

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Agriculture in Illinois* Oral History Project

Interview Outline

**Interview Themes:** Interviewers are encouraged to select one or several of the themes or subjects listed below for your interview, incorporating these into interview outline. We've also provided an interview shell for your use, below. The outline is meant to serve as a guide only. Add and delete to this outline as appropriate. Interviewers are cautioned against rigidly following a specific set of questions during the interview itself.

1) Land

From family farms to corporate farms  
Land management practices: low till, no till, drainage management, etc.  
Land prices & purchasing land  
Farm buildings & their evolution; Farm layout  
Organic Farming  
Drainage (especially early years) and tiling  
Weather (especially severe weather, draughts, hail, flooding, etc)  
Annual cycle of plowing, planting, cultivating & harvesting

2) Plants

Crop rotation  
Hybrids  
Fertilizers and Herbicides  
Cost/Production ratios

3) Animals

Feeding, housing & disease control  
Impact of Genetics  
From diversity to specialization  
Marketing

4) People

Farm culture  
Relationship to the land (Ownership, Tenant, renter, migrant labor)  
Finances  
Gender and farm roles  
Impact of rural depopulation  
Relationship between town and country  
School consolidation  
Fairs, 4-H, etc  
Country Churches

5) Technology

Rural Electrification  
Equipment/Machinery  
Communications revolution

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Impact of drainage & irrigation  
Storage  
GPS technology  
Computer technology & the internet

### 6) Institutions

State & federal legislation and impact on farming  
Farm subsidies  
Parity issues  
Extension services  
Agricultural Industries  
Markets & Marketing  
Impact of rural cooperatives on farming  
Role of education in Agriculture  
Chicago Board of Trade  
Chicago Mercantile Exchange

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**Introductory Information:** State at the beginning of the interview:

- **Your name as interviewer**
- **Date and place of the interview**
- **Name of the person being interviewed**
- **“This interview is being conducted as part of the ...**
  - **Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library’s *Agriculture in Illinois Oral History project*” OR**
  - **Illinois State Museum’s *Oral History of Illinois Agriculture project*”**

1. Background: When and where you were born?

a. Parent’s background?

1. Father

2. Mother

2. How family came to settle in Illinois?

3. Other siblings & immediate family?

4. Growing up on the farm:

a. Chores, etc?

b. School(s)?

c. Religious activities?

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- d. Holidays?
  - e. Career aspirations?
  - f. Interests / activities / hobbies?
  - d. Extracurricular activities?
5. Life beyond high school.
- a. Finding a career or choosing a college?
  - b. Why did you decide to go into (farming/agriculture/teaching ...)?
6. How you met your spouse.
7. Your early years in (farming/agriculture/industry, etc)?

At this point, the interview outline should be tailored specifically to meet the particular circumstances of your interview subject. Refer to the list of topics provided at the front of this outline for suggested topics to pursue.

xx. Family gatherings.

xx. Final thoughts:

- a. What do you think is the most significant and transformative change in agriculture during your career?
- b. How do you feel about changes in farming and farm life?
- c. What do you see as the future for farming?
- d. What advice would you give to someone thinking of pursuing a career in agriculture today?

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e. What advice or wisdom would you give to future generations?