

**Tacoma Community History Project**  
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

**Narrator:** Joel Baranick & Ann Petricola  
**Date:** May 1, 2020  
**Interviewed By:** Nora White  
**Place:** Olympia, WA & Tenino, WA – met online

**[Nora White]:** Awesome. Okay, cool. So this is Nora White I'm interviewing Ann Petricola and Joel Baranick for TIAS 515 Themes In the Interpretation of Culture. It's May 1, 2020. Ann and Joel, do I have your permission to record this interview?

**[Joel Baranick]:** Yes

**[Ann Petricola]:** Yes.

**[NW]:** Awesome, thank you. I wanted to tell you guys just a little bit about this project so you know why you're giving your time, which I'm really grateful for. I am in the master's program at UW Tacoma, and they have an interdisciplinary master's program and so you kind of get to choose your own research topic and my research in general is around food as a tool for community building and intercultural communication, and I've kind of tried to bring that into all of my required classes. And this class that I'm in this quarter is an oral histories class which is really interesting. I wish it was in person. I think it would be really cool. But, you know, everything's remote right now. And in particular, my professor is especially passionate about labor rights and labor issues. So it might be really appropriate we're doing this on May Day also. So we're all kind of doing our final project on workers in the time of pandemic and different people from different backgrounds and different professions and how they're being impacted by this time. Hopefully, everybody's projects will get included in something that's called the Tacoma Community History Project also, which is housed at the UW in the library there as kind of this cool record of this area and people's experiences and recollections of times here. It's really cool. There's about 10 or 12 of us in the class and people are doing [their projects on] you know, healthcare workers, or one person is talking about pregnancy and motherhood during pandemic - really a broad range of topics. So I'm talking to farmers.

**[JB]:** Awesome

**[NW]:** You know, right in line with everything else in my life anyway. So if it's okay with you guys. I would love to include this transcript in that and have your interview be a part of that. And then I'm kind of including my interviews and my takeaways with some research and writing a paper as well.

**[JB]:** Yeah, that's great.

**[AP]:** Yeah, sure!

[NW]: I'll share it with you when it's done if you're curious, I'm hoping to at least one or two others, just trying to get like different kinds of farms and a couple different people's experiences. So, awesome. Do you guys have any questions for me?

[Both]: I don't think so.

[NW]: Okay, cool. So I have some prepared questions and also totally fine with this just being a conversation and I can go through and edit things for clarity afterwards as well.

I would love to get just a little bit of background. I know you guys in the present, but would you mind telling me a little bit about kind of where you guys came, from where you grew up, and how you came to be here and farming here? Tell me about your background a little bit.

[AP]: Sure

[JB]: Go for it

[AP]: Why are you pointing at me? [laughs]

[JB]: You go first.

[AP]: Okay. So I was born and raised in Dayton, Ohio. I spent a lot of time on my grandparents sheep farm. They raised Suffolk sheep when I was a kid, and I loved going there at any time, but of course, during lambing, you know, that was one of my favorites. I got to name all the lambs and everything, you know, was very fun. And, you know, my grandparents, they were basically homesteaders. They had a huge garden and fruit trees and everything like that. So, that's kind of where my desire to farm started and so of course, then my life took a lot of twists and turns, but I did go to Evergreen. I did the Sustainable Agriculture program there and after that, I moved back to Ohio and, you know, kind of monkeyed around for a while and then, let's see, then we met in Seattle about 14 years ago. We lived in Seattle for 10 years, but were all the time kind of trying to figure out how to start a farm. And so we explored so many different options, including potentially taking over a farm that I'd worked for in Ohio. We also tried to get a lease on a farm in Ohio that was part of Cuyahoga National Park. They do long term leases on farms to try to encourage agriculture in the national park there. It's up by Cleveland. Anyway, none of that stuff worked. So, kind of on a whim, we decided to move to Olympia because we found this property was about two and a half acres, and we thought, well, you know, we could manage that size and just kind of try to figure it out. So that's what we've been doing for the past four years.

[JB]: The pressure to move was because we had a daughter entering high school. So it was either then or not for six years.

[AP]: And we weren't getting any younger, so we thought maybe it maybe it's a good time to give it a go.

[NW]: Yeah, Ann, I think I've met you at that women in ag conference in Portland right when you guys had moved here.

[AP]: Yeah! That's correct. I really liked that conference. I thought that was cool.

[NW]: I did too!

[AP]: I actually have that shirt on! Joel, you should tell us about how you became interested in farming.

[JB]: I met Ann. [laughing]

[AP]: Besides...

[JB]: I kind of grew up everywhere, all over. And then after being in the southeast for 15 years, 16 years, 15 years, something like that. I moved up to Seattle to work as a software engineer and I met Ann, and then, slowly added more and more homesteading stuff to our lives. Like canning and chickens. We had a coop that was in the coop tour. You know, just all sorts of little stuff and then, I don't know, for like six or seven years. We talked about farming, maybe four years, we talked about farming and just thought about it and planned. And then we started trying to make something happen with the farms that she mentioned and those weren't working. So, in 2014 or 15 I quit Microsoft and started at a startup. So that was all remote so I could work from home. So that was what let us move and I continue to still work for that same company which is based in California.

[NW]: You do now also?

[JB]: I do now. Yeah, I have a day job and then the other day job. And they're really understanding which is cool, but I work nights too, and weekends. Whenever I can slip in extra time to account for time that I'm taking out to do farming stuff.

[NW]: Ann, do you work off farm right now?

[AP]: No.

[JB]: The goal is to figure out if we can be solely self sufficient as a farm, but we don't know yet if this property could be that given space constraints and stuff.

[NW]: So, not in a time of pandemic, how do you sell? What's your usual marketing goal or business plan?

[AP]: Well, after kind of monkeying around with that for a couple years, we decided to just focus on restaurant and grocery sales, because being one and a half of us, spending all day at a market is not really possible, because, like on a Saturday, that's a day that we have to actually be working together all day. And the markets as beginning farmers that we got into were kind of

small and just didn't seem worth our time. So, we kind of tried to hone in on restaurant and grocery which seemed, at least for last year, worked out really well. I think we had about, is it nine? [speaking to Joel]

**[JB]:** Nine grocery and eight restaurant, or eight and eight. Something along those lines.

**[AP]:** It was pretty evenly split.

**[JB]:** About 50/50 on sales.

**[AP]:** And we were selling as far away as Tacoma – Marlene's.

**[JB]:** Federal Way, Yelm, Tumwater – kind of being the extent [of grocery sales]. And then what else? Yeah. Like, initially our planning had been all a diversified small vegetable farm, and that was kind of good when we were doing farmers market. We had a number of different things, but it's what everybody had, and then when they didn't sell we had to find places to sell them. We wanted to tone down what we were growing, so we could concentrate on things that were making money, but you can't really have an effective booth if all you have is like two crops. So another reason the farmers market didn't make a whole lot of sense, at least the way we were thinking about it. So was it last year? Or the year before where we toned down a bunch of crops, and then last year we toned down five, four? All salad mixes basically. We did eggplant I guess again, and peppers, and micro greens. So now we're pretty much only doing salad and micro greens this year.

**[NW]:** Well, I love them so they're going great in my kitchen!

**[all laughing]**

**[NW]:** So it's kind of meandered. You've kind of found where you are now it seems like.

**[AP]:** Yeah, yeah. It wasn't exactly where we wanted, like Joel was saying in the beginning, we wanted to grow everything. And, you know, and then we kind of realized, well we have space constraints we have a different kind of market we were trying to cater to, so yeah we just felt like it made a lot of sense to streamline.

**[JB]:** It wasn't completely haphazard though, because when we first moved here Ann was talking about how there was no local, or not much, local packaged salad. There was in the co-op, but there wasn't anywhere else.

**[AP]:** Well, even in Seattle though, that was the case. You couldn't find a lot of things like that.

**[JB]:** Yeah, even in Seattle. So she was talking about that.

**[NW]:** Box salads are so popular, everybody buys the Earth..?

[AP]: Yeah, the Earth Bound or Organic Grown. And last year we actually, another thing that kind of changed is we decided to go with one of those clam shells in the grocery store. And we had a lot of discussions about that because, of course, you know, like, well, like many people we want to be low impact. We don't want to create a lot of waste and all that stuff, which, as you know, farming can be the cause of. But it turned out that using a compostable clamshell, our sales, I mean easily more than doubled over time. In the bag so people were, you know, they take it or leave it. But in the in the clamshell...

[NW]: That's really interesting.

[AP]: Yeah, exactly.

[NW]: That's hard to argue with.

[AP]: I know! So, we've been going that route, and yeah, it's made a big difference.

[JB]: Yeah, the quality is better and sales are up. But, it kind of sucks. They cost more.

[AP]: Yeah.

[NW]: Right.

[JB]: They're almost 50 cents apiece. Which is crazy, yeah.

[NW]: Whoa

[AP]: But it's made up for. I mean, you know, the sales have made up for it, just because of so many more, I guess.

[NW]: And how many restaurant accounts do you usually have then too?

[JB]: Eight?

[AP]: Eight or nine at least. Yeah. Mm hmm. Yeah. So, obviously that's been a bummer because this year we're all, you know, like every year, we've kind of like been building our customer base. And last year we had people actually contacting us, you know "we've heard about your salad", and all that. So, you know, it's kind of getting some momentum and then yeah, now we're stalled.

[NW]: That's my next question actually. I guess this spring, like at what point did you feel, or did you start to realize your markets we're going to change because of the pandemic? Was it immediate or gradual?

[JB]: Well when restaurants were totally closed...

[AP]: Yeah, that... My cousin got married in Florida in early March, and by the time I came back from that trip. I was like [apprehensive sound] we're not really sure, you know we had some discussions like "what do we do? Should we just not plant anything? Should we just focus on infrastructure, this year, and like not worry about it? What's our goal?" And then we had a whole week of like no sales to anybody, even for micro greens or anything. So I was in a panic.

[JB]: That was a week. I think that was the week that the stay at home started maybe or maybe close to that and then grocery store sales seemed to be only essential items, like toilet paper and beans and stuff like that. So our grocery stores weren't buying anything.

[AP]: Yeah, right. Like right in the beginning people were in a panic.

[JB]: But that's picked back up so...

[NW]: And is that when you guys decided to do the micro greens CSA?

[BOTH]: Yeah. [laughing]

[AP]: One week, because we were growing a lot of micro greens already and, you know, we had this week where you know restaurants weren't open and the groceries were putting their money elsewhere. So we had a week where we basically dumped everything and we were like "oh, this is lame." you know, so kind of came up with the thought, well, maybe people would want to eat these and we can grow it year round. It's a very, I don't know, safe and controlled environment. And it's just, you know, me and Joel here. So we don't have a lot of like outside helpers and people coming in and out. And so it felt like a food source that hopefully people would trust and enjoy.

[NW]: How has that worked? How many people or customers do you have? And has it been consistent?

[AP]: Yeah.

[JB]: We're in week seven, and we have about... we've been a little higher, but now I think it's settled around 30. 30 members.

[AP]: Mm hmm. Yeah.

[JB]: And they've added salad when we've had. And once we have it, it seems like salad might be a popular thing to add on as well.

[AP]: Yeah, people have been very responsive about the salad greens and pretty enthusiastic about the micro greens, which I wasn't really sure.

[NW]: I mean, from personal experience, like it's not something I would usually buy in the store, but you know, trying to cut down on how much I was going to the store and then also, I'm a

creative cook so I'm willing to try. Like I've just been using them [microgreens] like I would greens, just throw them in at the end in literally anything and my partner has no complaints and I've putting them in salad. I've been eating them with my eggs like every morning or putting them in smoothie- just anything. It's been so easy to use.

[AP]: Great! Okay, yeah. I mean, that was kind of my, my hope and thinking was like, Okay, well, this is something that, you know, people are eating like canned soup or you know, I mean, they could add greens and just have more of a meal, add nutrition and all that, so yeah, I mean that's it's been good. It's been hectic, really hectic [laughing]. Because it's a little different doing, you know, eight or, I don't know, whatever it was, 18 deliveries, versus like 30 deliveries all over the Puget Sound.

[JB]: And growing. Like growing, how many trays before? Maybe like 10 or 12 trays or something like that. Like something that seems so small now. To 50 trays, or sixty [now]. I mean, last year when we were doing micros, we bought like what we thought was so many trays so we could – we have one of those baker's racks that when we're done, we just stack them up and then we wash them all in one big go and then we'd have a ton ready, but now it's like a week is like about 50 trays a week. So it's constantly like: we don't have enough trays and we're washing them, drying them, packing them. And we're doing one or two times of making soil a week. So that's just a lot of soil.

[AP]: Just a lot more.

[NW]: Are you guys having problems accessing any of the materials or products that you need? Is there any kind of supply chain issue there?

[AP]: Not yet.

[JB]: Was there anything we couldn't get?

[AP]: Well, we couldn't get our gravel. [

[JB]: Yeah, gravel and compost. So normally, we had a lot of compost our farm, and normally we work with a company and we get compost usually like same day delivery and I'll get like a dump truck with like 20 yards. And they told me they were four weeks out because there's so many people at home doing projects they want mulch and bark and whatever deliveries. So yeah, still trying to get that and then I couldn't even get through to them.

[AP]: That's been kind of a hang-up.

[JB]: So we're putting compost on beds, but I don't have any new compost lined up to put on them. So, that has been a challenge.

[AP]: And seeds. That has been a little bit of a challenge.

[JB]: That's been slow, but we've been getting it.

[AP]: Yeah, not too bad. I usually kind of hoard seed anyway so it's okay [laughing].

[NW]: The micro greens seems like a seed intensive production.

[JB]: Yeah!

[AP]: Yeah, we buy a lot of seed so that's been kind of, you know, a little nerve wracking.

[JB]: And many of them come from Italy. So that has been a slow down too. And we also get seeds from Canada so that's been a slow down just with like customs.

[NW]: Is there anything, I don't know if you can answer this, but do you anticipate or are you planning for any other major changes? Like if seed becomes unavailable or you know if restaurants start wanting to buy a whole bunch again... Are you just feeling flexible? Or what do you think?

[JB]: So we started doing like our in-tunnel half plantings in the beginning and then when we were seeing this all develop we were doing our field planting, like, half, half the size of normal. And then last week? Or two either last week or two weeks ago, we went back to a full field plantings. So, which is like six 60 foot beds a week, so 360 bed feet. And I think we're just going to try to sell it or donate it and because we don't want to be caught flat footed if restaurants open and then we're not able to sell to them.

[AP]: Yeah. So yeah, we just kind of decided to stick with what we were doing last year and hope that things work out.

[JB]: Yeah, we're in a little better situation in some ways because, you know, our cycles four weeks. So we're not like planting stuff now to find out we have to till it in like August, but we're also, you know, buying a lot of seed and planting a lot of seed and hoping there's somewhere to sell it.

[AP]: Yeah.

[NW]: And in terms of donating or something like that. I mean, obviously this is such an interesting time because there's so much food waste because of supply chains. And also, like, record usage of food banks and things - have you had people that have asked could they do payment plans or anything like that, or mostly people that can pay?

[JB]: Not yet.

[AP]: No.

[JB]: I am people are putting stuff on their credit cards. So it's possible that their plan, but I don't know.



[AP]: Yeah. Nobody's brought it up actually. And we do, I mean, it's nice because we're so close to the food bank. So, you know, we usually, usually by Friday we're like, "okay, you know, take it at the food bank". That's just kind of our routine. Which is nice, you know, it's super convenient.

[JB]: Also a requirement because of the size of our walk-in.

[AP]: Right, yeah so it goes somewhere else!

[JB]: So we can't leave stuff in the walk-in past Friday because it's got to be cleared for harvest day. So yeah, like Ann's saying, generally drop stuff off by like 4pm on Friday.

[AP]: Yeah. Usually 3:59 before they're closed! [laughing]

[JB]: Other things that are changing: I mean, we're building a farm stand.

[NW]: Yeah, I saw that.

[AP]: And we've had a lot of response from neighbors, people asking us for greens and so it's kind of exciting. I mean, I think a lot of people are really like kind of tuned into local food right now, which is cool, you know,

[NW]: It feels like it.

[AP]: I had to take this crazy thing to happen, but you know, that is that is neat. So hopefully, once we get that up and going it'll be a little easier, you know, kind of more of a self serve thing where some people can come and just access the food and, you know, on the honor system kind of thing.

[NW]: Have you sought out any or used any of like the business loans or any of the small business stuff?

[AP]: No

[JB]: No, we haven't.

[NW]: That seems like a whole other full time job, honestly, to get that stuff going.

[JB]: Yeah, and then all the people that didn't get anything.

[AP]: Yeah, I mean, you know, we're, we're really lucky in that we, you know, Joel has a good job and you know we're not we're not 100% dependent on this so we're pretty fortunate in that way if things just totally tanked, we'd be fine. But, you know, we want it to be successful obviously so we're just going to keep at it, I guess [laughing].

[NW]: Is there a kind of assistance that would be really helpful?

[AP]: Hmm I mean, well.

[JB]: Food hub.

[AP]: Yeah, that's what I was thinking about.

[JB]: Food hub could be very helpful. We're actively still working on that.

[AP]: Joel's involved in the board?

[JB]: Steering committee, not board. Just the committee, helping to figure out what the food hub might be like. So yeah, I mean, we're trying to fast track that. So it could be that that could help a lot of people have new outlets for produce or products.

[NW]: Totally, yeah.

[AP]: Yeah, I mean, for us it's just the, I guess the distribution aspect is a big slow down. I guess, you know, for us because it's just a whole other thing that just, you know, it's very time consuming.

[JB]: Even a normal year, like last year, it's slow. There's a lot of deliveries, but it's another scale now. And I don't know, we're just going to see like if the restaurants don't come back then we'll have to try to figure out what we're doing with produce.

[AP]: Right. Yeah, I mean, I'm pretty sure even if and when the restaurant sales do come back that probably not all restaurants are going to be reopening, or are able to reopen. Or doing the volume of business.

[NW]: Yeah. You're still selling to Cooper Point Public House, I think, right?

[JB]: Yeah, a little.

[AP]: Yeah! We've had also Gather Gastro Pub wanted to do a salad special. So people are contacting us about salad and stuff, which is good, but you know, it's just not as consistent or the quantity that we were at last year. But, I don't know...

[NW]: It's hard. Yeah, it's hard to say. I feel like it's interesting to talk to folks and see, like so many people's CSAs and things like that are selling out but it's hard to know. Which is great because I feel like that's at least like one seasons commitment for some people. But it'll be really interesting to see if people recognize the failures of the food system beyond this time.

[AP]: Exactly, yeah.

[NW]: Like you say, something like a food hub, if we'd already had that structure in place... that'd be cool!

[AP]: Right. Yeah. Yeah. Well, and it's so interesting because I remember last year that people were talking about, well CSAs are just, you know, it's hard to find people to sign up and now there's like Imperfect Produce and all these things where other people are you know, buying produce other ways. So it's kind of like it felt like CSAs we're sort of on the down turn, but now it's like the opposite, you know. All CSAs are selling out. And so, yeah, it's interesting.

[NW]: I wonder if partially it's like people feel like that form of delivered food is safer? Less people touching it. More reliable?

[AP]: Yeah, I would imagine.

[JB]: Seems safer than going in the grocery store.

[NW]: Totally.

[JB]: Grocery stores are pretty crazy. Many people with no masks...

[NW]: Yeah, as you know, I live right by Ralphs [Thriftway]. It's like hit or miss. Sometimes it feels fine sometimes it doesn't.

[BOTH]: Yeah...

[NW]: Outside of this as farmers, I know you guys are parents also. How's your family doing with all this and everything too?

[AP]: I mean, it's been okay. Our daughter is a senior this year. So that's been really unfortunate like you know her cap and gown showed up and the mail the other day. So, you know, it's just, it's just a hard, stressful, uncertain time for everybody. Lonely and isolating. I mean, we're kind of used to being that way, but the kids obviously miss their friends and all their activities and things like that. And work. Our daughter works, usually at Big Tom's, but she's been off for I don't know how long six weeks.

[JB]: Yeah, a while.

[AP]: But I think they're gonna start next week back up.

[NW]: Are you guys finding some like managing systems, coping mechanisms, something fun to do?

[AP]: Not so much. [laughing]

[JB]: Badminton.

[AP]: Badminton breaks here and there. Yeah. Though our skills don't seem to be improving! Ha! But you know, it's a distraction.

[NW]: Totally

[JB]: We've been doing puzzles.

[AP]: Puzzles. Yeah.

[JB]: It's very similar to many people. Puzzles are pretty popular. I've seen a number of places with badminton nets setup when I'm delivering.

[NW]: Awesome!

[AP]: Cooking projects here and there, so that's fun.

[NW]: Cool. Well, this is most of the questions that I think I had. Do you feel like you have anything else you want to share or add at this time?

[AP]: Not that I can think of, I guess just that we're just trying to figure out, you know, like everybody else, how to adopt and you know make changes quickly enough to be able to keep up with the changes that we don't know are coming and stuff like that so. Yeah, I'm not sure, but we're persistent so we're just gonna keep doing what we're doing, I guess.

[JB]: Trying everything we can to see if we can have a successful season and going nowhere else.

[AP]: [laughing] Yeah, exactly.

[NW]: Awesome. Thank you so much. I really appreciate you giving me your time!

[AP]: Oh, yeah!

[NW]: I, yeah, I think this is interesting for me. Obviously, it's interesting for what I do for work, and having a farm, and being in school. Everything's just interconnected in my life anyway.

[AP]: Yeah, that's wonderful. That's exciting.

[NW]: Yeah, yeah. We'll see. I was hoping to do my thesis research for this program this summer, which was really going to be like trying to host shared meals and get people to interact and have shared meal times together, but if that is not going to be a safe possibility, trying to figure out how. Either changing my timeline or what I can do instead we'll just have to wait and see.

[JB]: Host shared meals on Zoom.

[NW]: I was thinking about maybe doing like a recipe exchange between people, so maybe having like you get a story and a recipe from someone and you cook their recipe and then get to tell them about it or, we'll see...

[AP]: Yeah, that's a good idea.

[NW]: So I don't know. I'll let you know.

[AP]: Yeah. Definitely. Keep us posted.

[NW]: Cool, well, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I will share whatever comes out of this with you and let you know where you can find your transcript and everything when it's done. And thank you!

[BOTH]: Yeah, thank you!

[NW]: And thanks for the vegetables because we've really been enjoying them.

[AP]: Well, sorry about your order this week.

[NW]: Oh no! Not a problem at all. I don't think we had even busted into the bag of pea shoots from last week, yet so yeah no worries at all.

[JB]: Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

[AP]: Thank you.

[NW]: Thanks. Have a great evening. Bye.

[BOTH]: See ya, bye.