think will work." I said, "okay, well, what are they?" They said, "well, one is diffuse light. It's like refrigeration. You can take potatoes, and you put them in diffused light, and they won't sprout."

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And the farmers were complaining about with these new varieties of potatoes, all the sprouting and so forth, they weren't. . . you see, what we defined as losses, they didn't define as losses at all.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. Right.

RHOADES: Because, to us, if a potato is shriveled or a little rotten, or something like that, this was a loss, well, in the Andean system, you've got to feed the pigs something, they had this allyu belief system in which there is the. . . every. . . all creatures need to be taken care of, so you have to have a certain degree of potatoes to feed the chickens, or certain. . . to feed the crows, or whatever it is. And. . . but that wasn't the pur-. . . therefore, that wasn't a problem. Shriveled old potatoes that looked like losses to us were actually sweeter in taste.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh.

RHOADES: Is another thing. But they said, "these new varieties that we want for the market, because we make money on this, boy we can't store them." So, what we had was a situation created by the [?] varieties, and a lack of a storage system, but it was a problem the farmers saw.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: So then the scientists started working on this diffuse light idea, and at first they did it on an experiment station, again with separate structures, they couldn't get away from. . . I kept saying, "no," they wanted to put plastic on the side, I said, "no, forget about that." Slowly. . . and we figured. . . we found out that it worked, it really did cut back on the sprouting and the loss of water, and we would put them. . . planted them in the fields, diffused light potatoes, they sprouted much quicker as seed potatoes, but it. .

. it was not being adopted, because we were still clinging to these old ideas. Then we started a whole process of integrating it into the houses, into the compounds, where it was under their control. And all we did was introduce the principle, ultimately, through demonstrations, and then the farmers ran with it. They created their own storage systems, but using the diffuse light principle.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, the . . . as I recall, the incorporation into their structures was putting it in a . . . like a compound?

RHOADES: Yeah, first we did. . . we did little demonstrations like in a compound with a little storage thing made out of rustic materials, eucalyptus and all of that, but later on they did their own thing, they'd tip it out and into kind of a . . . under a veranda, or they would use their own materials to build these little stores. In other words, they absorbed the principle, but the technology, which is really the definition of technology, is the local adaptation. They just took the idea and then they fixed it themselves, and then this thing spread like wildfire. And so, we started offering courses all over the world where they had this problem, and it was an immense success. So, you know, in economic terms, yields went up, we cut down on the cost of seed, particularly expensive foreign seed import, so it was a wild success all around the world, thousands and thousands of farmers adopted this tech-. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Through CIP?

RHOADES: Through CIP. Yeah, through this team effort of the anthropologist, first Rob Werge, and then myself, and then with the technical scientists. And it was. . . it was spreading all over the world, right.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: Now, however, we still were very much, what would you call, in a subordinates position.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: A low prestige group within the international center.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. Right.

RHOADES: And then there was a review of the social science work, and they invited international guests like Robert Chambers, and Vernon Ruttan from Minnesota.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: All of these guys came down.

VAN WILLIGEN: When was that? About.

RHOADES: This must have been about 1981? 82? Somewhere along in there.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And there was a planning conference in which we had to present, and I was put on the program for five minutes. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Right before lunch. No, right after lunch, I'm sorry, and. . . but the rest of the program, 95% of the program was given to this agro economic [?], the constraints work, where they presented all their scientific work, and you know, their constraints analysis, and their experiments, and all of that, because they were the group that really had the power.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Well, a guy named Bob Booth, and I, he was the post-harvest technologist.

VAN WILLIGEN: Now, Booth is the name. . .

RHOADES: Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . on the original. . . what I perceive as the original. . .

RHOADES: Original article. Right.

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . article, that was “Agricultural Administration.”

RHOADES: Right, exactly. Bob Booth and I went down to [Encavia Parado] there, a bar, an outdoor bar, for lunch during this conference. We didn’t have anything we were going to say, we didn’t know what we were supposed to say, because we, again, we were really the low status sort of people, and we drank Crystal beer, and I don’t know if you know Peruvian beer, but it is really powerful stuff.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: You drink one bottle and you’re already half smashed. Well, Booth and I got there, and we started drinking this powerful beer, largely I think we were frustrated, because we didn’t know what we were going to say. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And sometime in the. . . in the course of the conversation, Booth took out. . . he said, “you know, maybe we can model this experience.”

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Right, and he took out what was then were hundred Soles pieces, they were a lot bigger than this quarter.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: That I just threw down, and so he said, “maybe we can model this experience.” All right, so he laid that quarter. . . those Soles down, and so he drew this thing, like this, and so then we started to say, well, obviously we began with the farmer

here, right, and then we laid it out in kind of a linear way, you know, in the same old way like that, and then we started looking, and I said, “but that’s not the way we experienced it,” right, because it was really this [intuitive] process, feedback constantly, and so we finally, probably 20 minutes before we . . . to go back to make our presentation, we laid down the Soles, and we put them in this circle like this, and we drew them out, and we said, okay, the way this case unfolded was we began with the farmers. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: And so you. . .

RHOADES: . . . definition, of the problem.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Okay?

VAN WILLIGEN: Okay.

RHOADES: And then we take a biological and an anthropological cut on that, and we argue about it, we call that constructive conflict, right?

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: With the farmer, so that we define a common definition of the problem, because if we don’t agree on what the problem is, the technologist is going to be off designing stores that don’t work, or seeds that’s not adopted, or, you know, it’s just sort of in la la land. But after you define the common problem, you’ve got to have a solution.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: So, that was where the potential solution came in, and that was the diffused light, in this particular case. Well once you’ve got an idea, like diffused light as a solution, you still have to experiment with it, and you have to adapt it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: Okay. And so then, that's where this adaptation part kind of came in.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

RHOADES: But the final. . . the final answer comes back from the farmer.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: If the farmer doesn't adopt or use it, it's not the farmer's fault.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Okay. It's because this process was flawed somehow, so you start all over again.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: So, this then became known as the farmer-back-to-farmer model.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so, when did that name emerge?

RHOADES: Well, we didn't. . . at first we didn't call it this. We went back, and I presented the. . . this with an overhead, I just drew these circles out again, and I explained it, and we had only 5 or 10 minutes, and Vernon Ruttan, the economist, and thank goodness that he's the one that said it. He stood up and he said, "well, it appears to me we have two approaches in this department."

VAN WILLIGEN: [chuckle] Okay.

RHOADES: He said the. . . "one approach, begins from the scientists' definition of the problem, and then merely asks the farmer, through surveys and so forth, what maybe he thinks about it, but it's pretty much a linear process in which the scientific process dominates, and then the idea is at the end there's going to be scientifically superior technologies, which is going to be fired through an arrow to the extension service then that fires them down to the farmer." And he said, "this other approach, of the post

harvest people is very different.” He said, “in fact, we haven’t seen anything like this in agricultural research yet, which simply says you begin with the farmer, and their definition of the problem, and then you apply your expertise to work toward a solution in an adaptive way, but if it doesn’t work, it’s not the farmer’s fault for being lazy, or irrational, or backward, or anything like that, but it’s because you haven’t understood what the problem was. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: . . . and you haven’t come up with a solution,” so it put the burden on the scientific process. He said, “these are very different things.” Well, then, of course, more, you know, blood on the floor, because this was a direct threat to the power structure, but it was also. . . it was coming from Vernon Ruttan, Mr. agriculture economics himself, and so he came up to us afterwards, and he says, “why don’t you publish this thing?” Just. . . yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: Pause at this point. This is. . .

[End of tape 1, side 1]

[Beginning of tape 1, side 2]

RHOADES: See, prior to this, the circles would have been drawn something like this, you see. In which you have science that decides, that delivers the results to extension, that then delivers to the farmers. The old top down, or what Robert Chambers calls the transfer of technology approach. Now, at the time, this so-called farming systems perspective was coming about, in which there was this idea of feedback.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: So, there would be the scientist, right, who would get. . . who would deliver to extension, deliver it to the farmers and you would get feedback through. . . but, it's still a very linear process from the. . . here's the farmer down here again. Well we're suggesting in this farmer back to farmer thing, is that the farmer is where you begin.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: Right, and it's not just a matter of doing a survey, or studying the system, but it's actually getting on common ground with what the farmer sees as the issue.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And experiences as the issue. Anyway, there was a journalist there working at CIP at that time, and he was in the audience too on that day, and he. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Do you recall his name?

RHOADES: Yeah, Frank Shideler. And Frank Shideler came up and said, "I'd like to write a little two-piece bulletin about this storage case and this farmer back to farmer model." He didn't call it that. Well when it appeared, in its little thing, it said, "Farmer-Back-to-Farmer." And so he gave it that name.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see. I see.

RHOADES: We didn't.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see. That's interesting.

RHOADES: But we loved it when we saw it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

RHOADES: Okay. And then Booth and I put together the article and sent it to Agriculture Administration, where Ruttan said we should send it, and it was published as

“Farmer Back to Farmer: A Model for Generating Acceptable Agricultural Technology,”
or something like that.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

RHOADES: And it was then picked up by a lot of different news releases and papers
and everything, and then it spread.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, Shideler was a employee of CIP?

RHOADES: He was. . . of CIP. He was the. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Kind of the public communication kind of thing. . .

RHOADES: Yeah. He was the writer. He was the local writer.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah, I see.

RHOADES: In-house writer. But he was a very practical guy who had an eye for these
things.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Now, of course all of this still meant bad blood at home.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: The house was not tidy, because it meant that the farmer back to farmer
perspective was still fighting for its position in this. Well, to cut further into the story, it
was picked up by Robert Chambers. That, plus other things I had written on informal
surveys and things like that. Robert wrote me a letter and said, “I just received your
agricultural anthropology. . . Agricultural Administration article, ‘Farmer Back to
Farmer’.” He said, “this corresponds very closely to my way of thinking.” He said, “I’m
going to write an article, and I thought about calling it ‘Farmer back to Farmer,’ but I’m
going to call it instead, ‘Farmer First,’ because I have political concerns as well, it’s not

just a matter of generating appropriate technology, but also the poor. . .” what is Robert’s. . . putting the poor first or whatever?

VAN WILLIGEN: Putting the last first.

RHOADES: Putting the last first, and all of that. A difficult quotation. And, so he did. And, of course, you know, Robert Chambers is a great writer, he’s. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

RHOADES: He’s like a guru.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes, absolutely.

RHOADES: He has. . . he has a cult following.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: Right. But “Farmer First” was derived from “Farmer Back to Farmer.”

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. I’ve. . . this is one of the things I wondered about, because I was trying to grasp an understanding of the underlying principles and I realized that my readings in “Farmer First” was sort of like. . . it sounded like the same idea, basically.

RHOADES: It was. . . well, Robert was in the. . . had attended these planning conferences, and we were in touch with him about this, but of course, what he did was in the “Farmer First,” he of course adds this thing of a political dimension, and has a whole argument which is very powerful. All we were trying to come up with is a model for social scientists and agricultural scientists and farmers to work together to come up with some solution. So ours, from the very beginning was nothing more than a. . . a model for that end, and we weren’t really thinking, at that point, of more of the political aspects of putting farmer’s first. Robert took this, added his own particular interest, and then later,

of course, participatory research methods was. . . was used to make this an even more dynamic process.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: An anthropological process too.

VAN WILLIGEN: I wanted to return to the. . . the folks of the potato center that were representing the dominant. . .

RHOADES: Right.

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . ideology. How did that play out?

RHOADES: Well, at first, of course, there was a lot of skepticism, and this. . . this is pretty normal in. . . when a new paradigm comes along, obviously, it's. . . it's declared to be, you know, naïve, or it won't work, or you know, all kinds of things, and so there was a lot of kind of bad blood, but the head of the social science department, Doug Horton, who's actually quite a good friend of mine, even though our relation was strained at that time, was also very open to anthropology.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Despite the fact that he had cast his fate with these more powerful kind of agro breeder types.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: But he was a good friend of Enrique Meyer, he was at Cornell, he had. . . had studied, and you know, he. . . he was just. . . so he began, I think, to see the handwriting on the wall. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And then, began to support us in this.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. I see.

RHOADES: But, there was a lot of. . . I'll have to send you a copy of the article called, "Farming Systems Research," or three stooges, or the three musketeers. It's where the three of us wrote about each other.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, that sounds. . . that would be really an excellent supplement. I've never read that.

RHOADES: Yeah, it's called. . . and, what happened. . . Doug presented at the AAA, was it AAA? Or Farming Systems meeting, somewhere, I don't remember where, it was at the American Anthropology meetings, back around 1986, or somewhere about that time. And there was just one boring FSR paper after another, because by that point, everybody had gone into. . . you know, little flow diagrams, and it was starting to collapse. And Doug, who's a great comedian, he got up there and he said, "well, we want to present this paper called, you know, "Farming Systems Team," three musketeers, or the three stooges. And he said, "and most of the time what we do," we wrote this together, is it resembles more of the three stooges than the three musketeers, with all their efficiency and so forth, and what we did was, we. . . in different parts of the world, we each wrote our part about what we thought about the other one. Right, it was cathartic, really, it was. And, we really had our say about what we thought about each other in this paper, and then Doug got to present it, and it was hilarious. People were rolling in the aisles and everything.

VAN WILLIGEN: An unusual thing at a meeting.

RHOADES: Yeah, very unusual. Yeah, it was just. . . he was. . . of course, had great timing and all of that, but it also helped us get through these feelings of sort of budget

and territorial strife and what have you, and it wasn't long after that that I went to the Philippines and established the user's perspective with agricultural research and development upward, that one, which is still ongoing, and upward was based on the farmer back to farmer model.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. And that was with a . . . that's a new organization? Or it's a CIP organization?

RHOADES: It was established through CIP, with Dutch funding as a pan-Indi. . . pan-Asian situation, where anyone that was interested in building the user's perspective into the agricultural research process could kick small amounts of funding. So, Virginia [Nazarea] was the associate director of the project.

VAN WILLIGEN: And, about when was that?

RHOADES: About 19. . . let's say '89 is when I started it, and we probably had our first meetings in 1990.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: I was there about two or three years before I went to Georgia.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: But it's another application, and they just won the Magsaysay Award, or whatever it is in the Philippines, I can send you something about that, that's the upward network. It goes on, it's now been incorporated into CIP's core programs, which means it doesn't rely entirely on special funding, it's that important. There have been a number of papers written at CIP by a new generation of scientists, very few of them anthropologists, on the use of the Farmer back to Farmer model, so you know, John, they

say if you can. . . have one idea that lasts, you know, 10-15 years, then you. . . that's about all you can hope for in a career.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: Well, this one still goes on.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: And it's still being used in the centers, it's still being cited. It's so simple that it's, you know, almost humorous. But in its simplicity, I think is its power.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Because it posits a basic anthropological truth that unless the people that are most directly involved perceive this thing as something of value to them, they're never going to use it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And that's a very simple thing, but we get caught up in our projects, and we have to, you know, push this thing, or we have to push new varieties, or, you know, what have you, and then we forget to come back to that most basic anthropological principle. And I think that's what gave the Farmer Back to Farmer its power, applied to agriculture.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. So just to. . . just to. . . without having to worry about accounting for all of them, what. . . what are some of the places where its still operating? I mean, you mentioned some.

RHOADES: Yeah, well I think that. . . well, one thing is directly it's still being used at the potato center in its. . . all of its international work.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Including this network in Asia upward, so it's very basic. It's being applied throughout the Andes in the programs associated with CIP, explicitly as Farmer Back to Farmer, still.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Same title. I think that indirectly you can say all Farmer First projects.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: I can trace. . . at least, let's say part of its heritage back to this one.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Right. The big SANREM project that I'm involved with with USAID, it's based on the Farmer back to Farmer model. The other day I went over to North Carolina, and I was handed a proposal to work. . . and I think it's funded already, I believe David Griffith, who's at these meetings is involved in it, but I read it, and it's. . . what they're doing is working with rural communities and immigrant populations, and it says very explicitly in there, "based on the Farmer back to Farmer model developed by Robert Rhoades we will," and so they're using it to work with. . . with the. . . the immigrant communities, and the rural communities.

VAN WILLIGEN: David is an anthropologist. . .

RHOADES: Yeah, he's a. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . and he worked in coastal research for a while.

RHOADES: Yeah yeah. That's it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Okay.

RHOADES: I believe it was that proposal, but it could be another one on food systems, and I was just giving it the other day, and there were several, I think he was there, but so

the idea is still being widely used, and sometimes even the name Farmer back to Farmer is. . . it's being applied in this participatory breeding approach at the international centers now, you know, for a long time the idea was that you produce these uniform lines and you set the lines to the countries and then they would, at the end would become a certified variety. Well now, there's a huge thrust toward involving farmers and bringing the selection to the very beginning, and that's explicitly traceable back to Farmer Back to Farmer. One reason is this guy Bob Booth went on to become a director of a couple of the centers, and he pushed the idea as well.

VAN WILLIGEN: One of the things I've always been curious about is Bob Booth, because I mean, I knew you sort of, and I was kind of curious about him. So he. . . he became a. . .

RHOADES: Director of research programs at II-. . . wait. . . one in Syria, after he left CIP, he went. . . there's one in Syria, and deals with semi-arid areas, now he's down in IATA, which is in West Africa, and he's always been pushing this Farmer Back to Farmer idea in his capacity as a research administrator, but back in those days, of course, he was a. . . just a technical scientist working. . . you know, it probably would have never been possible, and I think this is what kind of upsets Bob sometimes, is that the anthropologists get the credit for the model. [Editor: The institute located in Syria is ICARDA.]

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: But it was really us working together that generated it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: But, yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: Because, when I talk about it in the context of classes, I talk about you, basically, and then there was this other person that's . . . appears in the bibliographies, and maybe is referred to without name, and so it's . . . from your perspective was truly a giant. . .

RHOADES: Oh yeah, absolutely. That . . . the central thing about it is this team effort, because once you get the farmer's definition, obviously there's a technical component, and there's a human component, and we had this thing called constructive conflict, which meant that we had to argue with each other about it, in a constructive way.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: You know, sometimes this broke down, and it got really nasty.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: But, normally, we agreed, we're going to disagree on our perspectives, and I'm going to push my . . . you're going to push yours, but the main objective is for us to get on to a common definition of the problem.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see. So then the . . . the disciplinary boundaries become, like really muted, but they're also crucial in some ways.

RHOADES: Oh, absolutely.

VAN WILLIGEN: Because they're part of the . . . part of the . . . the creative conflict, I'll call it.

RHOADES: Yeah, well Bob Booth, for example, only saw the tip of the iceberg of the anthropological theory, and methods that I was applying.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: Because, I mean, there's no way he can become an anthropologist and understand, you know, culture and ecology, and the kind of cultural systems thinking that I was bringing to the table. But, I was. . . I was translating that into a way that he could understand. By the same token, I never understood all this physiology and sugar conversion, and God only knows what all that he. . . was so important to him, but they were both important to the process. And so we had to learn enough of each other's language so that we kind of understood what was going on, but we had to sort of subvert that to the idea that we were going to help these farmers solve whatever their problem was.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. And so in the. . . in the interaction, you would begin to learn more about the. . . the physiology of the potato, let's say.

RHOADES: Yeah. Oh yeah. Now, this is working at the level of a group of farmers or individual farmers. Later on in the [SANREM?] project, we elevated this to the community. And that's where, when I made the comment this morning, that the issues have gotten more complex, and the methodologies have gotten more complex. We've had to try to work at the level of the community, and find out what is the common definit-. . . now there, it gets stickier, because we've got stakeholders, you've got rich and poor, and landed and landless, and other kinds of issues, but that's what natural reso-. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: And a longer timeframe too.

RHOADES: And a longer timeframe.

VAN WILLIGEN: It's not just this season's potatoes.

RHOADES: One season, exactly. So this was really developed, and see what's. . . this was just a team of, at maximum three of us, four of us. Now the teams are huge. The

[SANREM] teams involve, literally dozens of people, each looking at different aspects in the landscape and the community, and in a way, we're trying to use this model, but it's another level of challenge.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, you mentioned the four. . . you said four people. It was Booth. .

RHOADES: Well, here's. . . the four that. . . there was Bob Booth. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Okay, who still works as research director. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. Right.

RHOADES: In IATA, there was an old crusty Idaho storage man named Roy [Shoal].

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: And this guy, you know, bearded, he was already probably 60, really rough, you know, but very grounded, and he was a part of the team. And then there was Rob Werge that I have to give credit to.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

RHOADES: And he was there before me, as one of the first anthropologists in the center, then I came, so there was really, in a way, the four of us on the international team, then we, of course, had counterparts.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: In the national programs and so on.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: But there was a. . . the other thing about it is that there was this belief in holism, there was this very grounded sort of thing, there was this suspicion in using

questionnaires, it was the participant observation, it was. . . you know, that was why the thing just gelled.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. I see. And, now, it's continued into these other projects, and has kind of. . . do you see that, in any context where you think it's misused? Or where key values associated with it get kind of dropped?

RHOADES: Yeah, like farming systems, I think that in some cases, the labels are there, but the substance is not.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And, the other. . . the other thing is I don't think we've come to grips yet with the multiple scale, and multiple stakeholder sort of watershed landscape level of analysis, because we've been grappling with, in the SANREM project, there may be a point, in this kind of work, that you just simply can't deal with all that complexity.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: You may have to come back to something simpler.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: And, I think that was one of the problems we've had with the agenda 21, the new kinds of projects, is that we wanted to be kind of, you know, small is beautiful, and farmer first in our approach, but the problems and the teams, and the money was so big. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: That's it. . . we lost our focus, we lost, you know, and those are, unfortunately things that. . . we haven't worked our way through it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: I mean, I do believe that sustainability is an important concept, and like you say, involves the time dimension and so forth, but we have not yet learned how, I think, to elevate this kind of thing to that level.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Very well.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: We have some. . . and I'll. . . did I not send you a book? A recent book? I'll give you one here.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: That we did on this. . . the project in Ecuador.

VAN WILLIGEN: No. No, I was. . .

RHOADES: It's also based on this model, so I'll give it to you today. Can you carry back. . . it's just a book.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah, I'm actually in a car.

RHOADES: Oh, okay.

VAN WILLIGEN: [chuckle]

RHOADES: Okay, great. Yeah, I'll go down to. . . and get it and let you have it.

VAN WILLIGEN: That'd be great.

RHOADES: Because they'd. . . and then I'll send. . . I'll look to get all this other materials, Farmer Back to Farmer stuff and send them to you so you can have them in your archive, because there's some unwritten documents, and God only knows, maybe even the banned paper is there somewhere and we can put it in there too.

VAN WILLIGEN: [chuckle] So, the . . . it . . . do you still have a copy of the transparency?

RHOADES: I might.

VAN WILLIGEN: [chuckle]

RHOADES: Oh, you mean the one. . . this one here where we did the . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah, with the Soles.

RHOADES: Yeah, the Soles. Yeah, maybe. I don't know.

VAN WILLIGEN: [chuckle]

RHOADES: I'd have to look and see.

VAN WILLIGEN: That's pretty. . . pretty interesting.

RHOADES: Yeah. But that's. . . that's the reason, also when you see that thing like that, that's the reason, is because we were drawing those circles using that. . . the Soles, and nobody would ever know that.

VAN WILLIGEN: [chuckle]

RHOADES: You know, you'd think that. . . and we were, of course, not too sober when we were doing it.

VAN WILLIGEN: You probably needed some. . . needed help to draw the circle.

[chuckle]

RHOADES: Yeah, by the way, for all future generations in anthro-. . . I do not recommend the alcohol approach to research. I mean, even though it worked on this particular day, I do not recommend it.

VAN WILLIGEN: [chuckle]

RHOADES: Many people think that that's the only way to do good research, but. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, reflecting back now, kind of going from your . . . looking at your predecessors, now thinking about other people that would be good to interview, it seems Bennett is like a crucial person because of the . . . his role, and probably Goldschmidt, although the linkage between you and Goldschmidt is probably not. . .

RHOADES: No, when I was in the field working with the potato center, the people that encouraged me most, unfortunately, one was Robert Netting who is now gone, and Hal Conklin, who had a different interest, but you can see Conklin influence here.

VAN WILLIGEN: This is the Ili-. . . I mean. . .

RHOADES: Ifugao. Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: Ifugao.

RHOADES: Yeah. And, but I called Bennett the other day, and John is. . . maybe a bit elderly now. If you had pointed questions, he probably could answer them, but unfortunately, I'm afraid if you don't get it quick, you're going to lose that whole oral history.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. I see.

RHOADES: Because he told me on the pho-. . . because I wanted to have a phone conference with him for my agricultural anthropology class, and he said. . . he says, "what's agricultural anthropology?" And I said, "John, I heard it first from you." He said, "I don't believe in disciplines," he said, "I never believed in a discipline," he said, "I've always been marginal to anthropology," and so it was a. . . it was not exactly. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Do you ever see him face to face?

RHOADES: I have not seen him for probably 4 or 5 years.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: I saw him last at Atlanta, the AAA meetings in Atlanta.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. Right. And so your view is that that. . . that should be like. .

RHOADES: Is there someone in the. . .

[tape paused]

RHOADES: You know, dozens involved. I mean, I don't know who they all are anymore, I have not much contact with them, but it's become an accepted. . . very much an accepted perspective.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: One oral history that probably should be told by someone else in time is that of Grace Goodell, at IRRI.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: I don't know if you know Grace, but she was a major figure in. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: And so where would she be? Is she there now?

RHOADES: After me, no, she's at John Hopkins.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: But she probably wouldn't tell the really good. . . there's still the famous Grace Goodell stories, that she came in, unfortunately she alienated a lot of people, but it was interesting a few years after she left, they instituted much of what Grace was fighting for, women and rice farming systems.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: Things like that.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, I had an interesting experience, I visited ICRISAT, and talked with the. . . ICRISAT was interesting to me, because anthropologists were like really banished the way I. . .

RHOADES: Yeah, there was an original anthropologist who was there about the same time I was at CIP, maybe a little later, maybe three or four years later. It was a bad experience.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes, and I. . . I think the man I talked to is an economist, and the name Walker comes to. . .

RHOADES: Tom Walker. Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: And, I had this conversation with him about what happened to anthropology here, and he made this comment, you know, because he started giving examples of. . . of anthropologists that made sense in the context of this kind of work, and then he said, “well, we haven’t had that experience.”

RHOADES: No.

VAN WILLIGEN: He may have mentioned your name. And then he said the problem with anthropology is that you can’t tell what you’re getting, and so that with an agricultural economist, that they all. . . I mean, the way he said it at that point is they all know essentially the same stuff.

RHOADES: Yeah, it’s a paradigm. Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so he was reluctant to support the hiring of anthropologists because they had hired them, and they didn’t do what he was hoping for.

RHOADES: Yes. Well, Tom went on to become the head of the social science department at CIP, so he inherited this whole anthropological tradition.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

RHOADES: But, I think he. . . you know, it's really unfortunate, but our worst enemies are economists, and there are some interesting stories there too, because economists have taken anthropological ideas and gotten the Nobel prize for them, and Theodore Schultz, *Transforming Traditional Agriculture*, for which he got the Nobel prize, in the early 60's, was based upon anthropological research by people like Sol Tax, that demonstrated that peasants were rational people, because up to that point they had been seen as irrational, and traditional, and culture bound, and backward, and what the anthropological literature, and one. . . [?] with *Penny Capitalism* as an example, demonstrated, but there were others as well, is that no, these people are very rational, given their conditions.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And so what Schultz did, was he took that, and he wrote this book called, "*Transforming Traditional Agriculture*," in which he said the peasant is rational, all the peasant needs is the inputs, and they will then get the job done.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

RHOADES: And in a way, it was old fashioned economics, but he took the evidence from anthropology and he got the Nobel Prize.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

RHOADES: And this happens again and again to us. We don't. . . as anthropologists, we don't sell ourselves very well.

VAN WILLIGEN: It's a scale. . . there's something. . . I mean, the issue of going up in scale is. . . gets to be a real constraint. I mean, you talked about it in the context of your

experience in sustainable. . . in sustainability, and it may be in fact that at. . . that the case of. . . of the Nobel prize winner illustrates the same thing.

RHOADES: Absolutely. Yeah. But economists who are will-. . . first, economists are willing to have a client relation with society, where anthropologists are reluctant. And, of course, that's what anthropol-. . . applied anthropologists have been trying to overcome. And you're right, the other thing is the scale thing, is that we wouldn't take any capitalism and make almost a global argument for it, but an economist has no problem with that.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: You know, give me that information, I'll stick it into my model, and then my model will become this thing that is, you know, fits all people at all times.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

RHOADES: And. . . and therefore, you know, when it cooks up something like the green revolution, it makes a lot of sense.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

RHOADES: But, he got the Nobel Prize. And now, you know, the latest Nobel Prize was given for information economics, and that too is based on the fact that, you know, that their. . . that the market is not perfect, and information is not, you know, uniform, and that some people know more than what other people. . . and God, anthropologists have been talking about that forever.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: That there are these gender differentiations, and class, and ethnic, and what have you, and that information does not flow smoothly, but for some reason it takes an economist to package it for society.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure. They resist it, and then they take it over, and benefit from it.

RHOADES: If it's a great idea, they co-opt it, yeah. So I mean it's. . . we really have some self-examination to do among ourselves. Because we fell like well we. . . you know, it's just. . . shouldn't do these things, you know, should. . . I don't know, we're just not bold with our ideas.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Because we're very. . . we're bent on understanding rather than changing anything, and we're very. . . whereas an economist has no problem.

VAN WILLIGEN: Mmhmm.

RHOADES: Recommend changes, go for it. You know. But we don't. We want to understand.

VAN WILLIGEN: The. . . there's also a tendency to criticize the bold amongst us.

RHOADES: Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: To kind of make sure they don't get out of line.

RHOADES: Yeah. So that's the story, I guess.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah. Well thanks a lot.

RHOADES: Yeah.

[End of interview]