

# TRANSCRIPT: JIMMY N. ROPPOLO INTERVIEW

Jimmy N. Roppolo · General Manager of Farmer Co-Op of El Campo

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## TRANSCRIPT

Interview with Mr. Jimmy N. Roppolo, General Manager of Farmers Co-op of El Campo. Roppolo is a 1969 graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

This video was posted June 15, 2011 on the Tyrus R. Timm Registry YouTube Channel.

Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career?

My name is Jimmy Roppolo and I graduated from A&M in 1970. Started out on a management training program with Farmland Industries, a producer's co-op in Bryan, Texas. And from there, I went to Baird, Texas, it's east of Abilene. It was a big move for me to move clear across the country and it seemed liked. But ended up being a very good experience with a small co-op. I'd set my goals to be a co-op manager and actually, in about two years, I was one. So, it was, it was pretty quick, pretty quick movement, and I stayed at Baird about six years. And from there, I worked for an independent friend for a little while and put together some businesses for him, an Ag Eco major. And then I came down to El Campo, working for Farmland Industries as a sales rep and calling on co-ops in the area. And after about two years, I was hired by a co-op down at Danevang and spent about six-seven years there and managed the co-op there for a while. Just kind of decided I need to move on, and I moved to an independent for about 18 months, and I worked for an independent fertilizer company as their sales manager over at Bay City and, and Crowley, Louisiana. After that, I ended up coming back to El Campo here, where I came in as the agronomy assistant manager. And came in July of 1985 and ended up being manager in December of 1985, and I've been here ever since.

Why did you choose to study agricultural economics?

Actually, when I graduated from college, advisors weren't what they are today – or when I graduated from high school, I'm sorry – and they recommended, my advisor, I made good grades, recommended, said you need to be an aerospace engineer or you need to be an engineer. That's where the money is at. So, I went to A&M and got in the Corps and decided that I was going to be a chemical engineer. I loved chemistry in high school, you know, I had a really good teacher. After about three semesters – after the first semester, you know, I did decent but not great. But it was, it was like wow this stuff is tough, you know. And then I decided that, you know, I really don't like chemistry. Agriculture is where my life, and I should have been a big hint. So, I changed to agriculture engineering, but it was the same calculus and physics and things like that. And of course, the other issue back in, back in those days, nobody advised how many hours to take, so I was taking like 18 hours and had three labs. And so, I was, you know, just to, and the Corps, and it was, it was probably too much for me. I like so many other people in this Registry, probably not a lot of them, but another honor I got at A&M, we got up and talked about our, our careers at A&M and what was going on when we were there, and a couple of the guys talked before me, and they, they both had been on scholastic probation. I said that must be a prerequisite for this, for this honor because I was on scholastic probation too. I actually had a senior in my Outfit that was an Ag Econ major, and he told me about some of the opportunities in Ag Economics. And I was called in and said Roppolo you got to make a C+ to stay in school. And I've never been approached like that my whole life, so it was a big failure to me, and I was pretty down. But I changed to Ag Eco and made Distinguished Student that next semester and things just, it was just what I liked and what I, what I really – I just started out in the wrong, and I know so many kids do that, start out in the wrong profession. But that's, that, I got into Ag Economics, and I really loved the courses, and I love making decisions for agriculture.

What activities at Texas A&M most influenced your career?

Well the, probably the one that stands out the most is the Ag Eco Club. In fact, that's where I was introduced to, to co-ops, never knew anything about co-ops. My dad farmed all these years and paid thousands, and thousands of dollars out and never did he get anything back. And we had a guy, one night at our Ag Eco Club, from Farmland Industries, and he came in and talked to us about co-ops and what, how co-ops help producers and their owners, and they get money back if, if the co-op makes money. And the co-op tries to be competitive. And it just really struck a bell in me. From that night on, from that night on, I decided that I wanted to be a co-op manager. So, that was probably the one activity that really, really saved my career. Of course, the Corps, I owe a lot to the Corps too. The Corps had me deal with so many people and in so many situations, upperclassmen were hollering in your face and whatever. And, you know, and I just got the point where I got callous to that, and I could, I could muster up a smile. And there's been many times in my career where, you know, a customer was really upset or something and, and we got into a shouting match, and I could just kind of take a deep breath and muster up a smile. And it really changed the whole complex of things.

What are your thoughts on being selected to the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry?

You know what, I was totally caught off guard. Ed and them got me there, and my wife. I should have known something. She was fairly anxious to go, you know, and my son went. But I swear I didn't have a one clue that I was going to get the award. I thought I was doing it for Blair, so he can see what's, what's some, some of the people that are getting this award, kind of boost him. He was at A&M at the time, and I thought well, this is going to be a good thing for us to go see him at school, gets us an opportunity to go down there, so. And, but, but the, the Ty Timm Registry is probably one of the most coveted awards that I've received over all the years that I've been in business. And, all, all the Department, you know, just been, they've always been there for me and been a lot of help to me. I'll call them from time to time. And it's just, it's just I can't explain. It's, you know, the awards I've gotten from A&M, it's probably the most prestigious awards that I received my whole career.

How have you managed to balance time for family, work, and other commitments?

That's a really hard question because I'm a workaholic by choice. I love to work. I love dealing with people. I have a cattle operation; I do redshirt Brangus. So, that's kind of my off time. We go to the A&M football games, and we'll spend the weekend there in a RV. And we do things. My wife cooks quite a bit, so we're always together at dinner and stuff. And we do keep things good. But near as much, not mere – near as much as I should because this job is so, it's so intensive, and it's seven, seven months out, I mean 12 months out of the year, seven days a week. I always take phone calls on Saturday and Sunday. On vacation, I take phone calls. My wife sometimes doesn't understand that, but I feel like when I call somebody that I'm looking for an answer, and I know when they call me, they're looking for an answer. And I don't want to, to be left out. So, it's, it's a really tough battle, excuse me, but the cattle are kind of my hobby. They're an expensive hobby, but I enjoy cattle and horses. But that's my get away time,

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and Aggie football. I don't hunt or I fish a little bit. But my wife, we just like her lifelong dream is to have a swimming pool, so we're making, doing that right now, so. She's, she says you can have your cattle, I got my swimming pool. So, we do, we do real good together.

What advice do you have for a student unsure of career decisions?

Basically what I tell students, and I, I told some young kids yesterday working for me at the elevator, they're high school kids or some are going into college, and I'm a little put out at some of the things they we're doing, you know, and I just call them in and say look, I'm really disappointed in you kids that you've got, you got an opportunity here. And I says, you know, there's one of you here that's hustling and showing off, and not showing off but showing that he is interested in working, and he's doing a good job, and he does it every step of the day, all day long. I said, now here, I said now this person, I said you have got, you know, you got the capability, and you play football, and you know what, what it takes. And I need you to hustle all day long. You got the capability, and I see little spurts, but I don't see the effort that I like to see. And I said this is an important job. But the main thing that I, first of all, try to get kids to get a college degree in some field. Hopefully it's a field that they've experienced. And I like to give them the opportunity to come to the co-op and visit, show what we're doing and show them the elevator and how were hedging grain and selling grain for people, and our hardware store and how we're having people breaking, making breakeven on feed and breakeven on cattle that we're feeding. And hedging those cattle, contracting those cattle and trying to, try to cover all the risks today that there are in farming. We talk to our producers every day, about. So, I think it, getting them involved. And I say internships are phenomenal. I think that's the way to go. We have an intern this year who's an Ag Eco major and just doing a great job. Every one I've ever had has done a great job, and they've gotten a good taste, because our co-op is so diversified, they get a good taste of all, all things of agriculture business. So, I recommend that internships are great and give it a lot of thought. And it, don't be afraid to change because I changed from Engineering to Ag Economics, so. I'm very excited that I did.

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

You know, I don't know how many young kids look, you know, checked our webpage out and stuff, but the thing that I see today from, from young gen, younger generation is the texting and things like that. And then communication face-to-face, it's not near what it should be, I think. The a, I know times are busy, and they got a lot of things on their plate. They can do a lot of different activities. The main thing is, I say or tell our people, always treat – I tell the students always treat people like you want to be treated. And, and that's talk to people like you want to be talked to. Answer phone calls immediately, don't just not call people back. And that's on of my very pet peeves. And some employees don't call the producer back when they got a question, I have no need for them. But do what you say you're going to do, be honest. Be honest with your people and have the intensity. You know, I told, I asked a class recently how many of you done something or did something today or yesterday that you're proud of, and I think one or two persons raised their hand. And I, you know, I'm proud of something out I do every day. And I tell students look for something to be proud of every day, look for people to help every day. And think about the people that are around you, that you're working with and

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talk to them in a manner that, that, that you respect them because I think showing respect earns respect. And I think, I have probably 70 people working here for me today, and I have no reason to think if I told them to tear down this room that it wouldn't be tore down tonight, you know, that's just the way. But that's the kind of drive I like to see students have. And be noticed when you're working. I think that's, that's one of the biggest things because every place I've been and everything I've done has been because somebody noticed what I was doing and the job I was doing. And I just take pride in that, and I think our, our students coming out should take pride and go in that direction. I see students come to class, sometimes they look pretty slouchy, and I understand that, but don't go to an interview looking like that.

Thanks for listening!

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Transcribed by  
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July 8, 2020