

TRANSCRIPT: JAMES M. MCGRANN INTERVIEW

James M. McGrann · [Former Professor at Texas A&M]

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An interview with Dr. James McGrann, vice-president of the International Farm Association. McGrann is a 1973 graduate from Texas A&M University and an inducted member of the Tyrus Timm Honor Registry.

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Would you please introduce yourself?

My name is Jim McGrann, and I am a retired professor from Texas A&M University. I retired, retired 2004.

Could you tell us a little about your experiences at Texas A&M?

I grew up on a, on a ranch in the state of Washington. And I studied at Washington State University for my bachelor's degree. I worked myself through school, worked for an agriculture economist. And then after I graduated, I was – I did the Peace Corps tour in Panama, worked with subsistence farmers, and used my economics as well as my experience in agriculture, my farm experience, to help poor people. And then when I finished that, I returned to Washington State University, got a master's degree. I learned how to speak Spanish while I was in, in Panama in the Peace Corps. And so, when I finished my master's degree at Washington State, they got ahold of me from Texas A&M because I spoke Spanish and they had a, a program in Argentina, and that was related to the Technical Assistance Program that Argentina had, and Dr. Jarvis Miller and Dr. Tyurus Timm was involved in recruiting me for that. And I – it was – I was to be a graduate student in a Ph.D. program, but there was – and my major professor was Don Farris, and in that program, they were running a little bit late, so rather than doing my coursework before I went to Argentina, I actually went to Argentina before and gathered my research work and my data and that type of thing. Worked with students from Texas A&M that were working on their master's degree. Got the data for my Ph.D. dissertation. And then while I was in Argentina, I met my wife, Nadia, and we were married in Argentina before I came back to Texas A&M. And then I worked on a Ph.D. here at A&M, and I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on beef cattle production opportunities in Argentina. When I finished my Ph.D. in '73, A&M hired me to go to Uruguay, and I worked from Uruguay with them for two-and-a-half years, again in a technical assistance program. When I finished that tour, that was very rewarding because I spoke the language and I was familiar with the area. I worked with the Minister of Agriculture, ended up recruiting quite a few students out of Uruguay and Argentina that, many of them come here to A&M. When I came back, I taught at A&M in the Department of Agricultural Economics for one semester. And then I took a position at Iowa State University, and I was on the extension research and faculty there at Iowa State for four-and-a-half years. And then they – that was a wonderful experience. It was a very, very good department and knowing and learning about the Midwest agriculture was very important in my life. Very, very good people. But we didn't, we didn't care for the winters too much in Iowa, and they offered me a job – Dr. John Hawkins offered me a job to come back to Texas A&M on the extension and research faculty. So, I came back and I continued at A&M for the rest of my career. And I was very blessed at Texas A&M with extremely good graduate students, and we were very successful at getting outside funds and support, primarily early adoption of computer technology in agriculture and microcomputers and that type of thing. We were always challenged by people that say we couldn't do the things, and we proved that we could. I really, I really was motivated by people that said we couldn't do the things because I found that that was motivational. One of our goals from all of our people that funded our projects was that we would do more this month than we said we would do in our projects. And we had a, in the

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early 80's, we had a large grant from the Kellogg Foundation, and that just allowed us to get a real good start in terms of the, the forward position in microcomputer applications in agriculture. That opened up a lot of opportunities to travel internationally. Nadia went with me to Japan, for example, for a, for a month in Japan. The scientific exchange program with Australia and New Zealand, several different South American countries. So, the microcomputer technology and my students that have worked me really, really helped on that. One of the areas we worked a lot with was finance and managerial accounting and related and using the computers in the beef cattle sector. My – I was very blessed all through my career that I stayed very, very close to the farmers and ranchers that we served, and they were my mentors, and everything that I did, I run it by them. And basically, I learned in life is to surround yourself by good students and also surround yourself by good ranchers that, that appreciate what you do and will give you open ideas in terms of what, how to do things. And so, I was always extremely successful then. The other thing was, A&M is such a powerful institution that is recognized internationally, and if you go to any kind of international place, ever been in the world, the doors open to, to people that are from the, from this institution that really has a high, high status among everybody. So, I had a very, very – very fulfilling life, with, all associated with Texas A&M. My son graduated in civil engineering, my daughter in biochemistry and later in a medical degree, she's a pediatrician. My wife is sold real estate in the community. And I really, I really have a very, a very fruitful and blessed opportunity, and I really thank God for the opportunity to work for Texas A&M.

What part of your experiences at Texas A&M do you value the most?

I think it's the students that I had, the graduate students I had, and because they were always, the weren't inhibited by technology or things that symbolize that some might say that something can't be done. And I had really, really fortunate that the new students, when they come in, my older students would help them, and I, I think that was probably the most rewarding is those young people, and to give you an idea, in Argentina a couple years ago I was down there, and the students got together, and I had 12 different graduate students in Argentina and we worked together. And when I want to look through those guys and what they've accomplished, I really – and I've always believed this, that through education is where mankind really fulfills its human capability. And I was really – it's really tremendous what those guys achieved. And when I go to any country now, I run into my former students or former A&M people. And I just, I just really realize that the most important thing that we can do for individuals is really ensure that they can get a good education, fulfill their human capabilities.

What advice to you have for a student of agricultural economics?

I think that the students right now – is to get a really, really good fundamental knowledge of the business side of agriculture. Take as much accounting and finance and those areas. Also engage people from outside of agriculture. Learn how to deal with other professions. So the comradeship that they can have at a school like Texas A&M is, is learn how to, to communicate with engineers and the computer people and the business school and, and those people because the doors will be wide open but you, you want to be broadly focused, and be able to

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communicated and understand, and be fulfilled by relationships with people from other disciplines and ways of life than your experienced with.

Is there anything else that you would like to tell A&M students?

Well I think the students are, are, that, know – I think that the world is, is much smaller. They were telling me the other day when I was in South Africa, you can look at the world as a tennis ball now, it's getting so small. And the other thing that we have to really, fully understand that, that people only fulfill if they can do things on their own. The freedom that we have and the freedom to take advantage of opportunities that come to us. The freedom to fulfill our human capability. We just have to constantly strive for that because we can't give people things. We just – people have to be rewarded from their own effort. They have to be motivated from their own effort. I, I worry a little bit about the, the fact that we feel like we can share wealth and somehow, we'll all be better off. I really think we need to focus more on the education so people can fulfill their own capabilities.

Thanks for listening!

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