Fike Family Farm:
A *Porción* of Edinburg

Discovering the Rio Grande Valley

Reports from the

Community **H**istorical **A**rchaeology **P**roject with **S**chools Program

Report # 1

The Norquest Family: A Porción of Edinburg

Report # 2

The Cantu Family: A Porción of Edinburg

Report # 3

Atwood Acres: A Porción of Edinburg

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The Eubanks Family: A Porción of Edinburg

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Luna Family Legacy: A Porción of Edinburg

For more information on the **CHAPS** Program, visit us at www.utrgv.edu/chaps

Fike Family Farm:
A Porción of Edinburg

A report prepared for:

The Fike Family

And for UTRGV and the CHAPS Program class titled:

Discovering the Rio Grande Valley: The Natural and Cultural History of South Texas

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Dedication

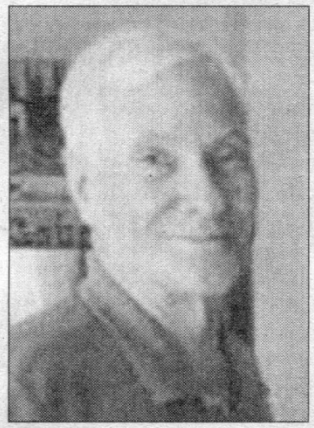
This report is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Kenneth "Rod" Summy, Professor of Biology (retired) at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and founding member of the CHAPS Program. Rod had been an active participant in our annual CHAPS class titled "Discovering the Rio Grande Valley." He participated as the professor of Biology for the Natural History portion of the class and worked directly with our students in the field, examined any/all biological (plant, animal, and insect) life on the family farms that we have researched in Edinburg, TX. We have fond memories of Dr. Summy as an integral part of our program. We could not have accomplished so much without him.

Dr. Kenneth "Rod" Summy

WESLACO — Dr. Kenneth "Rod" Summy, 71, passed away on Saturday June 30th, 2018.

Rod graduated from Pine Tree High School in Longview, TX in 1965 and served in the United States Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. After his tour of duty, he attended Stephen F. Austin University where he met his soul mate, Laura, and they were married six months later.

After receiving his BS degree in biology, Rod went on to earn an MS degree in Entomology, and a Ph.D. from Texas A&M University. Rod and Laura relocated to the Rio Grande Valley where he began his work with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a Research Entomologist and raised their two children Andrew and Patrick.



As a scientist, Rod worked on several projects with a focus on pest issues related to cotton, corn and citrus. In 2000, he began teaching biology at the University of Texas - Pan American where he taught 11 different courses, mentored graduate students, and conducted extensive research using remote sensing technology. Throughout his career, Rod had over 150 research publications. In 2016 he published a book titled "Fundamentals of Modern Scientific Communication" and established the Summy Endowment for Graduate Studies in Biology.

McCaleb FUNERAL HOME

Rod was an active member of the Sub Tropical Plant Society, serving as its President in 2012, and as the editor of the Subtropical Plant Science Journal since 2007. He was an avid outdoorsman and naturalist.

Rod is survived by his loving wife of 46 years, Laura, his sons, Andrew and Patrick, and his sisters Marilyn Jenkins and Suzanne Russell, and two grandsons. Rod is preceded in death by his parents, Kenneth and Olga Summy.

Sign the guestbook at www.themonitor.com/obituaries.

A Letter to My Family

December 2017

Open letter to my sons, my grandsons, granddaughter and the great grandsons and great granddaughter:

To my sons: You all have exceeded my dreams for your life. God has blessed you and me.

Michael, you were and are my firstborn. I loved you from the first moment Dr. Hamme laid you in my arms. That love only grew stronger as the years went by. I am proud that you followed in your father's love of farming. You have a wonderful wife, Karen, who was the answer to my prayers for you. You and Karen gave me a granddaughter. I remember the day she was born. Your dad and I were at the "Brush" and I had just laid down in a hammock to take a nap and you came to me and told me we had a girl. Joy, joy, joy in my heart! My Rachel. Later came Daniel and Joshua. My cup truly runneth over!

George, my son, who made me wait and wait for you to be born. The wait was worth it, you were precious from the very beginning, and you, too, have the love of farming in your heart. Your wife, Wendy, has been the helpmate you needed. Then came my grandsons, Adam and Mathew. Again, God blessed us and gave great joy in our hearts!

Harry, my son, who has preceded us into Heaven, and who told me "Mom, don't weep for me, I have the victory, either way. God will heal me or take me home." He had stayed farming also. He went to be with our Lord and Savior, Jesus on June 19, 2003.

Sam, a.k.a. Frank Samuel Fike, my little surprise, not in my plans, but God knew best. Another little farmer! Alleluia! You have supported me in my aging years.

So, my sons, I love you all best and words cannot express my unfailing love for all of you and I thank God for all of you. I have never been disappointed by any of you.

To my grandsons. If you read the words I wrote to your fathers, take them to your hearts, store them safely and remember that your grandmother loved each and every one of you beyond belief.

To my granddaughter Rachel. You cannot know how very, very proud you have made me. How can I count the blessings you have given me, your husband, D.J. Villareal, whom I love, and who calls me "Grandma", too. In love, you are serving your country as a lieutenant, your obtaining a master's degree, working at the college as a professor, etc., but you, too came back to the farm to live; building a lovely home right across the road from me. Then we must tell about your two boys, Warren and Woodrow, my great grandsons. The coming generation who appear to be heading for greener fields.

To my grandsons, Adam, Daniel, Joshua, and Mathew who are continuing to farm with their fathers, (except Adam, who is farming but chose to farm in McCook). You all are my favorite grandson, and I love each and every one of you. Need I say how very proud of all of you who have chosen to stay in farming although the challenges are growing day by day! Lastly you all have chosen wives who support you and who have given you and me the great grandchildren listed below.

Great grandsons and great granddaughters: Woodrow & Warren, Betsyanna & Beverlybelle, Hannis & Harper, and Teddy & Cooper, YOU, my little ones, are the future of Fike Farms. Hopefully some of you (if not all) will carry forward the standards we have honored and obeyed. Love your Lord and Savior, love your neighbors, love each other, uphold the faith we are giving you.

Love is forever.
Grandma Annie

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Daniel Cardenas, Assistant Art Director for the design of the front cover of this report as well as to Elisa Flores and Dr. Kimberly Selber of the Univeristy of Texas Rio Grande Valley's *The Studio* Marketing and Communications Department for their support of all projects developed by the CHAPS team. We would also like to thank all members of the Fike Family who participated in this project. Thanks to Lupe Flores, Shantal Brisette and Rocio Diaz at the Border Studies Archive for their ongoing support and assistance with the oral history interview process for this class. Special thanks to Dr. Frank Dirrigl who assisted our students with the identification of the animal bones that we found out in the field.

Foreword

The Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools (CHAPS) program is dedicated to sharing the history of the Rio Grande Valley including the multiple contributions made by the region and its populace over the years. Their publications have provided an overview of the role of the region during the Civil War era as well as a vivid historical accounting of farming families in the region. This current volume focuses on the journey of the two families, the Fike's and the Rork's, who came together with the marriage of Willard Fike and Anna Rork in 1951. Both families immigrated to the US in the 1830s, settling in the Valley in the mid-1900s.

Exploring the role of farming families in the region is of utmost importance. Not only does this offer intriguing insight into the daily lives of individuals who were instrumental in the growth of Edinburg, it also provides a detailing of how farming has changed over the years. The text describes how advances in areas specific to farming such as transportation, agronomy, and technology have changed the way farming is done today. In addition, we gain an understanding of how nature and man have impacted farming, as contextualized through the lives of the Fike family.

There are several aspects of this and previous volumes that I feel demonstrate the power of this work. One is the chronicling of farming within our region as experienced by one family. Another is the fact that this work signifies an interdisciplinary approach across multiple disciplines. Farming does not happen in isolation. Social interactions; scientific advances; local, state, national, and global demands; and climate change are all part of the story. A story that must be understood if we are to address the current day challenges faced in agriculture today.

Most importantly, I applaud CHAPS engaging their students in authentic and relevant inquiry that is place based. These students are developing their expertise as researchers as they become immersed in the heritage, culture, and experiences of farming families. This participatory approach ensures that we will have a cadre of individuals able and willing to continue to explore and chronicle the rich history of this often misunderstood and misrepresented region.

Patricia Alvarez McHatton
Executive Vice President Academic Affairs and Student Success
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Preface

Farming is at the very soul of the United States. From the shores of the Atlantic to the prairies of the Midwest and the Great Plains the image of the yeoman farmer permeates American history. In the greater Southwest those English-speaking farmers would encounter their Spanish-speaking counterparts in the 1850s. Those civilian *vecinos* had, served as the vanguard of the Spanish empire establishing towns, farms, and ranches in what would become California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. It was in this milieu that the Rio Grande region was settled in the 1750s. A century and a half later, following the construction of railroads and irrigation systems the descendent of those first settlers were joined by new farmers speaking a polyglot of languages.

Here at the beginning of the 20th century the "Magic Valley" was born. The guarantee of successful year-round farming enticed farming families to abandon their farms in temperate states and flock via train to the international border between the United States and Mexico. The Fikes of Ohio, and the Rorks of Nebraska were two such families who sought to make good on that promise. From them the union of Willard Fike and Anna Rork created over four generations a strong, sustainable, award-winning farming family.

Farming involves long days, often pre-dawn until well after sundown. It is not glamorous. It is risky and unpredictable. These challenges are compounded by evolving regulations and geopolitics regarding tariffs and trade imbalances which can thwart even the most carefully planned plantings and harvests. It is no wonder that American family-owned farms are dwindling. Yet, the Fike Family is prospering as it begins its fourth generation of farming. In 2017 students in the seventh-annual study of an Edinburg-based farming family discovered a resiliency among the Fikes that is largely unknown in the 21st century.

Our students in this Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools Program-sponsored UTRGV course "Discovering the Rio Grande Valley" have produced in cooperation with the Fike Family a comprehensive report that follows the Fike and Rork families from their ancestral homes in Alsatian France and Ireland to Edinburg.

On behalf of my colleagues Russell K. Skowronek (Anthropology and History), Juan L. Gonzalez (School of Earth, Environmental and Marine Sciences - Geology), and the late Kenneth R. Summy, Ph.D. (Biology), we thank the College of Liberal Arts, College of Science, and the Border Studies Archive at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley for their continued support of this interdisciplinary project as well as our inaugural farming family for this entire project, Carrol and Odie Norquest. Without them, this project would not endure.

Roseann Bacha-Garza
CHAPS Program Manager
Lecturer I – History

Juan L. Gonzalez
CHAPS Co-Director
Associate Professor
Geology & Environmental Science

Russell K. Skowronek
CHAPS Founding Director
Associate Dean
Interdisciplinary Programs and Community Engagement

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Introduction

Mayela Cavazos

The following report about Fike Farms represents the newest addition to a growing tradition of research on the local farming families of Edinburg. The Community Historical Archaeology Program with Schools (CHAPS) class at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) has researched families over the past seven years, using an interdisciplinary approach of history, anthropology, geology, and biology. While initially it was difficult to find families to participate in the CHAPS research, many families now recognize the importance of preserving their heritage. The CHAPS research has focused on the evolution of farming in the Rio Grande Valley and the area's ranching history.

The families previously studied come from diverse ethnic backgrounds and include the Norquest family, the Cantu family, the Atwood family, the Eubanks family, the Bair family, and the Roegiers family. The Norquests, of Swedish-German heritage, settled in Edinburg in 1925, farming the land around present-day University Drive.[1] The Cantus, a Mexican-American family, immigrated to the United States in the 1920s following the Mexican Revolution, settling off Highway 107.[2] The Atwoods, of German heritage, settled in land west of Edinburg in 1925.[3] The Eubanks family moved to Edinburg in 1978, buying land north of Monte Cristo Road.[4] The Bairs, of German descent, moved to Edinburg in 1920, living off Chapin Rd.[5]The Roegiers, of Belgian heritage, settled northeast of Edinburg in 1920.[6]

The research of these families has illustrated various themes regarding farming in Edinburg. For example, the CHAPS research has established the historical background of each family and what drew them to the region. The Eubanks family provided a unique insight on what attracted them to Edinburg, as they considered settling in various other locations, including Washington and Florida, but they chose Edinburg due to the soil, climate, and irrigation.[7] Many members of the families studied have also been actively involved in the community. Irene Atwood, for example, helped expand Edinburg Regional College to Pan American College, a four-year institution, and she served on the committee

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[1] Sandra Hernandez-Salinas et al. *The Norquest Family: A Porción of Edinburg. A Report Prepared for the Norquest Family and for The University of Texas-Pan American, Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools Program* (University of Texas-Pan American: Edinburg, 2012), 1, 5, 9.

[2] Jenarae Alaniz et al. *The Cantú Family: A Porción of Edinburg. A Report Prepared for the Cantu Family and for the University of Texas-Pan American, Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools Program* (The University of Texas-Pan American: Edinburg, 2012), 10, 11.

[3] J. D. Garcia et al. *Atwood Acres: A Porción of Edinburg: A Report Prepared for the Atwood Family and for the University of Texas-Pan American, Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools Program,* (The University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, 2014), 10, 12.

[4]Janette Garcia et al. *The Eubanks Family: A Porción of Edinburg. A report prepared for the Eubanks Family and for the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Community Archaeology Project with Schools Program,* (The University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley: Edinburg, 2016), 59.

[5] Ismael Aleman et al. *The Bair Farms: A Porción of Edinburg. A report prepared for the Bair Family and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Community Archaeology Project with Schools Program,* (The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley: Edinburg, 2016), 43, 13.

[6] Annaiz Araiza et al. *Roegiers Family Farm: A Porción of Edinburg. A report prepared for the Roegiers Family and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Community Archaeology Project with Schools Program,* (The University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley: Edinburg, 2017), Page 2 of Introduction, Page 10 of Chapter 1.

[7] *The Eubanks Family: A Porción of Edinburg*, 9, 59.

that decided the school's name, official colors, and mascot.[8] Furthermore, the studies have shown the evolution of farming over the years, such as the change of farming equipment. The Bair family began farming with mule-drawn plows when they moved to Edinburg, then switched to Oliver-Hatpar, Ford, and John Deere tractors.[9] The CHAPS research has also recorded the various crops that families have grown and how they have distributed their products. The Cantus discussed growing citrus, cotton, corn, and grain and distributing their products through a trucking business to places like El Campo and Houston.[10] In addition, the research has recorded how various families have interacted with the natural environment, especially with regard to the effects of various natural disasters in the area. The Roegiers' lost many of their citrus trees in the freezes that struck the Valley in the 1950s and 1980s, but they were relatively sheltered from the flooding caused by Hurricane Beulah.[11] Lastly, the CHAPS research has shown the effects of urbanization on farming as a way of life, highlighting the encroachment of land development on farmland, which has caused some families to sell their farms and to leave farming completely. Urbanization significantly impacted the Norquest family as the land they used to farm is now centered on University Drive and includes various businesses and schools, such as UTRGV.[12]

The following report illustrates how the Fike family shares these experiences as they continue farming on the eastern edge of Edinburg. The report covers the journey of the Fike and Rork families to Edinburg, their chain of land ownership, the families' traditions and practices, the Fike's agriculture practices, their family business, their interaction with nature, and a summary of the fieldwork conducted by the class. The Fike family is originally from the Alsace-Lorraine area of France. They immigrated to the United States in 1835 and settled in Ohio before moving to the Rio Grande Valley in the mid 1940s.[13] The Rork family is originally from Ireland. They immigrated to the United States in the 1830s, living in Nebraska and Arkansas before moving to the Valley in the late 1930s.[14] The two families came together through the marriage of Willard Fike and Anna Rork in 1951.[15] The Fikes currently farm on the eastern edge of Edinburg off of Sharp Road, Mile 17 ½ Road, and Val Verde Road. The Fike family has maintained a tradition of community service, as Willard Fike served as president of the Irrigation District Board for many years,[16] and the Fikes have been helping with the Edinburg Beef Club's fundraiser barbecues for over twenty years.[17] While they dedicate much of their time to their work on the farm, during any spare time, they enjoy activities such as family barbecues, hunting, and fishing.[18] Fike Farms' primary crops are corn and sorghum, though they also grow citrus and avocados,[19] and have grown cotton and vegetable crops in the past.[20] They run a reputable business and have won the National Sorghum Producers' yield contest in consecutive years.[21] During their years farming, the Fikes have overcome several natural disasters, including Hurricane Beulah and

[8] *Atwood Acres: A Porción of Edinburg*, 81.
[9] *Bair Farms: A Porción of Edinburg*, 48-50.
[10] *The Cantú Family: A Porción of Edinburg*, 12.
[11] *Roegiers Family Farm: A Porción of Edinburg*, Page 17 of The Process.
[12] *The Norquest Family: A Porción of Edinburg*, 9.
[13] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[14] Anna Fike, interview by Laura Leal, Lizette Garcia, and Lesley Robles, October 20, 2017.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Matthew Fike and Leslie Fike, interview by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19] Anna Fike, conversation with Roseann Bacha-Garza, November 14, 2017.
[20] Sue Rork Everett, interview by Mayela Cavazos, Gabriela Chapa, and Jordan Kennedy-Reyes, November 2, 2017.
[21] Matthew Fike and Leslie Fike.

the severe flooding that resulted from it,[22] as well as severe freezes in the 1980s that killed their citrus trees.[23] The Fike family also faces the threat of urbanization, as plans for State Highway 68 would potentially split their land.[24] However, multiple generations of Fikes are still actively involved in farming, and they are passionate about continuing, maintaining the philosophy of hard work and perseverance that has helped them withstand the test of time until now.

[22] Sue Rork Everett.
[23] Matthew Fike and Leslie Fike.
[24] Anna Fike,

Chapter 1: The Journey

Roxanne Recinos, Laura Leal, and Lesley Robles

Introduction

While the Fike family today claims Edinburg, Texas as 'home', their journey to South Texas has taken them across the Atlantic Ocean (from Alsace-Lorraine, France) and throughout the United States (from New York, to Ohio and eventually Texas). It is this excursion and the events that occurred along the way that brought them to the 'Magic Valley', where several generations of Fike's have enjoyed living, being active members of the community and continuing their proud family tradition of farming. The chapter that follows will begin by briefly discussing the history of Alsace-Lorraine, France to explore the Fike's European homeland and as a means of highlighting several factors that may have caused them to immigrate from this region to the United States. This section will also outline the Fike and Rork's family's journeys that led them to eventually settle in South Texas.

History of Alsace-Lorraine, France

Alsace-Lorraine has a tumultuous and complex past with both France and Germany due to being caught between two warring countries. The region, which encompasses the departments of Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin and Moselle in present day France, began as part of France but was ceded to Germany after the Franco-German War in 1871. After World War I, it was returned to France but was once again ceded to Germany during World War II. Finally, in 1945 it was returned to France and has remained ever since. However, even before being ceded to Germany, the region of Alsace-Lorraine suffered from the political and social upheaval that was affecting all of France, including the July Revolution of 1830 which led to Louis Philippe I declaring himself king.[25] Naturally, the political instability of France during the early 1800s led to two large waves of emigration from Alsace. The first wave of Alsatians immigrated to Russia and the second wave of Alsatians immigrated to America.[26] One of the families that left Alsace during the 1830s was the Fike family who immigrated to Ohio, and later, the Rio Grande Valley.

Despite the region of Alsace-Lorraine being French before it was jointly annexed to Germany, it was originally two separate non-French entities. Alsace was a Germanic region that became Romanized after it was conquered by Julius Caesar in the 1st century. It remained under Roman rule until it was taken over by the Alemanni, a group of Germanic peoples who gave the area its German language, in the 5th century. However, this was only for a short period of time and in 496, they were conquered by the Franks and converted into a Frankish duchy. During this time, Alsace was greatly influenced by the church and became Christianized. Under the Treaty of Mersen in 870,

[25] Gordon Wright et al. "France," *Encyclopedia Britannica.* Accessed December 7, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/place/France

[26] "A History of Alsace," Accessed December 7, 2017. https://www.smithancestry.com/places/alsace/history.htm

Alsace was joined with other German territories and was thereafter overseen by the Holy Roman Empire until the 17th century. The German Empire, which Alsace was a significant part of, was established in the 11th century. By the late 16th century, French influence began to loom over Alsace as a result of the Wars of Religion and the Thirty Years War. During these wars, the people of Alsace feared for their freedom and sought aid from France. This resulted in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which gave France informal control over Alsace. After the French Revolution, France gained full control of Alsace but allowed it to remain autonomous.

Lorraine was part of Lotharingia, or Lothar's kingdom, which was named after emperor Lothar I's son (also named Lothar). Lothar I was one of Charlemange's grandsons, who inherited Media Francia. Charlemange's other two grandsons received the lands of Francia Orientalis (East) and Francia Occidentalis (West), which became Germany and France respectively. Lothar I gave the southern portion of Media Francia (Italy) to his eldest son and the northern portion (what became known as Lotharingia) to Lothar. After Lothar's death, rule over his kingdom was contested for several years before it eventually fell under another German king, King Henry I, who turned it into a duchy. In 955, the archbishop Bruno, who had been gifted Lotharingia from his brother and King Henry I's successor, Otto I, divided Lotharignia into lower Lorraine and upper Lorraine. By the 13th century, lower Lorraine had been dissolved and thus upper Lorraine simply became Lorraine. In the 18th century, France gained control of Lorraine and divided it into departments during the French Revolution. In 1871, after the Franco-German War, the Department of Moselle, Lorraine was annexed together with the province of Alsace by Germany and thus, Alsace-Lorraine was born. In reality, much of what was considered Lorraine remained with France.

In the period between the end of the French Revolution (1799) and the beginning of the Franco-German War (1870), France was in a state of great political turmoil. The French Revolution resulted in the Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802), which endured after the end of the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) which put France in conflict with several other European powers.[27] This period of 23 years put a lot of economic stress on France, which the inhabitants of Alsace surely felt. Between 1800 and 1820, there was a large wave of emigration out of Alsace, mainly to Russia.[28] After the exile of Napoleon, France took steps towards more liberal politics, but this all changed after the king's nephew was assassinated. The liberals turned towards conspiracy and the government became heavily repressive. After King Louis XVIII died, his younger brother, Charles X, became king and ruled without regard to the public's discontentment. During his reign, there was a revival of Roman Catholicism which he heavily endorsed yet he continued to lose favor with the French people and eventually made his last mistake when he appointed a fanatic reactionary to his cabinet rather than the candidate that was favored by the people. During this time, and until the 1850s, the second wave of Alsastians began to immigrate to America.

In 1830, the July Revolution began and effectively overthrew Charles X's rule. Louis-Philippe then declared himself king and ruled until 1848. Initially, Louis-Philippe

[27] Gordon Wright et al. "France," *Encyclopedia Britannica.* Accessed December 7, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/place/France

[28] "A History of Alsace," Accessed December 7, 2017. https://www.smithancestry.com/places/alsace/history.htm

was well-liked and was even dubbed the "Citizen King" for his supposed liberal views. However, it soon became apparent that he was not prepared to simply rule symbolically and he began appointing ministers who believed in royal power. This led to several assassination attempts as well as widespread resentment towards the king which in turn incited many protests. Stability was not found until 1840 when the regime's enemies finally became discouraged and Francois Guizot rose as a prominent figure in the ministry. Guizot was a defender of the status quo and encouraged becoming part of the wealthy elite which the government facilitated by granting railway and mining concessions and providing partial development costs. This generated an economic boom and the beginning of an industrialized France. However, since 1830, unrest had continued to grow with the spread of socialist and feminist thought which led to a desire for a broadening of the political elite. In 1846, there was an economic crisis due to crop failure and a moral crisis among the governing elite. Finally, the alienation of the nation's intellectuals, including Victor Hugo, led to a glorification and romanticization of the common class. All this resulted in Louis-Philippe abdicating out of fear of a civil war in 1848.

Later, when it came time to elect a new constituent assembly, the people elected conservatives who eliminated the social reform that was barely being enacted. This triggered a momentary civil war in Paris (known as June Days) in which the rebels were quickly crushed. From 1848-1852, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte ruled as president and at the end of his term, he staged a coup which allowed him to become emperor of France as Napoleon III.[29] He led an authoritarian rule until 1859, after which he attempted to liberalize France. During this time, Napoleon III was largely unsuccessful in foreign affairs, which eventually led to the Franco-German War. Between the end of the Franco-German War and World War I, France suffered economically from the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and from a significant amount of anti-German sentiment.[30] France resented the fact that Germany had control of Alsace-Lorraine, which they considered to be French, although it had deep German roots. This sentiment was echoed throughout much of Alsace-Lorraine, despite its Germanic origins, and thousands of its inhabitants emigrated back to France and elsewhere. However, the Roman Catholics of Alsace-Lorraine no longer felt religiously unified with France after France instated anti-clerical policies and instead began to identify and assimilate with Germany.

During World War I, Alsace-Lorraine was torn between two countries, with thousands fighting for both the Germans and the French. In the German armies, desertion rates were high and thousands fled to avoid the war altogether. Those from Alsace-Lorraine who fought with Germany were nonetheless viewed with suspicion, as were those from Alsace-Lorraine who fought with France. Germany took several measures against French supporters (and Alsace-Lorraine in general), including outlawing the French language and imprisoning anyone that they considered to be displaying any sort of French pride or nationalism, no matter how minute. After Germany lost the war, France was quick to reacquire and reintegrate Alsace-Lorraine. However, this was easier said than done. Alsace-Lorraine was undeniable different, as it

[29] "Napoleonic Wars," *Encyclopedia Britannica.* Accessed December 7, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/event/Napoleonic-Wars

[30] "Alsace-Lorraine," *Encyclopedia Britannica.* Accessed December 7, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/place/Alsace-Lorraine

had been affected not only by its German environment but by the war. Thousands of Germans now lived in Alsace-Lorraine which made its current ties to Germany inescapable. France wanted to abolish any reminder of Germany from Alsace-Lorraine, but there were many things (such as the vast majority of the population speaking and writing in German) that France could not change. This inevitably raised tensions and caused Alsace-Lorraine to unsuccessfully seek autonomy with France as it had previously done (semi-successfully) with Germany. During World War II, Germany once again gained control of Alsace-Lorraine, although this was short lived since in 1945, after the end of WWII, Alsace-Lorraine made its final transition back to France.

In modernity, Alsace-Lorraine has ended up with an interesting national identity. Too French for Germany and too German for France, Alsace-Lorraine exists in a state of liminality, neither here nor there. Although the region often sought autonomy, with varying degrees of success, with both France and Germany, it never truly became autonomous. Even today, it remains part of France but isn't truly French. Now, Alsace-Lorraine is part of a larger region called Grand Est, or Alsace-Champagne-Ardenne-Lorraine. It was formed in 2016 in an attempt to reduce bureaucratic redundancies and costs by reducing the number of regions in France. It remains technically French, although only the Rhine River separates Alsace-Lorraine from its German roots. Despite relocating to its more recent home of France, Alsace-Lorraine had already picked up as well as enforced older established Germanic aspects. In Alsace, many places and people still have German names and the German dialect of Alsatian is still considered the *lingua franca*. Alsace remains a picturesque region, reminiscent of an old, fairytale-like village with beautiful Germanic architecture. This architectural style can even be seen in the United States in Castroville, Texas, aptly nicknamed "Little Alsace".[31] It was settled in the 1800s by Alsastians, mainly through the efforts of Henri Castro who was a French native himself. Lorraine is more reminiscent of France, although it does contain some German names as well. Lorraine's *lingua franca*, however, has been French for centuries.[32] Despite the differences in language, German is still spoken and taught in both areas. Alsace and Lorraine had a complicated relationship with each other, as well as with France and Germany, but they came together as a land between lands, and now exist as a place where the differences between people and countries have come together to create something truly unique. However, the political instability that affected France ensured the emigration of thousands of people who suffered due to the economic, political and social turmoil. These days, Alsace-Lorraine (as part of Grand Est), is stable and peaceful and it remains as a distant memory to the families, like the Fikes, who emigrated from France.

[31] "A Little Alsace of Texas," *San Antonio Magazine.* Accessed December 7, 2017. http://www.sanantoniomag.com/April-2017/A-Little-Alsace-of-Texas

[32] "Alsace-Lorraine," *Encyclopedia Britannica.* Accessed December 7, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/place/Alsace-Lorraine

The Fike's Journey

"… and he came to Ohio… and he bought a farm."[33]

Like many other Americans during the nineteenth century, Michael Fike (the great-great grandfather of Willard Fike) immigrated to the United States from his home of Alsace-Lorraine, France, presumably in pursuit of a better life for himself, his wife Eva and their children. Furthermore, (given the previously discussed tumultuous history of Alsace-Lorraine) it is likely that the Fike's first came to America seeking stability, away from the looming conflict of their homeland. Despite the fact that the Fike's immigrated a whole thirty-one years prior to the Franco-Prussian war, it is likely that the tensions in this region that were the precursors to impending conflict were able to be felt by individuals who lived in Alsace-Lorraine during this time period. These tensions likely motivated the Fike's to begin their journey to the United States that would eventually bring them all the way to South Texas. To further support this theory, the violence in Alsace-Lorraine is even present within their family-lore. According to one story passed down within the Fike family, Steven Fike (one of Michael and Eva's sons) perished in a clash that took place in Alsace-Lorraine sometime prior to the Fike's immigrating to America. According to Anna Fike on this particular story, "[Michael Fike] decided to come where we weren't fighting… and he came to Ohio… and he bought a farm".[34] Despite the lack of physical records corroborating this story, one can be certain that it was most likely due to the hostility and instability that was prevalent in Alsace-Lorraine, France, that Michael Fike made the decision to relocate to the United States by way of New York in 1839.

"It's a good country up there."[35]

Figure 1.1: Mildred Hannah Fike (Willard Fike's Mother) in a horse drawn carriage (exact date unknown)

[33] Anna Fike interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[34] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[35] *Ibid.*

After their arrival in New York, the Fike's originally settled in Canaan, Ohio in 1839. It was here where they purchased their first farm on American soil and worked as dairy farmers and grew food for cattle.[36] It is in Ohio where Harry Fike (who was the son of George Fike and was born on July 21st, 1892) met Mildred Hannah Snyder (born September 10th, 1897). According to their marriage license (that still remains in the possession of the family), Harry and Mildred were married on November 9th, 1918. They eventually had nine children (Evelyn, Betty, Harry Jr., Willard, George, Janet, Mary, Shirley, Patsy), all of which were born in Ohio. Willard Fike (the Fike family patriarch) was born on March 15th, 1931 in Smithville, Ohio.

Figure 1.2: Mildred Hannah and Harry Fike at their 50th wedding anniversary (May 1975)

[36] Anna Fike interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017, and "Notes of Meeting with Roseann Bacha-Garza and Anna Fike," August, 2017.

According to Anna Fike, Ohio was the ideal place for agriculture. As she stated, "it's a good country up there", complete with fertile land and reliable rainfall.[37] Furthermore, it was the abundance of German communities within Ohio that attracted the Fike's to this part of the country as well. In a sense, Ohio was the ideal place for the Fike's to relocate to after immigrating to the United States and begin their tradition of farming that endures to this day.

According to Anna, she and her husband Willard would periodically visit Ohio about every two years, once even staying with an Amish family. During family visits to Ohio, Anna and Willards sons (Michael, George, Harry and Sammy) enjoyed exploring and playing in the woods located on their Uncle George's property. George Fike had a wooded area that he converted into a park for the family to enjoy.[38] Overall, Ohio would serve as the setting for many fond memories for the Fike family, especially for Willard Fike. To Willard, Ohio would always be considered his "home".[39]

Figure 1.3: Anna Fike and her sons (Michael, George, Sammy and Harry) during a visit to Ohio (c. 1960s)

[37] Anna Fike interview by Cynthia M. Sanchz and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[38] Anna Fike, telephone interview by Laura Leal, December 7, 2017.
[39] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.

"Welcome to Edinburg"[40]

Figure 1.4: Willard, Anna and their sons (Michael, George and Sammy) eating watermelon (c.1950s)

Initially, the Fike's became interested in relocating to South Texas after hearing several rumors that were circulating in their community in Ohio regarding the 'Magic Valley'. According to George Adam Fike, "Mr. Bensen was spreading rumors in Ohio area… [stating that] you can grow anything down here in the Valley and that is what they wanted to take advantage of".[41] When the Fike's first arrived in South Texas in the 1940's, they lived on a property located on Highway 107 (east of Edinburg, Texas).[42] The original home they lived in is still standing there to this day.

The Fike's transition from living and working in the agricultural industry in Ohio to the Rio Grande Valley took some time to get used to (for instance, the subject of irrigation). According to Anna Fike, "Ohio has seasons, they have snow in the winter and they have plenty of rain, they don't irrigate at all it's all from God's hands".[43] Despite the drastic differences in the climates of Ohio and South Texas, the Fike's began their venture into the

[40] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[41] George Fike, interview by Alvino Flores, Juan Matta, and Eric Acosta, November 7, 2017.
[42] Anna Fike, telephone interview by Laura Leal, December 7, 2017, and "Notes of Meeting with Roseann Bacha-Garza and Anna Fike," August, 2017.
[43] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.

agricultural industry of the 'Magic Valley' on ten acres of land where they grew citrus.[44] Along with citrus, the Fike's have grown a plethora of different crops over the years, including cotton (which was, according to his grandson Joshua Fike, one of Willard Fike's favorite crops to grow), corn, milo and various vegetables through the help of irrigation.[45]

When Anna and Willard Fike married in 1951, they moved to Red Gate, where they were eventually joined by Willard's parents shortly after.[46] Anna and Willard briefly moved back to the original property on Highway 107 for a short period of time before eventually purchasing the property in Edinburg in 1953 where the family farm remains to this day.[47] According to Anna Fike, ten acres of the farmland they currently own and work on was purchased from a man who had admired her husband and agreed to finance the farm.[48] Then, yet another ten acres of land were purchased by a man named Judge Baird, completing the twenty acres of farmland they currently own. According to Anna Fike, Baird "thought [Willard] was a good man and a hard worker and gave us the same deal [as the previous man whom they purchased the ten acres from]".[49] Overall, it seems as though the land that currently makes up the Fike's farm was acquired through the hard work of Willard Fike, along with the admiration he garnered from his neighbors and friends.

Figure 1.5: Joshua, Daniel, George. Sam and Mathew Fike (November 14, 2017)

[44] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[45] Joshua Fike, interview by Benito Contreras, David Hernandez, and Osiel Uribe, November 6, 2017.
[46] Anna Fike, telephone interview by Laura Leal, December 7, 2017.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[49] *Ibid.*

As stated previously, agriculture remains a major aspect of the Fike's identity as a family. According to Anna Fike, all of the Fike men have worked on or currently still work on the farm.[50] Adam Fike continues farming on his own property in McCook, Texas.[51] As for the future, many members of the family hope to continue their tradition as farmers with the younger generation. The wish to keep this long-standing family tradition alive is best summed up by Daniel Fike who stated: "…we love this… we need to keep growing so we can keep going you know".[52]

The Rork's Journey

"… so they got on a ship and came to the New York port."[53]

The Rorks began their own journey to the United States a year after the Fike's had begun their own. It was in the 1840s when Patrick O'Rourke immigrated from County Cork, Ireland to the United States of America. During this time, England (which was in possession of Ireland) was gathering men to serve in their military. Patrick O'Rourke had no intention of serving in the British military. According to their own family lore, Patrick was a stowaway on an uncle's ship to avoid serving in the English army. He left Ireland with a cousin and ventured forward to America landing first in Rochester, New York where he married Elizabeth Dingy and had three children; Hanna (b. 1855 New York d. 1926 Nebraska), Sadie (b. 1860 Pennsylvania d. 1938 Wyoming) and Francis Fermont Rork (b. 1865 Pennsylvania d, 1958 Arkansas). The last child, Francis Fermont Rork, married Catherine Elizabeth 'Kate" O'Neil (b. 1873 Wisconsin d. 1942 Hatfield, Arkansas) in St. Libory, Nebraska in 1895. He was the Mayor of Hatfield, Arkansas when they lived there and had 12 children, the fourth of whom was William (Bill) Rork (b. 1900 Nebraska d. 1995 Texas), Anna Fike's father.[54]

William (Bill) Rork married Ruth Ann Lee Scott (b. 1912 Arkansas d. 2000 Texas) in Oklahoma in 1931 and had five children: Anna, Frank, Sue, Bobby and Johnny. The next year they moved to Overton, Texas where Bill ran the Reynold's & Rork trucking company. The Great Depression took over America during this time and many families from all social classes were greatly affected by it, including the Rork's. The Great Depression took a toll on Bill Rork's trucking business and resulted in the loss of the Oilfield Equipment Supply Company. Desperate to make ends meet for the sake of his wife and children, he followed the advice from one of his friends to move to the "Magic Valley." According to Anna Fike, the man that got ahold of her father said that "everything grows! You just put a pencil in [the ground] and it'll sprout roots!"[55]

[50] Anna Fike, telephone interview by Laura Leal, December 7, 2017.
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Daniel Fike, interview by Cris Avalos, November 6, 2017.
[53] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[54] Frank Rork, email with Anna Fike, August 23, 2017.
[55] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.

Bill Rork moved to the Rio Grande Valley first in 1936 and promised his wife and children to have a house ready for them when it was time for them to join him. The time came, and he did not have a house for them to settle in yet, but he was able to obtain 40 acres for 50 cents per acre on the Santa Cruz land from a man that was able to loan him the money to make the purchase. Anna Fike was four when she moved to the Rio Grande Valley. Anna fondly remembers this time in her life as one full of adventure and mischief growing up in the farm. For her mother, Ruth Ann Lee, it was difficult to adjust to living without a home, having only a tent to sleep under and a campfire to cook in. She persevered to nurture her children to the best of her abilities and maintained a garden year-round filled with fruits and vegetables. Anna recollects the sight of coyotes and people traveling from Mexico camping next to them during this time in the Rorke family's lives. A year later, Ruth Ann Lee finally got her dream home. Today, Anna Fike owns the home, where it still stands to this day on route F.M. 1925 and Monte Cristo road.

One of the first crops planted by William Rork on this property was corn. They also farmed cabbage, sweet corn and other veggetables. During these early years, they also owned cattle and pigs. Bill was able to farm until World War II. When the war began, there was a military base on Moore Field in McCook. Anna Fike recalls her father "[driving] a bus back and forth" during this time period as a means of aiding the war effort.[56] As Anna Fike recollects: "that was how we spent the war… Daddy driving the bus, taking the soldiers out and bringing them back."[57]

"Whirlwind romance"[58]

Willard and Anna Fike met and began their "whirlwind romance" when she was eighteen-years-old.[59] According to Anna, Willard would ride his motorcycle (Figure 1.6) along the road that went up to the woods on the ranch. She recollects how "this guy kept driving his motorcycle, loud as he could ride it... past the house and my daddy would get so upset, 'That hoodlum's out there again!'"[60] Despite her father's remarks, Anna thought Willard was actually a "cute" hoodlum.[61] One day, Willard finally asked Anna out on a date and, despite her parent's objections, she agreed. They dated from the first of October to the fifteenth of December and got married that same year in 1951.

As mentioned in the previous section, Willard and Anna bought a home (two days before they got married to be exact) in Red Gate, Texas where they lived for about a year until their eldest son Michael was born on September of 1952. They moved to Edinburg and lived on Highway 107 for a short period of time. Then moved on to the property where they live in today on 1601 North Sharp Road Edinburg, TX, which initially began with 10 acres of land. Next door to their current home lived Willard's parents after Willard's father grew ill. Willard built the house and the farm, and it eventually blossomed into the family business it is today.

[56] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.*

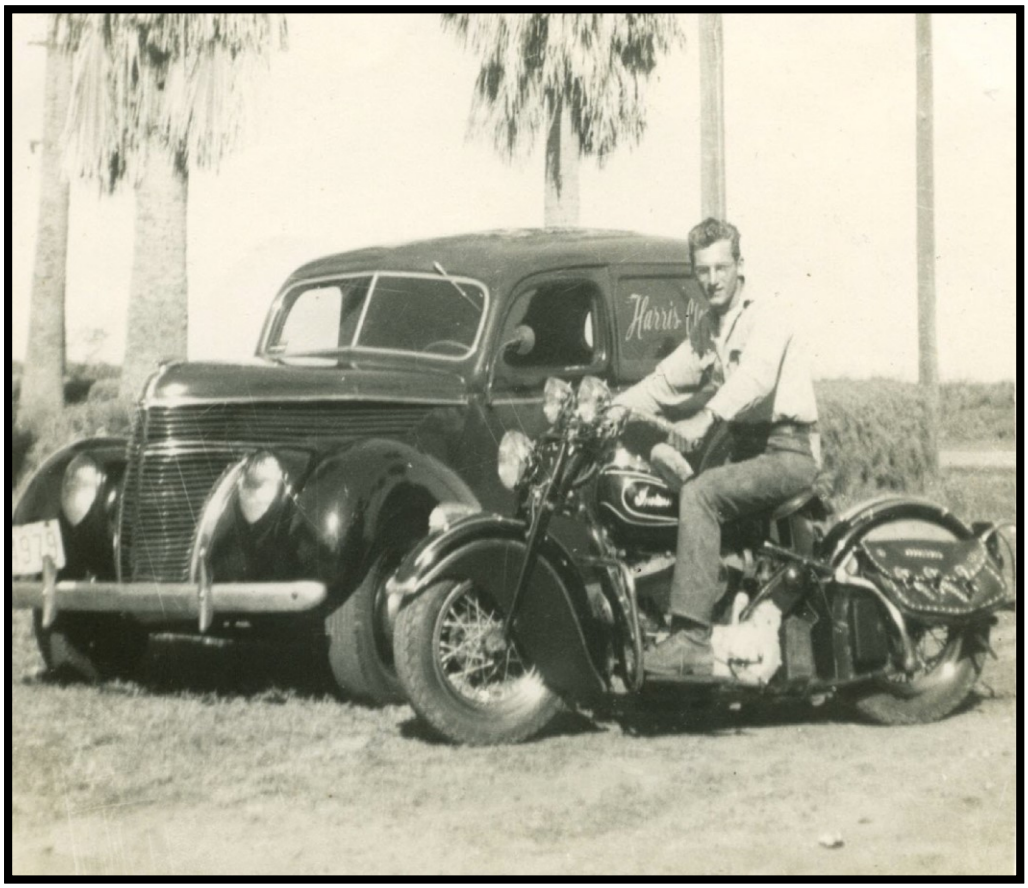

Figure 1.6: Willard Fike at the Citrus Valley Motorcycle Club (c. 1950's)

Figure 1.7: Anna Fike holding baby Michael (one-year-old) with Willard Fike and Francis Fermont Rork sitting on the chair (c. 1952)

Conclusion

The Fikes and Rorks each had their own unique journey and story to go along with it. Both families can trace their roots back to different regions in Europe (Alsace-Lorraine for the Fike's and Ireland for the Rork's) with their own distinct history and social factors that led their ancestors to leave their home-country. Once the Fikes and Rorks arrived in the United States, both would sojourn to different parts of the country. Ultimately, both the Fike's and Rork's journeys would overlap when Willard Fike and Anna Rork met in the 'Magic Valley', where the story of their family continues to this day.

Chapter Two: Family Life

April Wilson, Criselda Avalos, Mark Garcia, and Yazmin Soto

All families have traditions and holidays where they gather together to swap stories and eat, and the same is true for the Fike family. Family traditions are not always birthday parties or weddings. Some believe, as the Fikes do, that getting together for a hunting excursion and fishing trips are a modern tradition. These allow for many memories to last lifetimes for the future generations to talk about. Although Anna Fike and her family are of Irish and French descent, their traditions from the families of old have not carried over. However, new traditions have taken hold.

For the Fike family, especially the younger generations, traditions are the same as those practiced locally in the Rio Grande Valley. According to Daniel Fike, since he was born and raised here, his family celebrates in the same manner as the local residents do.[62] The one event that always appears throughout the Fike family history has been barbecues with cold beer in order to talk, laugh and eat. The Fikes cook fajita tacos, brisket, ribs and all the works. These weekend barbecues are a regular occurrence for the family, and even the neighbors join in. These gatherings allow the family to catch up on daily life and enjoy each other's company, which helps them create a tighter family connection. According to Rachel Villarreal, Anna Fike's granddaughter, there is a section of the family land that they refer to as "The Brush" that was left unused for farmland. This portion has a smaller house on it where the kids can hunt for Easter eggs or have sleepovers. Rachel states that her grandfather, Willard Fike, poured a slab on concrete down to allow a spot for dances when the families gathered here.[63]

Sue Rork, Anna's sister, recalls that traditions in the family were the same as other families. She remembers gathering for Thanksgiving and Christmas where the family got together to eat and talk. The meals were traditional items such as turkey and ham with a mix of local cuisine, including tamales. Sue also stated that it may not be considered a tradition to most people, but in her family, nobody stayed mad at anyone. If a person was upset with someone, they had to talk it out, "nobody stayed mad at anybody. Now that is a tradition."[64] For Christmas Eve, Anna attends a Christmas Eve service at the Lutheran church, then family and friends gather at Anna's house to converse, eat cookies and drink cocoa. Wendy and George Fike host an annual Christmas Eve luncheon at their house for the family. On Christmas Day, the family celebrates at their respective houses. As for the family, they have all continued to follow their religious beliefs; Mathew and Leslie Fike attend church in Palmview, Anna at the Lutheran church in Edinburg and Daniel Fike at the Methodist church also.[65]

As with some people, not all family is related only by blood. Matthew Fike remembers the Cruz brothers, Eddie, Juan and Greg, who were hired by his granddad Fike to help on the farm. He recalls that when Willard Fike passed away, the Cruz brothers were just as distraught as the blood family members. These men had worked for the Fikes for

[62] Daniel Fike, interview by Criselda Avalos and Jacob Garza, November 6, 2017.
[63] Rachel Villarreal, interview by Evan Berg, November 2, 2017.
[64] Sue Rork, interview by Mayela Cavazos, Gabriela Chapa, and Jordan Kennedy-Reyes, unknown date.
[65] Anna Fike, interview by Mark Garcia, McAllen, Texas, December 2, 2017.

thirty or more years, according to Matthew and Leslie Fike, and Willard had helped them obtain their American citizenship.[66] Blood means relations, but the friendship developed between the Cruz brothers and Willard Fike lead to an extended family not related by blood, but trust, respect, and love.

Many Mexican American families in the Rio Grande Valley celebrate traditions such as *quinceaneras*, which is a dance or event that occurs when a young lady turns fifteen, and is officially introduced into society as a young woman. Daniel Fike states that they have never experienced such an event as a *quinceanera* within the family, especially since his sister has been the only female in the past 35 years. The closest there has been to a celebration for a young lady in the family has been a sweet sixteen, which was in the honor of his sister, Rachel, as per her request, when she turned sixteen. On the plus side, he is not opposed to the thought of a *quinceanera* should his 5-year-old twin daughters decide they want one when they come of age, it will just be an experience that will allow for wonderful memories. Only time will tell.[67]

As far as family vacations are concerned, there was not much free time to pack up and leave. When you are a farming family, crops are grown year-round and that does not leave much free time to take the kids to Disneyland or Sea World for the week. Rachel remembers that every now and then the family was able to load up the truck for the weekend and drive down to South Padre Island. Here the kids could play in the Gulf of Mexico or fish.[68] Rachel also mentions that the family is a "live off the land" type of family, so they always cook what they catch. Since there are still family members located in Ohio, Anna and Willard would gather their children every two years to visit cousins, aunts and uncles still living there. George and Wendy made a few trips to Ohio for a couple's getaway.[69]

There are many stories that mold the family into what they are today. Some come from family members while others are from acquaintances that have known the family for many years. George Carpenter met Willard Fike in 1979 while serving as board president for the irrigation committee. He wasn't a close friend but did attend multiple gatherings and family events of the Fike family. Just last week he attended a banquet hosted by Anna Fike - the food was barbecue, and it was delicious. He remembers hearing stories about the family being close knit, as well as helping one another, and enjoying large gatherings. Today Mr. George Carpenter still works at the irrigation district office in Edinburg to help farmers with irrigation and municipalities since it is urbanized now. Large gatherings always involved family, friends and food along with beer - and lots of it. Russell McDaniel, a fellow employee of the irrigation district remembers going to their barbecues. The men in the Fike family would take up to three days cooking the meat to perfection. One of the Fike men said "barbecue and beer" was their favorite combo, and their go-to meal for parties. One particular story that stood out was Mrs. Estella Mata, another employee of the irrigation district, who remembers hearing that one of the Fike men was getting married, and as a gift or a good gesture gave his bride-to-be 10 acres of land in her name. George said "that was the Midwestern way." The barbecues always involved meat, brisket, sausage, sometimes

[66] Matthew and Leslie Fike interview, interview by Ana Hernandez and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.
[67] Daniel Fike, interview by Criselda Avalos and Jacob Garza, November 6, 2017.
[68] Rachel Villarreal, interview by Evan Berg, November 2, 2017.
[69] Anna Fike, interview by Mark Garcia, McAllen, Texas, December 2, 2017.

chicken - and let's not forget beer. Overall, George Carpenter mentions how he admired Willard Fike for all his hard work, and the strong family bond that existed.

Growing up in an Irish American family and being brought up from a Catholic father and Baptist mother created interesting conversations over the dinner table for Anna Fike. Her story starts after her father lost his business and heard about farming in "Magic Valley". Anna has memories of first getting to "Magic Valley" such as getting there, and her father only had a tent and her mother had to cook on a campfire for a while. After a year her father bought a cheap motel business that was going out of business, he then built a wooden house that still stands today. The amazing part is she owns the land and gave her sons around 40 acres. As a child Anna was active and getting into some mischievous adventures using hoe in the field to keep her from bouncing around. She remembers going fishing in the canal but never having the patience to just wait and bait.[70]

Anna Fike has lived a long and interesting life with Willard Fike. Along the years of being married they have shared fascinating memories, when looking back what an adventure they went through with just 75 dollars in their pocket when they got married. Once Mr. and Mrs. Fike stayed at an Amish Town in Ohio; very religious and all farmers, and excellent woodworkers.Mr. and Mrs. Fike stayed in the Amish Town for a month, which they had done a couple of times before. No electricity or radio the town had and the lady they stayed with would listen to Billy Graham discretely. It was a bit surprising and funny but she didn't tell on her. Willard loved staying in the town, he was ready to go back and make it his permanent home. Though she never worked in the farm one of her favorite things seeing the farm grow was cotton. To her they looked like little cottons on the field, it was a beautiful picturesque view. They don't grow cotton anymore it is one of her favorite things memories of things they once grew. Anna's great-grandchildren are already showing interest in working in the farm. One of the kids can't wait to be on the farm and the other is just a toddler and can speak a few words one of them was "Tractor."[71]

Sue Rork had a lovely childhood growing up with older siblings. On the farm there was always plenty to do. A memory that stood out was Hurricane Beulah during the 1960's. Sue's parents got completely flooded in, along with Anna and Willard. Things turned for the worse after the flood. At night came the freeze, and citrus trees and everything died and had to be replaced. Left with high water and no electricity, Anna came to the rescue bringing food and other necessities to her parents during a time of natural disaster.[72]

When it comes to medical needs in families, everyone uses different methods. The Fike family has very traditional values and beliefs when it comes to religion and medication. In the Fike family, Anna Fike had all her sons in the Edinburg Hospital. On the other hand, Kathleen O'Neill, Daniel Fikes' great-grandmother had a set of twins at home with a midwife instead of the hospital. Kathleen got to have three more children with a midwife before going to a hospital to have the rest of her children. Midwives were used a lot before in the 19th century because hospitals were scarce in the Rio Grande Valley. Grandview Hospital was opened in 1927 in Edinburg around 300 West Palm Drive, which is now

[70] Anna Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez, and Roxanne Recinos, Edinburg, Texas, October 31, 2017.
[71] Anna Fike interview, interviewed by Lizette Garcia, Lesley Robles, and Laura Leal, Edinburg, Texas, October 20, 2017.
[72] Sue Rork, interview by Mayela Cavazos, Gabriela Chapa, and Jordan Kennedy-Reyes, unknown date.

Ebony Hills.[73] The family would use the old Edinburg Hospital as well when needed if it was a situation where home remedies would not work. Ruth Rork birthed both Anna and Bobby at home with doctor and Frank was born by midwife. Anna recalls that when Frank was born, her father shooed her and Bobby off to bed. The midwife exclaimed, "Oh my! It's a little elephant!" and Anna ran down to see this 'elephant' but once again, her dad shooed her away. The next morning, bright and early, Anna woke up to catch a glimpse of this 'elephant,' but to her dismay, it was only a new baby.[74] Both Johnny and Sue were born at Grandview Hospital in Edinburg.

Figure 2.1. Grandview Hospital in 1956 located at 300 West Palm Drive, now Ebony Hills subdivision.

The Fike family used the conventional medication when treating the common cold. Tylenol, Dimetapp, and aspirin are a few examples of the types of medications that were consumed. Besides over the counter medications, many families use a variety of home remedies instead of using medications to help with different types of illnesses. The Fike family had their own home remedies they used when dealing with different sicknesses. One of the family members, Karen Fike, had the children gargle salt water for a sore throat. Vicks salve and Metholatum were used for rubbing the children's chest if they had a cold. Anna Fike mentioned that her mother, Ruth Rork, would pour turpentine on any cuts her children had, then would wash it clean, and if she felt it necessary, she would bandage the wound.[75]

When the children grew older, she would make them a hot toddy. A hot toddy is a hot drink that includes a mixture of lemon juice, tequila, and honey with cloves and a

[73] South Texas Health Systems staff, "*Our History,"* accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.southtexashealthsys-tems.com/about/our-history
[74] Anna Fike, December 2, 2017.
[75] *Ibid.*

cinnamon stick to stir with. It was used to treat a sore throat. If one of the children had congestion, she would use mentholatum to open a stuffed-up nose. Mentholatum is mainly used to relieve minor muscles or joint pain. One plant the family still uses is aloe vera. The plant's leaves can be sliced open to expose the meat inside and rubbed on a sunburn to help prevent blisters. Anna's sons drink the aloe juice to help clean their systems, as well as rub it on any places that are itching.[76]

As stated before, Anna Fike is a practicing Lutheran and is involved in a church prayer group. The prayer group is a group of friends from the Lutheran church Anna attends that are called when someone needs a prayer for an illness or having problems. The group is comprised of people who still believe "prayer saves and cures."[77] Prior to her marriage to Willard, Anna grew up with a Catholic father and a Baptist mother which caused diversity on her upbringing as well as family conversations. William Rork, Anna' father, did not force his wife and children to attend his Catholic church so they attended the Baptist church with their mother, Ruth. Anna Fike made sure all of her children were baptized within the first two months of birth. One of the children, George Fike, was baptized at the family home since Anna had fallen ill. The preacher brought the holy water to the house when George was two weeks old to insure his baptism was completed. Daniel Fike, Anna's grandson, was baptized at the Methodist Church in Elsa. Karen, Daniel's mother and Michael Fike's wife, is a lifelong member of the Methodist Church as was her family the Turbervilles. The entire Fike family is very religious and there is a painting hanging in the family home/company office of the *Last Supper* by Leonardo di Vinci. Anna has a beautiful Virgin Mary statue located to the left of the office door in a garden. *Psalm 23* is Anna's favorite passage as well.[78]

The Rork side of Anna's family, as well as a few Fike members, have participated in the United States military for many years. When we think of family members that have served in the military, we never truly look at the impact that person's time in the service had on the family itself. Not all families are impacted in a negative manner, and life did not just cease to exist until that missing family member returned from the service. Most people today know of at least one person, be it a family member or dear friend, who has joined the military either for a chance at gaining an education or drafted; but military services seem to affect everyone at some point in time.

World War II (1939-1945) seemed to draw people from every corner of the United States with the military draft being enacted in 1940. The Selective Training and Service Act 1940 required men between the ages of 21 and 35 (the act was amended once the United States joined the war to include men ages 18 to 65) to sign up with the draft board and a lottery was used to draw names and social security numbers out at random. After the Pearl Harbor attack on 7 December 1941, men and women alike signed up voluntarily to support the United States' efforts against the Axis Powers.[79]

Virgil Rork, uncle to Anna Rork, signed up to fight for his country during World War II. He enlisted in the US Army and served in Guam. After the country was taken over by

[76] Anna Fike, December 2, 2017.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Michael Ray. "Selective Service Acts," *Encyclopedia Britannica.* Accessed November 25, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Selective-Service-Acts#ref1077949

Japanese in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, Virgil's unit was sent in to reclaim the island for the United States. Virgil served his entire time, the duration of World War II, in the US Army in Guam defending the island from future attacks.

Frank Rork, Anna's brother, remembers rationing on various goods such as sugar, gasoline, tires and rubber. He also remembers that during World War II, they always thought that the war seemed worlds away and that the Rio Grande Valley was out of harm's way, but years later the news came out that German submarines were found at the mouth of the Rio Grande. These submarines attacked the transport vessels and tankers coming from major ports along the Gulf of Mexico.[80] As for Anna and Frank's father, William Rork, he was exempt from the draft, but instead signed up to drive a truck or bus. He would transport the soldiers to and from Moore Field Airbase located in McCook, Texas[81] to their barracks. As far as the farm was concerned, the food was not taken by the government to feed the troops, nor did the farming cease. While William was transporting troops, the Rork kids helped with the farming jobs. All the kids were driving tractors at young ages and able to harvest crops, so the work never had to stop.

Virgil was not the only family member to serve in the military. Both Frank and Bobby, Anna's brothers, served in the United States Army during the Korean War (1950-1953). The draft was still used in the Korean War, so Bobby was drafted. He began his service in Colorado at boot camp but near the end of week five of six, he came down with pneumonia and had to redo his six weeks of boot camp all over again! After he served two years active duty, Bobby joined the National Guard and served locally until he was called up again. This time he served in Louisiana. Bobby considered joining the Army Reserves with Frank, but since he was working at the bowling alley during the day, the National Guard's weekend hours were a more fitting solution.

Frank Rork also served in the US Army, but in the Reserves, or as he referred to it, the "six-month warriors."[82] He began his delightful adventures at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. For those that do not know, Leonard Wood is known as Fort Lost-in-the-Woods, because everybody gets lost in map training. It was a hot and horrible summer, according to Frank, but he did not have to go active duty at all, so he truly lucked out. Frank served a total of six years in the Reserves and only went to the summer training camps.[83] Charlie Rork, Anna and Frank's uncle, also served in the United States Army, making a career out of it. He was Anna's father's youngest brother. John Rork, Frank, and Anna's youngest brother also served in the military, in the United States Air Force. His son, John, Jr. served in the Air Force as well, although not many details were remembered about the service of these family members. Rachel Villarreal and her husband, Daniel, both served in the Army overseas in the Middle East.

[80] Frank Rork, interview by April Wilson and Emmanuel Torres, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Library Room 3.117, November 2, 2017.
[81] Anna Fike interview, interviewed by Lizette Garcia, Lesley Robles, and Laura Leal, Edinburg, Texas, October 20, 2017.
[82] Frank Rork.
[83] *Ibid.*

Family is important to everyone, but to the Fike family, it seems to be the most important thing in life. Love and a close bond make this family strong and everlasting. The family gatherings around the barbecue with cold drinks in hand, telling tales and enjoying each other give inspiration to all that family is important.

Figure 2.2. Bobby Rork's gravesite in the family cemetery in Edinburg, Texas, located on Skinner Road, south of 17 Mile Line.

The Rorks Arrive in the Magic Valley

William (Bill) Rork and his wife Annalee lived in Overton, Texas prior to moving to the Rio Grande Valley.[84] Overton, Texas is located in East Texas near the Louisiana state line, and in the 1930s, oil was discovered in the area. The discovery of oil transformed Overton from a quiet agrarian town to a booming oil town. Oil provided many opportunities for entrepreneurs, which included Bill Rork and his business partner F.M. Reynolds. According to Mr. Frank Rork, son of Bill and Annalee, his father and Mr. Reynolds operated a rental truck company in Overton.[85] Mr. Rork did not recall who gave his father and Mr. Reynolds the idea about buying property and moving to the Valley, but said that they wanted to come to the Rio Grande Valley because of the irrigation farming that was being done there.

By 1936, when Bill Rork and his family came to the Valley, the region had gone through some major changes. The arrival of the railroad in the early 1900s provided the people of the Valley with a dependable and stable form of transportation that would greatly benefit farmers. Another breakthrough in the Valley was the development of an effective irrigation system, which had existed before, but was never commercially beneficial. Centrifugal pumps were starting to be used to draw the water from the river over the Rio Grande's high banks.[86] As investors provided money for the further development of the irrigation systems, the population of the Valley rapidly expanded with farmers looking for cheap irrigated farmland. Mr. Rork recalls his father and Dick Reynolds purchasing land on Monte Cristo Road in Hidalgo County. Mr. Rork said his father and the Reynolds bought their land "side by side."[87] He did not recall exactly how much land the Reynolds purchased but said that his father bought forty acres.[88] When Bill Rork began farming in the Valley he began with his forty acres with and additional forty that was rented to William Rork by the land's owner.

Irrigation farming wasn't the only draw for prospective farmers coming to the Rio Grande Valley. The Valley's climate allows for long growing seasons, as well as being able to harvest different crops in the same year. By the 1930s there were a variety of crops being grown in the Valley. The climate made the Valley a center for tomatoes, beets, carrots, corn, and cabbage. Some of the major crops grown in the Valley were cotton and sorghum, however citrus was the most important crop in the region.[89] The first crop that Bill Rork farmed after moving to the Valley was cotton, according to Frank Rork.[90] Mr. Rork also said

[84] Frank Rork, interview by April Wilson and Emmanuel Torres, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Library Room 3.117, November 2, 2017.
[85] Frank Rork.
[86] Lila Knight. "A Field Guide to Irrigation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley." *Texas Historical Commission*. Accessed November 20, 2017. http://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/survey/survey/Irrigation.pdf.
[87] Frank Rork.
[88] Frank Rork.
[89] David M. Vigness and Mark Odintz, "Rio Grande Valley," *Handbook of Texas Online.* Accessed November 26, 2017, http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ryr01
[90] Frank Rork.

that his father grew a small amount of cabbage as well as some other vegetables, but cotton was his father's stable crop.[91] By the middle of the century, agriculture was the backbone of the Valley's economy. The Valley continued to see people moving to the region in hopes of opening up farms and capitalizing on the labor that was available via Mexican workers.

Documents from Hidalgo County archives show the land that was purchased by William (Bill) Rork and F.M. Reynolds was located in the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision, and occupied, "all of lot "O," all of lot "P," and the West 35.56 acres of lot "Q" in Hidalgo, Texas."[92] According to Mr. Rork, when his father first purchased the farm, there had to be some work done before they were able to plant crops.[93] Mr. Rork said that his father had to clear mesquite trees from the area, and the land was never leveled until his sister Anna married into the Fike family. Mr. Rork also added that early on they had a lot of difficulties with the irrigation gates on the farm. He recalls that when the farm was finally leveled, Anna Fike's husband, Willard, made irrigation easier due to pipelines being laid. This was so that water would not have to move though a ditch, which often caused ditch breakage.[94] Farms require constant upkeep before, during, and after the crops.

Family was and is an important part of life on the farm. Family members provide valuable assistance and help share some of the chores of farm life. Children usually begin to help their parents on the farm at a young age, and the Rork children were no exception. Mr. Rork said that he remembers driving a Ford truck and a tractor at a time when he could just see over the steering wheel. He figured he was around ten years old at the time.[95] Mr. Rork also shared some information about his parents Bill and Annalee. He could not recall if they had any particular family traditions but did remember his mother's good cooking.[96] He said that his mother had to learn to cook at a young age in order to help take care of her siblings after their mother died when they were young. Mr. Rork also shared that when he and his brother Bobby were old enough to take care of the farm, their father got a job with the Valley Transit Company as a driver. Mr. Rork said that he and his brother would be in charge of the farm while their father was away.[97]

One major factor in the success and failure of a farm is the weather. While the weather of the Valley is favorable to growing multiple crops throughout the year and allows for tourism to be a considerable contributor to the Valley's economy, its role in a farm's success is vital. Droughts and freezes throughout the history of the Rio Grande Valley have claimed countless families' crops and farms. When asked whether the weather ever made his parents consider selling the farm and moving, Mr. Rork said that the weather never caused his parents to rethink leaving the Valley.[98]

[91] Frank Rork, interview by April Wilson and Emmanuel Torres, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Library Room 3.117, November 2, 2017.
[92] Land deed. Hidalgo County Clerk's Office, Edinburg, Texas. Accessed November 20, 2017. https://www.hidalgocounty.us/index.aspx?NID=161
[93] Frank Rork.
[94] Frank Rork.
[95] Frank Rork.
[96] Frank Rork.
[97] Frank Rork.
[98] Frank Rork.

The Rork family farm survived all the obstacles that they encountered in the Valley however, 1967 produced one of the largest hurricanes in history at the time. Hurricane Beulah was a category five hurricane that caused massive devastation throughout the Rio Grande Valley. At the time, Hurricane Beulah was the largest and one of the most damaging hurricanes to ever hit the United States. In its wake, Hurricane Beulah left many communities under water, and caused many farmers to lose their crops and farming equipment. Farmers were not the only ones affected by Hurricane Beulah. Mr. Frank Rork was working at the First National Bank in Edinburg, Texas when the storm hit Texas. He stated that the farm was "high and dry," but downtown Edinburg was completely flooded.[99] During the hurricane, Mr. Rork said that he was in the basement of the bank trying to pump floodwater out, in order to protect important bank records and documents that were being stored there. They used a three-inch pump to push the water out. The pumps were vital to protecting the documents. However, as the storm continued, the floodwaters were too much for the pumps, and eventually the electrical pumps succumbed to the rising waters.[100]

The Rio Grande Valley represented a new hope for many who had aspirations to become farmers. The Valley's climate and location made the area ideal for farming a variety of crops. Irrigation technologies developed helped farmers overcome the topography of the land and were able to make one of the most effective irrigation systems in Texas. The irrigation system along with the railroads caused the area to boom which brought many, including Bill Rork and his family. Once here, they worked and farmed the land and harvested many different types of crops over the years. When the Rork and Fike family were joined through marriage, the farm went though some major improvements, especially with regard to the way the land was irrigated.

Rork Residency

The genesis of the Rork family land ownership before the current matriarch, Anna Rork Fike started with her parents, William (Bill) Rork and Anna Lee Scott-Rork. Unfortunately, the story of Anna Lee Scott was overshadowed by the intrepid Bill Rork who worked with various people to acquire, distribute and work the lands purchased. Much of the land described sits on the San Salvador Del Tule Spanish land grant, and further described as the Santa Cruz Subdivision just barely handled within the Hidalgo County lines in south Texas. In February 1936, Bill Rork purchased a tract of land in the Santa Cruz subdivision within the San Salvadore Del Tule Land Grant in Hidalgo County, Texas. (Figure 3.1).

The grantor, C. S. Rambo sold the whole of Lot O and Q in total of 250 acres except for 1/16 of all the oil, gas, and other minerals in under or that may be produced from the said 250 acres. (See Appendix K) The property was purchased for the sum of four-thousand one hundred twenty-five and 00/100 dollars. On the 23rd day of May 1934, J. G. Barrera acted as administrator of estate of J. R. Alamia and Olivia V. Alamia, both deceased, and as guardian of persons and estates of two minors, sons. They delivered to M. W. Shriver of the

[99] Frank Rork, interview by April Wilson and Emmanuel Torres, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Library Room 3.117, November 2, 2017.
[100] Frank Rork.

Figure 3.1: Land purchased by Bill Rork in 1936. http://www.hidal-goad.org/maps/schools/SEB_2016.PDF

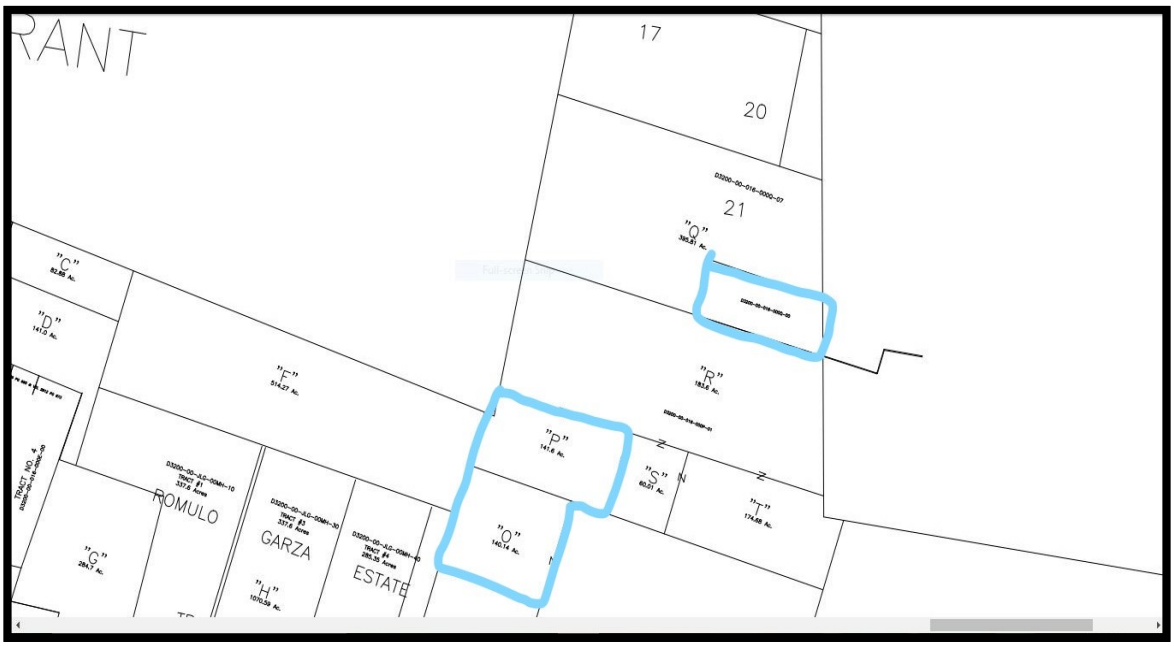

Figure 3.2: Lots leased to Sun Oil Company in 1936. http://www.hidal-goad.org/maps/schools/SEB_2016.PDF

Sun Oil Company, a lease for oil, gas, and minerals covering 3336.27 acres of land described as "all of blocks O and P," and the west 76.33 acres of Block Q out of the Santa Cruz subdivision of Lands in Hidalgo County, Texas, containing about 290.97 acres. (Figure 3.2)

The lease for the Sun Oil Company was for ten years from the date the document was drawn up. On May 6th, 1936, C. S. Rambo, F. M. Reynolds and Bill Rork agreed to exclusively lease the property to Sun Oil Company for the "purpose of investigating, exploring, prospecting, drilling and mining for and producing oil, gas, and all other minerals laying pipelines, building tanks, power stations, telephone line and other structures…" Described are the owners, F. M. Reynolds, C. S. Rambo and Bill Rork from Overton, Texas agreed to allow the irrigation facilities of Hidalgo County Water Control & Improvement District No. 1 to aid in the development and cultivation of the Lots "O," "P," and West Part of Lot "Q" out of the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision of the San Salvador Del Tule Grant. Waters owned by the first party for irrigation was agreed to extend along and near the south boundary line of said lands. From Rusk County in the state of Texas, C. S. Rambo and wife Annie B. Rambo secured a promissory lien note from F. M. Reynolds and Bill Rork for Three Thousand and one dollars to be paid in increments of one thousand on April 25 of each year until 1941. The acres executed in this deed agreement was for all of Lot "O," which contains 107.32 acres, Lot "P," which contains 107.32 acres and the west 35.36 acres of Lot "Q" of the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision, Hidalgo County, Texas. The Grantors retain ½ of the minerals by this deed. However, the oil, gas, and mineral lease is subject to said lease. Bill Rork and wife Ruth Rork granted Edna T. Reynolds the West 100 acres of Lot "O" and the East 74.84 acres of lot "P", except the east..." The grantee took the described land and is subject to all taxes due or become due as well as the principal sum of three thousand dollars executed by F. M. Reynolds and Bill Rork payable to C. S. Rambo, dated April 25, 1938 and due in three annual installments of one thousand dollars each. On July 9, F.M. Reynolds, Edna T. Reynolds and Bill Rork granted a warranty deed to Ruth Rork. In January 1942, C. S. Rambo released the lien securing the payment of One Thousand and Six Hundred dollars to F. M. Reynolds and Bill Rork. The Westerly 40 acres of the west 100-acre lot of "O" of the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision of ands out of the San Salvador Del Tule grant was fully released from all liens. The Sun Oil Company declared a release of lease on May 22nd, 1943 for the rights to oil, gas, and minerals by J. Howard Pressley, agent and attorney for Sun Oil Co. Properties described are the acres covering 290.97 acres of Blocks O, P, and part of Block Q out of Tract 162, San Salvador Del Tule Grant. Ruth and Bill Rork granted an easement, or right of way, for an electric transmission line. The lands described are the west 35.36 acres of Block "Q," and east 4.64 acres of Block "P" of the San Salvadore Del Tule Grant. According to the easement, "A small stipulation of no more than two poles and no wires to support the poles shall be erected along the land unless the central power and light company pays the legal representatives ten dollars for each pole." Ruth Rork and husband, Bill Rork entered an agreement to lease oil, gas, and mineral resources within the forty total acres of the Santa Cruz Ranch situated east 4.64 acres of Lot "P" and the West 35.36 acres of Lot "Q." The Union Producing Company entered a ten-year term with the Rorks and made resources payable to the First National Bank in Edinburg, Texas. About 1/8th of the market price for oil and gas would be distributed, about two hundred dollars annually payable quarterly. Royalty sum of one dollar per ton for all sulphur produced was also detailed.

Bill and Anne Lee Rork paved the way for their future family and the paths of generations to come for an agrarian life style that stays strong to this day. Their daughter Anna Rork married Willard Fike in 1951. Her siblings Sue, Frank, Bobby and Johnny also endeavored to keep the family tradition alive.

In February 1961, Willard O Fike and Anna Rork-Fike paid the sum of seven thousand five hundred dollars to the First National Bank in Edinburg, Texas to fulfill a promissory note for quarterly installment payments. These payments were towards "the west thirty-five and thirty-six hundredths (W. 35.36) acres of Lot "Q" and east four and sixty-four hundredths (E. 4.64) acres of Lot "P", Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision out of the San Salvador del Tule Grant, Hidalgo County, Texas." Anna Rork-Fike and husband Willard O. Fike contracted Bill Rork to renovate the frame of the house on the south fifteen acres of Lot 6, Section 254 (according to the Texas-Mexican Railway Company's Surveys of lands in Hidalgo, Texas). The First National State Bank in Edinburg defined the properties within the Santa Cruz Ranch subdivision and stated a partial release of ownership to Bill Rork, et al. The properties were described as the east 4.64 acres of Lot P and the West 35.36 acres of Lot Q of the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision of the San Salvadore del Tule Grant. In January 2000, Ruth S. Rork granted power of attorney to Anna Rork-Fike for the properties defined in the Santa Cruz Ranch subdivision of the San Salvadore Del Tule Grant. Each tract is defined and summarized by acreage. Track No. 1 has .389 acres out of the East 4.658 acres of Lot "P." Tract No. 2 is 4.061 acres out of the east 4.658 acres of Lot "P." Tract No. 3 is 33.989 acres out of the West 35.413 acres of Lot "Q." Tract No. 4 is the remaining .61 acres out of the West 35.413 acres of Lot "Q," all within the Santa Cruz Ranch subdivision within Hidalgo County, Texas. Anna R. Fike acted as attorney in fact for Ruth Rork's tract covered .389 acres out of the east 4.658 acres of Lot "P" within the Santa Cruz Subdivision. This property was granted to the Fike Farms, a partnership of Michael, George, Harry and F. Sam Fike. The portion was described as "a cotton picker spindle set within the W.O.W. of Monte Cristo Road (F.M. 1925) for the southeast corner of Lot "P," and the southeast corner of this tract." Anna Ruth (Rork) Fike, Frank Virgil Rork, Katherine Sue (Rork) Everett and John Hubert Rork granted Bobby Gene Rork .814 acres of land out of the west 35.413 acres of Lot "Q" of the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision, Hidalgo County Texas. On October 23, 2006 a Deed of Trust was filed electronically with the document number 1678153 from Anna R Fike to Rhonda Jean Rork. On October 23, 2006 an electronically filed document was recorded as document number 1678152 that granted Anna Fike a warranty deed from Rhonda Jean Rork and Stephen Kolmer. Stephen Kolmer and Rhonda Jean Rork released ownership from Anna R Fike and Willard Fike though an electronic document number 2006-1686381 for twenty-four dollars. This property is situated in the Santa Cruz Ranch subdivision within the San Salvador Del Tule Grant.

Although some of the children of Bill and Anna Lee Rork did settle in the Rio Grande Valley, other children like Frank Virgil Rork, opted to live in the northern portion of the state. However, he still had ties to real estate in Hidalgo County, Texas.

On February 13, 1961, a promissory note was drawn for Hidalgo County Trustee Ernest R. Johnson for seven thousand five hundred and no/100 dollars. This document granted the deed of trust to "Willard O. Fike and wife, Ann R Fike; Bill Rork and wife, Ruth Rork; Frank Rork and Bobby Rork". The property described: "West Thirty- Five and Thirty-Six Hundredths (W. 35.36) acres of Lot "Q" and the East Four and Sixty-Four Hundredths

(E. 4.64) acres of Lot "P", Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision out of the San Salvador del Tule Grant, Hidalgo County, Texas." Interest was six per cent (6%) per annum, seven annual equal installments of One Thousand Three Hundred Twenty and No/100 Dollars ($1,320.00) each, the first installment before the 1st day of October 1961. The First National Bank of Edinburg Trustee Ernest R. Johnson partial release of Lien on the 13th of February 1961 describes the real estate Granted to Bill Rork, et al in the county of Hidalgo in the state of Texas. Land 4.64 acres east of Lot P and West 35.36 acres of Lot Q of the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision of San Salvador del Tule Grant. On January 5, 1962 Lot number Nine was purchased from John Wallace Barker and Melissa F. Barker, less and except all the oil, gas and other minerals under said lands, they were reserved by prior grantors. Payment was ten thousand five hundred dollars and 00/100. Ten dollars was paid towards the sum. On September 11, 1967 the property listed as "Q" and "P" within the Santa Cruz subdivision within the San Salvador del Tule Grant has been paid in full and is discharged from the lien of said deed of trust by the First National Bank of Edinburg Trustee Ernest R. Johnson. Although the county documents are signed and notarized, a section below for the state of Texas regarding ownership actions by someone's wife was drafted, but not signed. In May 12, 1976 Frank Rork, as a trustee for the First National Bank of Edinburg filed a promissory note from Riley L. Buchanan and wife Mary Olive Buchanan for twenty thousand thirty and 44/100 dollars. This sum was for the west 23.5 acres of farm tract 529, wet tract subdivision within a Llano Grande Grant in Hidalgo County, Texas. On March 13, 1977, Frank Rork, as trustee of the University Baptist Church was granted land in Edinburg, Texas From First Baptist Church of Edinburg for the sole purpose and function of the church. Detailed in the document are the conditions under which the land should be operated, if that purpose was violated, the agreement becomes null and the previous grantor is redistributed the deed.

The legacy of land ownership for the Fike-Rork family spans decades and enriches our knowledge of the special history of the Edinburg area and how it has grown into the thriving city we know it today. The landholdings of the Fike-Rork family highlight an agricultural culture that has led to an enriching story of family and prosperity.

Willard Fike's Land Deeds

Anna Fike describes her husband as a man who was admired by many. Thanks to this, Willard was able to take advantage of opportunities given to him. This admiration helped him build what the Fike family has today. After his marriage to Anna Rork in 1951, he would commit to land leases and purchases of land in the Texas Mexican Railway survey tract where most of his land is today.

Like most farmers looking to get into the farming business, most would lease or rent farm land. On the 17th of September 1952, Mr. Fike signed a Farm Rent and Lease Contract with S.O. Pottorff. The land is located on th e corner of Doolittle Rd. and State Highway

107. It was 30 acres of Lot 5, Section 268 of the Texas-Mexican Railway Company Survey. (Figure 3.3)

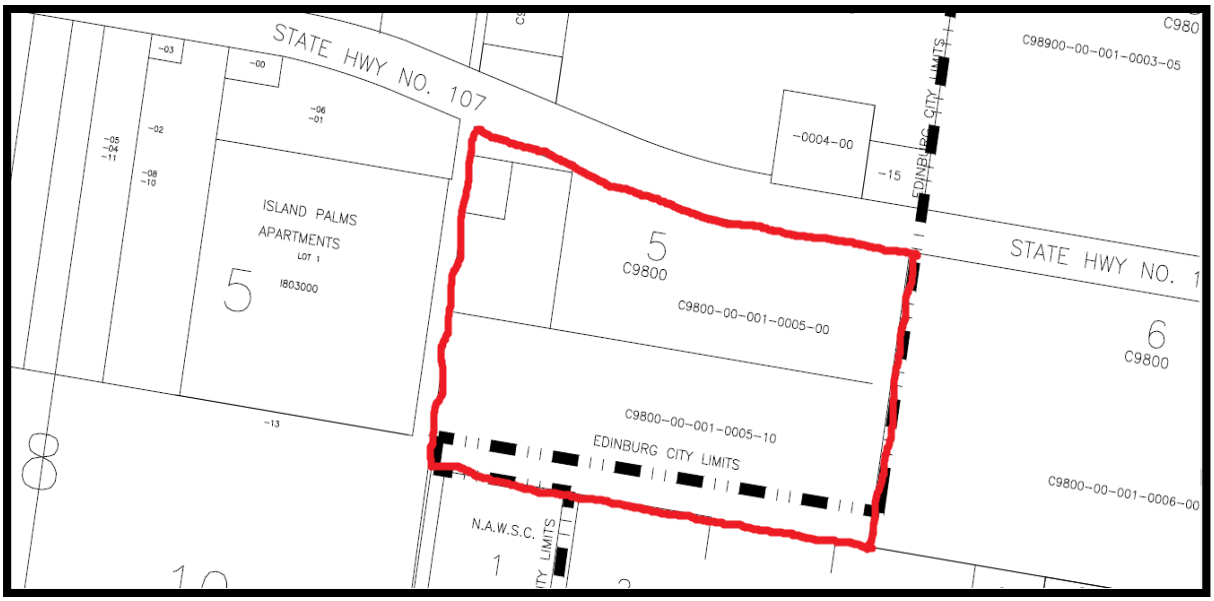

Figure 3.3: Land leased to Willard Fike for farming in 1952.[101]

The terms agreed began the day the contract was signed and ended on August 31, 1953. The land was to be used for farming purposes only and included a one and one-half story house. The property included a washhouse, water well, pump, chicken house, dairy barn, and citrus trees. Mr. Fike was given 45 days to remove any citrus trees, root plow, level and prepare the land, and give proper care to any good citrus trees indicated by Mr. Pottorff. Six months were given to paint the house inside and outside, replace or fix any damages to the house, maintain the lawn, and any other necessary things to preserve the property. The farmland was to be farmed in a good manner and given any necessary treatment to receive a good harvest. Planting a crop for the fall or winter season was recommended to help prepare the land for cotton in 1953 before the lease ended. Also, Mr. Fike agreed to give Mr. Pottorff one-fifth of all vegetables, one-fourth of all cotton and seed, one-third of all row crops, and one-half of all citrus crops. On September 12, 1957, Mr. Fike, together with his wife, bought the mentioned land at forty-four thousand and no/100. A principal payment of $1,000.00 was agreed to pay before the first day of October 1958.[102] Every succeeding year on the same date, $2,000.00 would be given together with a 6% per annum as of October 1, 1957. All taxes, insurance, and water charges would be assumed from December 31, 1957 onward. On November 26, 1962, Mr. Fike agreed to terms with the Standard Oil Company of Texas.[103] An Oil, Gas, and Mineral Lease was signed in which the oil company would gain

[101] Farm Rent and Lease Contract. Recorded date: 9/18/1952; Document#: 1952-14882; Legal Description: TEXAS MEXICAN RY 268 00005; Instrument date: 9/17/1952, Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, Texas.
[102] Warranty deed. Recorded date: 10/3/1957; Document#: 1952-14780; Legal description: TEXAS MEXICAN RY 268 00005; Instrument date: 9/12/1957, Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, Texas.
[103] Oil, Gas, and Mineral lease. Recorded date: 12/28/1962; Document#: 1962-22535; Legal description: TEXAS MEXICAN RY CO 00005 0268; Instrument date: 11/26/1962, Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, Texas.

rights to drill for oil on the 30 acres of Lot 5, Section 268. In return, the company would give to Mr. Fike one-eighth of profits made. If for one year of the signing of the lease nothing has been done, the lease would be terminated, the company would pay Mr. Fike $60.00. On April 19, 1963, a subordinate agreement was signed by Mr. Fike and Mr. Pottorff.[104] Mr. Fike had signed the lease agreement with the Standard Oil Company of Texas, but Mr. Pottorff had the vendor's lien. Mr. Pottorff subordinated his rights on the lease established by Mr. Fike and the oil company. This meant the vendor's lien would not interfere with the mentioned lease and gave Mr. Fike the royalties from the mineral estate.

On September 1, 1954, Mr. Fike acquired the land on which the Fike Farm is situated today. The land was purchased from the gentleman from whom he had leased the land on Highway 107. Mr. Pottorff sold the land to Mr. Fike at a reasonable price of $4,750.00.[105] First, $750.00 was given, cash in hand, to Mr. Pottorff. Second, it was agreed to pay in four annual installments of $1,000.00, with the first installment to be paid on or before September 1, 1955. Each installment was to be paid on the same date with a 6% per annum. The land purchased was the south fifteen acres of Lot 6, section 254 of the Texas-Mexican Railway Company's Survey. (Figure 3.4) On August 1, 1958, a release of lien was signed, and Mr. Pottorff ceded all rights of the land to Mr. Fike.[106]

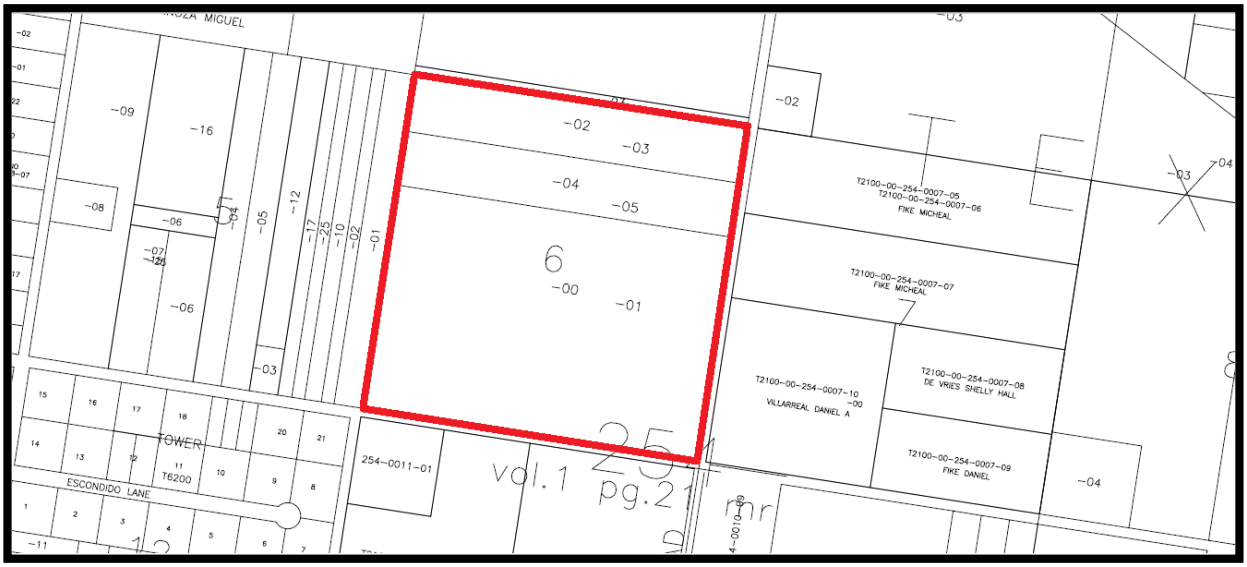

Figure 3.4: The land on which the Fike Farm sits today. It was purchased by Willard Fike in 1954.

By February 1, 1960, Mr. Fike had acquired the remaining portion of Lot 6. Clayton R. Baird sold the remaining portion for $4950.00.[107] First, $450.00 was given as a down

[104] Subordination agreement. Recorded date: 4/29/1963; Document#: 1963-7711; Legal description: TEXAS MEXICAN RY 268 00005; Instrument date: 4/19/1963, Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, Texas.
[105] Warranty deed. Recorded date: 9/3/1954; Document#: 1954-11717; Legal description: TEXAS MEXICAN RY 254 00006; Instrument date: 9/1/1954, Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, Texas.
[106] Release of lien. Recorded date: 8/2/1958; Document#: 1958-11313; Legal description: TEXAS MEXICAN RY 254 00006; Instrument date: 8/1/1958, Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, Texas.
[107] Warranty deed. Recorded date: 3/5/1960; Document#: 1960-4922; Legal description: TEXAS MEXICAN RY 254 00006; Instrument date: 2/1/1960, Hidalgo County Courthouse, Edinburg, Texas.

payment that same day. Next, four promissory vendors' lien notes were established, each with a 6% per annum. The first note was $1,000.00, with $500.00 to be paid by August 1, 1960, and $500.00 by February 1, 1961. The second and third notes were like the first with its respective changing years. By the fourth note, $1,500.00 was to be paid, $500.00 by August 1, 1963, $500.00 by February 1, 1964, and $500.00 by August 1, 1964. The remaining portion consisted of the north 11.66 acres of the total 26.67 acres of Lot 6, section 254 of the Texas-Mexican Railway Company's Survey.

Mr. Fike, together with his wife, Anna Fike, began to purchase properties throughout the Texas Mexican Railway Company's survey of Hidalgo County. The extensive properties gave rise to the Fike Farms. At the turn of the 21st century, Willard Fike and Anna Fike gifted their grandchildren and sons with lands which were once theirs. This would further secure the future of the Fike Farms in the urban sprawling city of Edinburg.

The Fike farm, which has been run by the family for over fifty years, has no plans of slowing down. The majority of its labor force comes from the family itself, and major crop responsibilities are spread among the family. Two of the Fike grandsons, Joshua and Daniel, along with their cousin Mathew, work the corn. Their Uncle Sam works primarily with hay, and their Uncle George works with citrus and helps manage the farm. Their daily tasks are also divided between themselves, with Mathew working the high cycle, spraying fertilizer and bug deterrent on the fields. The two brothers, Joshua and Daniel, work the harvester, planters, fertilizer rig, and the rowers. At the head of it all is the Fike matriarch, Anna Fike, who along with her son George, runs the family farm. Anna and George Fike are now managing the farm with the input of the younger generation, who will eventually have to take the wheel and steer the family business to greater success.

Multigenerational Farming and Farm Expansion

Multiple generations of Fikes have decided to continue working for the family farm business and have become major contributors in the Fike farm. The farm has grown to become a partnership with Anna Fike's sons and grandsons, and they are just as hard working as their great-grandparents were. It is very common to see Mr. and Mrs. Fike's grandsons and great-grandsons working around the farm, and many of these younger Fikes have expansion in mind.

Fike Farms plans to become Triple F Farms, which will be overseen by Mathew, Joshua, and Daniel Fike. They have rented between five hundred and six hundred acres of land in Edinburg, Texas north of the current Fike farm. They plan to keep and maintain both farm locations for future generations of Fikes. However, like their great-grandparents before them, they know the farming business is not easy. Currently, many family members work up to eighteen hours a day, from four in the morning until long after the sun has set. Yet, their dreams of expanding and preserving their family heritage have kept them going despite having to work long hours out in the hot South Texas sun. The family has done a fantastic job balancing their expansion efforts with their yearly crop preparations. Many in the family comment that their only worries right now are getting some rain in time to prepare the soil for planting in January. Because the equipment they need to use is so expensive, the younger Fikes rent newer equipment to use on the Fike farm, such as tractors and field carts.

It really is incredible to see and learn about a family who has not only remained close throughout the years but thrived in an increasingly competitive farming business. As Mathew Fike states, his family sees "[no] difference between a way of life and a family business…it is one and the same now for us. Farming is out life, it's what we do, it's what we think about, that's what we talk about when we go out to supper, when we get around for barbecue…it's everything to us."[108]

[108] Leslie Fike and Mathew Fike. Interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, residence of Mathew and Leslie Fike, Edinburg, Texas, October 24, 2017.

Awards Won by Fike Family

Thanks to their hard work and dedication, the family has won many awards and accolades for their crops, and 2018 will be no exception. Sorghum has been one of the main harvests produced by the farm, and the family is very proud of their success growing high-quality quantities of this crop. In 2014, Fike Farms was awarded 1st place by the National Sorghum Producers competition and has continued to win statewide and national competitions since then. Their annual sorghum yields usually average 7,500 pounds a year.

Figure 4.1: Fike Farms 1st place trophy for Sorghum Yield Contest, 2014.

While field corn has also been entered in prior years as a competing crop, it has been more difficult to conquer winnings, because the top winners produce about 500 bushels for their entry. This is an amount that would not be possible for the Fike family to produce, while maintaining their high-quality standards, as well as the nature of the land in the Rio Grande Valley. However, the Fike family has worked this land for more than seventy years now, and they know a thing or two about how to grow winning crops in the Magic Valley. "[Many people] said 'Oh, you can't grow nothing on it because [the land] is too salty', and we get ahold of it and you just start working," said Sam Fike. "[You have to keep] fertilizing it and… it starts making good [crops]."[109]

Mrs. Anna Fike also mentioned that the Fike farm is in line for another national award and that some of the family will be traveling to the ceremony, which will take place in San Diego, California. Yet, she stated that whatever the outcome of any competition the

[109] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia and Jose Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.

family enters, she is most proud of the reputation her family farm has for exceptional produce. "A lot of people come to us because we have a good reputation, " she states. "We are unique. I mean usually the kids can't wait to get away from the farm…but [our family does not] feel that way. They have an affinity for the farm and the soil and the life that we lead."[110] That, she believes, is what makes their family thrive.

Current Heads of Business

In 1978, the Fike family farm officially became Fike Farms: A Texas Partnership. Mr. Willard Fike and Mrs. Anna Fike established themselves as the heads of the business. The farm eventually became a "Quad corporation" between Mrs. Fike and her sons, and later her grandsons. After Mr. Fike passed away in the early 2000s, Mrs. Anna Fike officially became the business owner, general manager, and bookkeeper of Fike Farms. Her sons George, and Sam, and her grandsons maintain shares in the business and handle a majority of the farming and selling of produce. The ladies of the Fike family are also very involved with the family business. Some of them, like George's wife, Wendy Fike, help Mrs. Anna Fike with office duties and bookkeeping.

Crops and Projects/Technology Used

Currently, the Fike farm produces sorghum, citrus, and field corn for local and commerical uses. The family stated that out of all the crops they have tried growing in the history of their business, citrus has been one of the most difficult fruits to grow, due to the dry climate of the Rio Grande Valley. At times, the area has little to no rainfall. Mrs. Anna Fike also explained that while there have been times when the weather has caused damage to their crops, such as two big freezes in 1951 and 1987, and Hurricane Beulah in 1967, they have been very fortunate in that they usually suffer little to no major business-threatening crop losses.

Figure 4.2: Willard Fike on a tractor. Date unknown.

[110] Anna Fike. Interviewed by Laura Leal, Lesley Robles, and Lizette Garcia, 1601 N. Sharp Road, Edinburg, Texas, October 20, 2017.

The equipment used in the farm also varies depending on the needs of the farm for the upcoming planting seasons. Mathew Fike explained some of the things the family considers when they choose certain farm equipment over others. The climate of the region is one such consideration, for example, "[one brand] has one of the best air conditioners. When it get to 110 [degrees] outside, all the other [brands] don't work. That's a big factor for me… we got a brand new [tractor], tried it, their air conditioner went out the first day."[111] The family also shares many stories about the equipment that has been with them through so many planting seasons, especially when their equipment does not work as expected. A favorite story told by the family is that at one point, Daniel Fike was out in the field, working like usual, but he filled his grain cart too much. "It sank probably five feet, six feet in the ground!", he stated. Sam Fike laughed as he remembered the incident. "The tire [was] as big as [a grown man] and you [could] see it down at your boots, and we got it out!" How did they get it out, you ask? "We unloaded it with the front end of a backhoe…went under…and dumped out [the grain] five yards in and went and dumped it on a truck and [came] back!" said Daniel. "We unloaded 50 thousand pounds like that!"[112] Stories like these show the dedication this family has toward saving their equipment and to one another. Only a family of farmers can you say you helped your nephew dig out a 50-thousand-pound cart from six feet under the ground.

Figure 4.3: Combine stuck in the mud after the rain. Unkown date.

[111] Leslie Fike and Mathew Fike. Interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, residence of Mathew and Leslie Fike, Edinburg, Texas, October 24, 2017.
[112] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia and Jose Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017, and Daniel Fike, interviewed by Jacob Garza and Criselda Avalos, November 6, 2017.

Current Business Relationships in the Rio Grande Valley

The Fikes are currently associated with the Edinburg Citrus Exchange, which the family describes as a co-op of sorts. The way this partnership works is that the individuals associated with the Edinburg Citrus Exchange get paid the same amount of money for their crops, regardless of who harvests their produce first. The only way that anyone can make any profit through this system, however, is by how much tonnage they are able to produce. This is not much of a problem for the Fike Farm.

One of the major challenges the business is facing is an increase in citrus competition from Paramount, a major corporation from California. According to Mrs. Anna Fike, Paramount is buying out the smaller mom-and-pop citrus farms. Due to this pressure, the farm has begun to employ various marketing techniques, such as a "pick your own" citrus initiative, which has had mixed results in the past.

The sorghum produced by the Fike Farm is primarily purchased by a company named Garcia Grain, a farming operation located in Progresso, Texas. However, due to the quality and labor involved with growing this prize crop, the Fike family is very cautious about making sure that their sorghum is bought at a reasonable price. Another place that the sorghum will go is Feedlock, a feed company that specializes in selling specifically to farmers who have cattle up in North Texas and beyond.

One of the main concerns for the Fike family is the fact that the state plans to to build a new expressway between the main farm and Mrs. Anna Fike's granddaughter's house. The expressway will not only come between the two houses, but will completely remove her granddaughter's house and her son Michael's house as well. According to the Fikes, this project will not only divide the Fike farm in half, but will also affect equipment, fuel, crops, and everything else that goes into running their farm. If built, not only will it affect the livelihood of the family, but the highway will create problems for the community as well, and many others could potentially lose their homes. Although this threat has loomed over the farm for the past three years, they are at the mercy of whatever the state ultimately decides to do.

The Fikes are a unique example of a family who has worked through hard times, and kept their heads high. Their history as farmers in the Valley has rooted them for over fifty years, and will continue to grow for as long as they have the strength and health to carry on the tasks of a farmer. Their persistance and love for one another and the farm has provided them with the strength to carry on through the toughest of times. Even with the uncertainty of the younger generation taking up the family tradition, the Fike family keeps a positive outlook toward the future. Stories of the humble beginnings of the Fike farm describe a family with a respectful work ethic and strong hopes for the future of the farm. The possiblility of future Fike farmers lies on their son's and daughter's first words- "tractor". As for the older generation of the family who have seen the farm grow, their grandmother Anna Fike leaves words of encouragement to future Fike farmers – "Don't give up!"[113] These words of encouragement are meant to echo through future generations.

[113] Anna Fike. Interviewed by Laura Leal, Lesley Robles, and Lizette Garcia, 1601 N. Sharp Road, Edinburg, Texas, October 20, 2017.

Family Business and Future Generations of Farmers

Although some of the Fike children have shown enjoyment accompanying their fathers in their daily tasks as a farmer, they are too young to even begin to speculate whether or not they would keep the family farm growing. Although the uncertainty of the younger generation becoming farmers is kept in the back of the minds of the current force driving the farm, it is not something the family worries about too much. The current generation is still healthy and strong, and hopes to be for many years to come. "We're going to do this until we can't do it anymore. Whether our kids, next generation want to do it, that's another story, but if they don't, we'll just have to see what happens when it comes to that time," says Daniel Fike.[114]

[114] Daniel Fike, interviewed by Jacob Garza and Criselda Avalos, November 6, 2017.

Chapter Five: Building the Bond with the Land: Agriculture

Alvino Flores, Gabriela Chapa, Jose Montoya, and Israel Vasquez

There is an indescribable beauty that surrounds farming. As the farmer works his land, he builds a bond with it. A close relationship is formed between the two. This relationship requires a strong commitment from the farmer. The farmer has to work hard, commit most of his time to the land, and he must remain humble with the land's production. The honor of participating in this relationship is something most people will never experience. In contemporary society, farming does not appeal to most young Americans. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the average age of a farmer in 2012 was "58.3" compared to "50.5" in 1982.[115] People are leaving their farms and moving to cities to find employment. "Consistent with a thirty-year trend, farmer's average age continued to increase."[116] As harsh as it sounds, farmers are a dying breed. This can be attributed to one thing - growing food is not easy. It takes a special person to be a farmer. It takes an even greater person to be a successful farmer. Farming, for so many, has been a struggle.

The Fike Family has endured this struggle. While some farmers were forced to sell their land, the Fikes have been able to maintain the land their ancestors purchased and even expanded by buying more land. Currently the Fikes farm on 1,600 acres. The amount of physical work required to farm can be seen on the callused hands of the Fike men who work the land. For the Fikes, farming is a nexus that keeps their family together. In the center of the family stands the beautiful matriarch – Anna Rorke Fike. Her leadership bonds the Fike men as they continue to expand and improve upon what their families had initiated decades ago. This chapter concentrates on the agricultural aspect of the Fike's farm life. The subjects that are covered are dry land and irrigation farming, crop selection, crop rotation and field management, and agribusiness success.

Irrigation

In order to grow crops, water has to be used. There are generally two techniques in farming with regard to the use of water. The first technique is dry land farming and the second is irrigation farming. With dry land farming, the farmer depends solely on Mother Nature to provide the water necessary for his crops to grow. In short, if it does not rain, the crops will not receive the moisture they need. This technique is a lot riskier, especially in the Rio Grande Valley where the summer temperatures reach triple digits. According to the National Weather Service (NWS), in 2016 the Valley received an average of 15.0 to 24.99 inches of rain.[117] Some areas obtained a larger amount of rain, but the majority of the Rio Grande Valley received only 15.0 inches.[118] This is a relatively small amount of precipitation for farmers who depend on rainfall to irrigate their crops. The Valley has been under drought conditions for several years. The NWS reported, "enough [rainfall] fell at periodic intervals to hold drought conditions mainly to abnormally dry to moderate, with

[115] United States Department of Agriculture. "Farm Demographics – U.S. Farmers by Gender, Age, Race, Ethnicity, and More," (May 2014), https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Highlights/Farm_Demographics/#average_age

[116] *Ibid*.

[117] National Weather Service "2016 Rainfall for the Rio Grande Valley," https://www.weather.gov/images/bro/wxevents/2016/annual/rainfall.png

[118] *Ibid.*

just a few small windows and areas of severe drought in the Lower Valley following prolonged, and record, hot and dry weather from July through October."[119] Rainwater is limited. To make matters even worse, the Valley had record high temperatures in 2016. The Valley broke temperature records that had been in existence since 1961.[120] The lack of rainwater and drought conditions negatively impacts dry land farmers.

The dry land farming technique demands that farmers stay on top of the weather and prepare their fields in an attempt to capture as much moisture as they can throughout the year. Farmers will plow their fields and leave them sitting with the hope that rain will pour down on them. Due to the lack of precipitation in the Valley, as noted earlier, farmers are not able to plant multiple crops a year. The small amount of rain Valley farmers receive has to be preserved in the soil as much as possible. This is why Valley farmers try to trap as much water as they can in order to grow their crops. Farmers trap the precipitation in the soil by building and maintaining ditches and field borders. The borders trap and keep the rain water from running out from their fields. Farmers will disc their land and prepare it for planting, even though they do not anticipate planting for several months. The notion behind discing early is to prepare the land to receive and keep as much rain water as possible.

George Adam Fike (hereinafter referred to as Adam Fike) is Anna Fike's grandson. Adam Fike learned farming from his father and his uncles. He left the family farm when he married. His wife's father is also involved in the farming industry. Adam Fike began his own personal farming business and even helps his father-in-law. In total, Adam Fike farms on "6,000 acres."[121] What makes his farm different from his grandparents is that Adam Fike uses the dry land farming technique. In other words, Adam Fike's farm depends solely on Mother Nature to provide his crops with the necessary water they need to grow. In an oral interview, Adam Fike, referring to the dry land farming technique he uses, said he was at the "mercy of Mother Nature" to provide his crops with the necessary water.[122] Another important thing Adam Fike pointed out was the difference in the amount of work that has to be done when you farm through the irrigation technique. Adam Fike said, "They probably work just as hard as I do because it's a lot more labor intensive on irrigation and manual labor."[123] The reason irrigation farming is more labor intensive is because the soil has to be manipulated, large hoses have to be laid, and the water run has to be monitored. Access to water determines what types of crops you can grow. Some crops, like sorghum and grain, can still grow under dry conditions. Citrus, melons, and watermelons, on the other hand, require a lot of water. Due to the lack of access to irrigation, Adam Fike is forced to grow crops that are conditioned to dry farming. Sam Fike, Adam Fike's uncle who works on the Fike Farm, spoke of the issues of irrigation. During his oral interview, Sam Fike was very direct with his answers. He said, "Yeah I can tell you…, if you dry land, you don't make it and if you have irrigation, you do make it."[124] Sam Fike's response describes the risk farmers take when dealing with dry land farming. On Adam Fike's farm, he is not able to grow more than one crop a year. He spoke about how he enjoyed growing leafy foods but understands that the land where he farms will only grow one crop per year. As mentioned

[119] National Weather Service. "The Heat Was On! 2016 Brings Record Warmth to Valley: Just Enough Rainfall to Keep Big Drought At Bay," https://www.weather.gov/bro/2016event_annualsummary
[120] National Weather Service. "RGV Record Warmth in 2016," https://www.weather.gov/bro/2016event_annualsummary
[121] George Adam Fike Jr., interviewed by Eric Acosta, Alvino Flores Sr., and Juan Matta, November 7, 2017.
[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Ibid.*
[124] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia, and Jose Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.

earlier, after harvesting his crops, Adam Fike has to concentrate on preparing his land. He said, "the sooner we get done harvesting, we start doing tillage."[125] Adam Fike has to do this in order to trap the water in the soil. The "clay base holds the water" and traps in the moisture.[126] The importance of trapping as much water as possible cannot be understated. To put it simply, without rainwater, Adam Fike's crops will not grow. During the first year after he left his grandparent's farm, Adam Fike learned a very valuable lesson. He went on his own in 2006. The Valley had been under drought conditions. Adam Fike said:

> We were planting into dry dirt and nothing came up!...We had absolutely zero crop...Not a single plant on our farm! The first year I even farmed was probably the toughest! A friend of her family, besides my family, who helped me start farming out here, said, 'you can only go up from here, it's not gonna get any worse than this![127]

Having to deal with this hardship influenced Adam Fike. He reverted back to the lessons his parents and grandparents taught him. Instead of abandoning farming, Adam Fike worked hard and overcame farming's uncertainty. His first year was the most difficult. Now it seems he has a good handle on his agribusiness.

At the Fike farm, they use irrigation farming. In other words, the Fikes are able to purchase water from the irrigation district, build trenches around their land, and direct water to the fields that need irrigation. The access to irrigation has benefited the Fike Farm. Matthew Fike, when discussing the access to irrigation, referred to their farm as "very lucky" to have access to water.[128] Matthew Fike described how having the ability to water their crops on a consistent basis allows them to grow crops some Valley farmers cannot. While the Valley's hot summers can be hard on dry land farming, having access to irrigation alleviates some of the problems. One of the crops they can grow is citrus. During the hot summer months, the Fikes will irrigate the land where the citrus fields are once every two weeks. They do this in order to keep the trees producing. Citrus trees need a lot of water, so having the ability to purchase the water keeps the trees from dying.

On some of the property the Fikes own, they have installed 15-inch pipelines.[129] They did this in order to alleviate some of the problems they faced when directing water through dirt trenches. Soil erodes with water and hundreds of gallons of water are lost through soil absorption and evaporation. By installing pipelines, the Fikes have been able to direct water more consistently. Since trenches and ditches have to be periodically maintained, the pipelines alleviated some of the time consumed with the trench maintenance and monitoring. A dry land farmer, on the other hand, may not have to endure the added cost of the labor required to maintain the trenches in an irrigated farm. More money is invested in a crop on an irrigated farm. Matthew Fike, comparing dry land farming to irrigation farming said, "There's more risk on that because you have to rely on the rain, but there's not as much you put into it. You don't put the amount of fertilizer, you don't put in the amount of

[125] George Adam Fike Jr. interviewed by Eric Acosta, Alvino Flores Sr., and Juan Matta, November 7, 2017.
[126] *Ibid.*
[127] *Ibid.*
[128] Matthew Fike, interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.
[129] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia, and Jose Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.

preparation and stuff like that."[130] In short, the investment in irrigation farms is higher than dry land farms.

Another aspect of the Valley environment that is overlooked is that while the Valley may have hot summers, it allows farmers with irrigation to double crop. Farmers in the northern parts of the country may not suffer from the water dilemma Valley farmers contend with, but they suffer harsh winters. Referring to northern farmers, Matthew Fike said, "They do not have the ability to do double crop because of the winters. We do not have the winters they do up there."[131] The ability to grow more than one crop per year helps farmers make ends meet, as long as they remain conscious of the deterioration of the soil.

It might seem that if access to water is present, through an irrigation district, for example, the farmer will be successful. The drought, however, impacts the amount of water that the irrigation districts receive and are able to release. So, while the Fike Farm has access to water, they may run into situations under extreme droughts where the irrigation district that services their area cannot sell them the water they need. George Carpenter, a dairy farmer, served on the irrigation board with Willard Fike. George explained what would happen in a situation where the region was suffering an extreme drought. The irrigation district would fairly divide the amount of water available based upon the number of acres the farmer was farming on. The irrigation district would then release that water to the farmer. Since some crops need more water than others, some farmers would only plant on a portion of their land. The farmer would then "stack all their water from all their land on that one small lot, so at least they'll have some kind of crop."[132] This farming knowledge is gained through experience.

Stressing the importance of the irrigation district, George Carpenter said, "If it wasn't for the irrigation district you wouldn't have anything down here."[133] He spoke of the amount of commercial developments throughout the region. The commercial developments have impacted farmers. Carpenter was a farmer himself who used to farmland and cattle in the area. His years of experience give him credibility that is hard to find in any profession. The water district's "income comes from pumping and delivering water."[134] George Carpenter expressed how he does not see what the district does as selling water, he sees it as the irrigation district provides a service of delivering water to their customers. He was not sure on how the irrigation in the area started, but he stressed how "irrigation…made the land valuable."[135] The irrigation district does not only serve farmers. They serve municipalities too. The irrigation district George Carpenter served on the board for also services the City of Edinburg and the North Alamo Water Supply Company. The water is obtained from the river and then redirected to whatever location it is needed with large hydraulic pumps. George Carpenter served on the board with Willard Fike. When asked of his time on the board, George Carpenter replied he "enjoyed every minute of it."[136] Driving through the Valley, the irrigation canals can be seen through most of the area. For many, the irrigation

[130] Matthew Fike, interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] George Carpenter, interview by Yazmin Soto, Stephanie Montalvo, and Jessica Tanguma,
[133] *Ibid.*
[134] *Ibid.*
[135] *Ibid.*
[136] *Ibid.*

canals might seem to be nuisances, but their significance can never be understated. As Mr. Carpenter suggested, irrigation districts are what made Valley farms successful.

Harvesting Crops

Though our primary research was conducted on the Fike family, we gained more insight into how farming methods have evolved for the Rorks' and Fikes' since the county's founding, as well as how other farming families might have adapted to increased demand on crops.

Rork Family

The Rork family originated from Ireland and eventually traveled to the United States. Anna Rork Fikes' grandfather settled in Wisconsin and then again in Nebraska. It was in Nebraska where he began farming. Anna's grandfather then traveled to Arkansas where he also farmed. Anna's father, William "Bill" Rork, was living in Overton, Texas where he owned a trucking business transporting equipment and supplies. However, Bill's trucking business was lost during the Great Depression. Though Bill was not a farmer, he learned of the "Magic Valley" and decided to move to the Rio Grande Valley when Anna was four. Upon moving, the Rork family first lived in a tent but later moved to the Santa Cruz ranch and bought forty acres of land for fifty cents an acre. On this land they grew their first crop—sweet corn. Additionally, Bill would sell the sweet corn ears on the side of the road with packaged oranges, tomatoes, carrots, and cabbages. The family then ceased farming due to World War II.

Fike Family

The Fike family originated in Alsace-Lorraine but moved to New York and then Ohio because it was a beautiful country and had fertile land with annual rainfall. Harry and Mildred Fike, Anna's parents-in-law, lived in Canaan, Ohio where they owned a dairy farm and grew food for cattle. Through Harry's brother, a realtor, they heard about the "Magic Valley", and shortly after World War II they moved from Ohio to the Rio Grande Valley. Willard Fike, Anna's husband, was only fourteen when his parents sold their dairy farm and moved where they believed successful year-round farming was guaranteed, and they could produce crops such as oranges and grapefruit. The transition from Ohio was difficult primarily due to the "Magic Valley" not being as advertised—the weather conditions varied far too much. For guaranteed success the weather must permit. Unaware of this knowledge, Harry obtained ten acres of property in Donna, but later sold it to a Japanese man before moving to Edinburg.

Rork/Fike Shared History

As a child, Anna Rork assisted in hoeing the farm to keep her out mischief. Her brothers Frank and Bobby Rork assisted in the irrigation on the farm. When the land was irrigated, the family installed pipelines so they could open up a gate that would not allow the water to go down a ditch, though there was a ditch breakage often resulting in the family

creating a dirt canal for the water. Bobby and Frank remained working on the farm for their father, while Bill drove a Valley Transit bus for years to supplement their income.

When Anna Rork married Willard Fike, Frank and Bobby stepped away from farming. When Willard and Bill began working on the farm together, Bill leveled the land allowing it to be easily irrigated. The family used to grow cotton, carrots, onions, cabbage, and tomatoes. They eventually had to stop producing vegetables because there was an issue with bureaucracy and the Department of Agriculture required constant record keeping. These heavily enforced regulations are to benefit the consumers, but it makes life difficult for farmers in various ways. First, regulations result in farmers paying out-of-pocket to continue maintaining the standards they are required to meet.[137] Second, vegetables became a liability for Fike Farms, and therefore they decided to stop growing vegetables in the 1990's.[138] Third, each pesticide must be kept put away and locked, and records of chemical use must be retained for 25 years. Though, before the use of chemicals, people would hire a crew to pick off the worms and kill them for approximately $0.25 an hour.[139] And lastly, The Trump Administration is putting regulations on NAFTA, the selling agreement between The United States, Canada, and Mexico, causing difficultly in farmers' trade routes. NAFTA benefited everyone along the border because the trade allowed for products that could not be grown in one area to be grown in the other. This meant that no country would be lacking in their food sources.[140]

While farm and crop development continued, Anna Fike mentioned that Willard Fike was a versatile man in the sense that he would produce items that were of demand, such as onions. Anna compared this strategy to the boys who have maintained the land since as they are more careful with what they produce. Thus, they grow items such as corn, grain/ sorghum, citrus, avocados, and in the late 1990's they even grew spinach for a company called Allen. Corn and grain/sorghum are often rotated. Field corn is planted in their fields of 150 acres at the end of December. The Fike family usually waits about a month after the corn is ripe to harvest, when it is a bit too hard to eat, but not hard enough to harvest and run through the combine. Field corn is used for cattle feed and for deer hunters and cannot be sold for human consumption because they do not test it for aflatoxin. Once the field corn appears to be ready, the boys collect and store as much as they can on their farm. Sorghum (milo) is harvested in the spring. Citrus is successfully grown year-round on 160 acres of land with irrigation and requires less attention than other crops because it mostly takes care of itself, unless there is severe weather that causes the loss of trees through flooding or wind damage.

Unfortunately, natural disasters and/or human error are not something that can be predicted far in advance, thus there are some instances in which the family had a drawback due to natural disasters and human error. In 1967, Hurricane Beulah hit the Rio Grande Valley, and is remembered to this day as a tragic event. Due to Hurricane Beulah, the Fike family had no electricity, or water for approximately a month. Sue Rork Everett, Anna Fike's sister, recalls living in Harlingen during the storm with her husband. Luckily, Sue's property was not much affected by the hurricane, and since her husband owned a large truck,

[137] Matthew Fike, interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.
[138] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia, and Jose Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.
[139] Anna Rork Fike, interviewed by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017.
[140] George Adam Fike Jr., interviewed by Alvino Flores Sr., Eric Acosta, and Juan Matta, November 7, 2017.

they were capable of making their way to her parents' house to buy any products they may need. Hurricane Beulah certainly caused a negative effect on the Fike family's farm that season. Next, there was a freeze in 1983 that resulted in Fike Farms losing most of their citrus. Luckily, the Fike family also had orchard heaters that prevented some crop damage, and benefitted the family to an extent with saving their crops. In 1995, Fike Farms continued to grow cotton until a government program, the Boll Weevil Eradication Program, attempted to help farmers. However, this program had non-farmers aiding farmers, and created what Mathew Fike believed to be "a mess for a lot of farmers all around the Valley".[141] Twenty-five years later, in 2008, Hurricane Dolly caused only minimal damage to the Fike Farm. Thankfully, the main crops had already been harvested so the family only lost a little bit of fruit. From August through September of 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit the Houston area just barely grazing through the Rio Grande Valley with harsh rain. For irrigation farmers in the Rio Grande Valley, it was a positive they were just barely missed. Though for dryland farmers, such as Adam Fike, it appeared to be upsetting because dryland farmers rely heavily on Mother Nature.

In addition to natural disasters, there are dramatic climate issues that could affect a farmer. Specifically, for dryland farmers, droughts are the worst thing that could happen. Adam Fike left Fike Farms and now has a farm of his own, located in McCook, where he works with dryland. Adam Fike explained his greatest hardship in farming was overcoming "the drought".[142] The first-year Adam Fike began farming alone was tough because there was something known as "zero crop". Zero Crop speaks for itself—there was absolutely no crop produced that year. Zero Crop could be due to either not enough, or too much rain and either of those results are bad for crops. Though Adam Fike was discouraged during that tough year, he turned to his family for guidance and was given positive reinforcement. "You can only go up from here," they told him.[143]

Dryland farmers do not receive enough rainfall to double crop. The climate in the Lower Rio Grande Valley does not allow for easy growing conditions. For example, if the Fike family would not be able to grow 400-500-bushel corn such as farmers up north can. Additionally, Adam Fike explained that it is not advisable to grow field crop because they use the moisture from the spring and the crops take that moisture from the soil. However, irrigated land is much easier to double crop on. "Double crop" is when a farmer grows two crops on one piece of ground in the same year, which is typically easier in the Rio Grande Valley because here there are not harsh winters.[144] When in Edinburg, Willard financed ten acres of land from a man who really admired his work ethic. This man only requested, "pay me what you can, when you can."[145] There was then another man, by the name of Judge Baird, who felt the same way toward Willard and offered him another ten acres. Then Willard made a similar deal with a former mayor of Edinburg named Joe Davis who had 700 acres. Each person Anna and Willard Fike worked with were good people and were considerate toward production. There were times when money was tight, but the men were

[141] Matthew Fike, interview by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017, interview 1, transcript.
[142] George Adam Fike, interview by Alvino Flores, Eric Acosta, and Juan Matta, November 7, 2017, interview 8, transcript.
[143] George Adam Fike, interview by Alvino Flores, Eric Acosta, and Juan Matta, November 7, 2017, interview 9, transcript.
[144] Matthew Fike, interview by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017, interview 7, transcript.
[145] Anna Rork Fike, interview by Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos, October 31, 2017, interview 21, transcript.

very understanding and worked with the family. Now, Fike Farms has thousands of acres of land and with that land they double crop. They start once in late January – early February and harvest that set of crops in June – mid-July. They then prep the land and plant again in August through late December.

The overall theme of the family is to work hard and never give up. This sort of work ethic has benefitted the family, and they have been recognized for their hard work through awards. The Fike family thrives at producing the best crop they can possibly grow on every acre of land they have. They water when they have to and spray fertilizer. Farmers are judged in categories of what they grow and how it is grown. The Fike family was entered into a competition as "double crop irrigated" and won at the state level for the last three years. They also won at the national level three years ago. In 2014-15, the family won with sorghum because of a technique in which they build up land in places that are considered "too salty". They work the land, fertilize it, add some cow manure and sulfur and eventually harvest their crop.[146]

Crop Distribution

The next question is: Who do they sell to? The Fike family does not often vary who they sell to. They stay with the same companies they have been with for years. As stated above, they grow grain, citrus and sorghum. Their grain is bought and marketed by Garcia Grains in Progresso, where the price must be set before contracting. Their citrus is shipped from a citrus station in Edinburg. Then, their sorghum will sometimes go to feed lots for cattle. Overall, Garcia Grains buys most of their sorghum. However, in the past, the grain used to be taken by the elevator and citrus is currently in competition with a huge corporation from California named Paramount.

Development of Triple F

With all this love and passion that has accumulated over the years, Matthew, Josh and Daniel Fike decided to branch off and coexist on a dryland farm called Triple F. The three rented 500-600 acres and worked 18-hour shifts to prep the land and hoped to catch some rain so they could begin their planting in January. During the preparation of the land, the guys would alternate between shifts at their farm while also working on the Fike family farm. Luckily, because Triple F is a dryland farm, it requires less effort from them in ways of not putting certain amounts of fertilizer, and the overall preparation time is shorter. However, because the farm was in its infancy, preparation took longer hours.

Field Management and Crop Rotation

When it comes to farming it is very easy to say that the Fike family is one of the best at doing so in the Edinburg area. They are very well known for their corn, sorghum and citrus production, but also for their great attitudes and work ethic. The Fike family has been working this area over 70 years, but not every year was always amazing. The family originally moved down here after hearing rumors of the "Magic Valley" where you could grow anything because the land was just perfect. That was not completely true, in fact when

[146] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia, and Jose Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.

they started they learned very quickly that the land needed plenty of work and that without irrigation or rain nothing would really grow at all.

However, the Fike Farm has learned through the years, and has mastered the art of field management in order to ensure a prosperous year and nutrient rich soils. When asked about the methods they use now in order to keep their lands fertile, Sam Fike credited that success to the fact that they not only fertilize every year for their standing crops, but also lay fresh cow manure every three years. He feels that sulfur is the key nutrient for a rich soil and by adding cow manure and fertilizer they ensure the sulfur content is high enough to yield healthy crops.

Sam Fike also claims that the exact fertilizer they use is something that puts them at the top because not many people use it. The Fike Farms choice of spray fertilizer is N32, which Sam claims to be straight nitrogen. N32 seems to work well because nitrogen promotes plant growth. Every single process in a plant's growth cycle relies on nitrogen because it is part of every protein within the plant's cells. This ensures that the crops are able to grow to their maximum potential and produce the healthiest products possible, as naturally as possible.

Fike Farm is situated on irrigated property so unlike a dry land farm they have the luxury of having access to water regularly, so they do not need to rely on the rain. A big part of their field management comes from irrigation because as Sam said himself, "if you have dry land you don't make it and if you have irrigation you do make it."[147] A big source of their income is only possible because they do have irrigation because without it growing citrus would not be possible. For example, the citrus groves due to the Valley heat and little rain have to be irrigated every two weeks (year around) in order to keep them healthy and producing. Citrus groves on their own require about one and a half to two hours of irrigation per acre. This is almost equivalent to receiving a five to six-inch downpour every other week. On the other hand, the grain (sorghum and corn) is only irrigated during the growing time and is only irrigated up to 3 times before harvest. This may seem like a lot, but is nothing compared to the water demanded by the citrus groves.

Working the land is what the farmers of the Fike farm do very well. They have been told many times that they have pieces of land that "you can't grow nothing on it because it is too salty," but that has never stopped the Fikes from doing what they do best.[148] In these situations Sam says that a certain technique is used in order to not only utilize every inch of rain but to also use that same rain to naturally flush out the salt content in the soil. He explains that when they get a property like this, they will level the land flat across a 40 ($1330ft^2$) and put up six-inch borders around the perimeter to keep the water in. This keeps the water from running off onto other properties and concentrates the water saturation into the soil directly below, also allowing them to hold up to six inches of water. This, of course, naturally dilutes the salt content in the soils, allowing it to be more suitable for harvest; especially after they fertilize with manure as well as liquid fertilizer like they do on all their properties used for farming.

[147] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia, and Jose Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.
[148] *Ibid.*

These methods have been tried and tested, and with the awards they have won, have proven successful. However, much of this is also credited to the family integrity and the hardworking demeanor passed down from generation to generation. Leslie Fike (Daniel Fike's wife) claims that the family loves to do what they do; and they take pride in their farm. She boasts about how the guys make sure that "nothing is skipped" and that "they are watering when they are supposed to be watering and they are spraying their fertilizer, they are not trying to cut cost."[149] The Fike family obviously takes pride in not only their product but also the hard work they put into their product. Within the last five years, the Fike Farm has been competing on a national level. Thanks to their field maintenance and management processes they have managed to bring home the gold in the Sorghum division, specifically under the double-crop irrigated section. This means that the Fikes plant, cut, and harvest twice each year from each plot. This is the reason they must fertilize so much. Each crop pulls out nutrients, and if they do not replace those nutrients, the land will go sterile. They do take the advantage though, being able to utilize the double-crop approach, because they get to yield twice as much as they would if they only grew a single crop. However, this is only possible because of the fact that the Valley weather does not have a harsh winter.

Three members of the third generation of the Fikes have recently decided to purchase their own land just off the Fike property with plans to do their own thing. This small partnership consists of Daniel, Mathew and Josh Fike; but unlike the Fike Farm, this land is not irrigated and will be completely dryland farming. This does not mean that they will abandon the Fike Farm. They do wish to continue with the family farm but want to do some production on their own with hopes to work alongside their families. Daniel, Mathew and Josh are not the first to attempt the dryland approach. Adam Fike left the Fike farm when he married and started his own dryland farm in McCook, Texas. This approach requires absolute dependence on the will of Mother Nature. If it does not rain, the crops don't grow. Therefore, the monetary investment is at a minimum to maximize the profit or minimize the loss.

The Fike family has the skill and the drive to be successful regardless of the situation. The Fike family has been through many hard times and have always managed to keep pushing forward and achieve success. If you ask any Fike family member, they will never credit the success to the land or irrigation. They will credit the strength and the love of the family, the drive they inherited from the family before them, and of course the hard work that everyone puts into it. The work never stops for them, but they will never complain. They will all tell you they love what they do and whom they do it with. That is the true key to their success. Everything else just comes as a result of this.

Business Success and Future

To understand the success of the Fike family, we must start at the core principle of it all. The values of a close-knit family has driven the Fike Family to success. These values are deeply in rooted. From day one, we saw the integrity and hard work of the Fike Family showing that success is never a given without two key ingredients: integrity and hard work. They have received state and national recognition for their crops, proving that farming goes beyond harvesting and providing for their families. It's enduring those unpleasant times that

[149] Leslie Fike and Mathew Fike, interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.

have given the Fikes a true specialization in farming. One of the biggest obstacles they face is who will take the reins after the third generation is no longer around. Others have ventured in search of success of their own. Taking these values with them, but not forgetting their roots that lead back to Fike farms where it all started.

Agriculture Success

The bond of a close-knit family has ensured the success of the Fike farms, starting with Anna Fike, who has taken the role as the matriarch of the Fike family. We've learned from our interview with Mathew Fike that Anna Fike plays a huge role in the family and farming business success. Mathew, grandson of Anna Fike, mentions her as the "linchpin" that keeps everyone together.[150] Working together has created a bond that has endured till this today. Mathew Fike understands that when you love those working around you, more than likely things are pointing in the right direction. It's a passion that has been passed down from generation to generation. Creating a legacy of excellence is easier said than done, and the Fike family knows that cutting corners is not part of their craft. As they go through the whole process they're not farming to produce a crop that will fail. Putting in long hours of work, sweat, blood, and tears are part of the process. Farming is everything to the Fike family; that's all they think about, talk about, and do. The core principles that drive this family are respect, honesty, and hard work. Simple but so effective to what Fike Family has been able to accomplish.

Future of the Fike Farm

As the third generation of the Fike Family moves along in the agriculture business, questions about the future of the Fike farm and what direction they are heading are of major concern. One of changes the Fike family see happening soon is relocating the Fike farm further north of Edinburg, Texas. According to *The Monitor* in 2015, the city of Edinburg mentions the possibly of annexing more than 3000 acres. Discontent has been expressed by the residents of that area. For the Fikes, it threatens their livelihood and their way of life. Much of what once was used as agricultural lands is becoming residential and commercial areas. Population growth is one of the major contributors to the displacement of agricultural lands. Prolonging the existence of the Fike Farm is part of these changes that will determine if the Fike Farms will exist 50 years from now. The fourth generation is fairly young, but there is a lingering hope that they will take up farming as a trade. Daniel, Josh, and Mathew Fike are branching out from Fike Farms to a venture they have named Triple F Farms. According to Mathew, he insists that his intention is to continue working within the Fike farm business. There is mutual agreement within the family that the Fikes are going to continue farming. Farming as a way life is still in the picture. The Fike family is always on the lookout for land available to lease or buy. The third generation is likely to set the tone in what direction the Fike Farm will take moving forward.

[150] Leslie Fike and Mathew Fike, interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.

Conclusion

Withstanding the test of time is a reality for the Fike Family, as they've been in the Rio Grande Valley for over 70 years now. Some of the Fike family members are approaching the age of retirement. Others have taken the reins of the Fike family agriculture business, while looking to the success of their predecessors for guidance. Although nothing is guaranteed in farming, it's much like a gamble. Optimism fuels the hopes of the Fike family members in 2017; that their legacy will see greater achievements and plentiful years of success to come. They trust the core principles that have been passed down from one generation to another. These will remain the backbone of Fike family success. In their relentless pursuit of success, they have not forgotten the true cornerstone of their success. The bond they share with their loved ones is essential and vital to the success of the family, from sharing time together working on the farm or at a weekend barbecues. National and state recognition of their crops is testimony of their hard work. Their harvest output speaks of their pride and their desire to provide the best possible crops.

Chapter Six: Interactions with Nature

Jessica Tanguma, Evan Berg, and Ulysses Garcia

Background

The Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) is a region with a rich variety of unique flora and fauna. Fertile soils are a trademark of the Rio Grande delta and with close to a year-round growing season, vegetation in the region became highly diverse. In turn, this biodiversity only begets more; within in the four counties of Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy, there are 520 species of birds, 300 species of butterflies and 1,200 species of plants that adapted to this region's ecosystem.[151] Fertile soils were also crucial in the development of the LRGV. At the turn of the 20th century, commercial agriculture became a vast venture than previously seen in the region. Since then, close to 95% of the native habitat in the Valley has been cleared for agriculture or city development.[152] The Fike-Rork families came to the LRGV when they heard anything could grow on the land; the promise of the "Magic Valley" started a frenzy and the farmers who were able to adapt to the conditions were successful in their ventures.

At the Mercy of Mother Nature

It is possible to grow almost anything in the Rio Grande Valley, but in some cases, the weather is not always cooperative. The LRGV is notorious for scorching and humid summers, extended periods of drought, and the occasional flood or frost. Since the construction of the Falcon Dam (1952), significant floods are considerably rare, unless there is a massive storm. Of all the calamities that could befall on a farmer, hurricanes are considered the worst, especially Hurricane Beulah. On September 20, 1967, Hurricane Beulah made its final landfall east of Brownsville. In less than four days, some parts of the RGV had close to 76 cm in rainfall. Homes were washed away by torrents, and large tracts of land were swamped with high flood waters for over two weeks.[153] The Fike-Rork family were in the RGV at the time Hurricane Beulah struck the region. Sue Rork-Everett recalls helping her family after the storm:

> "Uh, it flooded the ground so bad that my parents were without electricity or telephone… I lived in Harlingen at that time, and we had a pick-up truck, one that has big wheels on it, and we had to take them food and water, you know, so that we went and check on them because nobody could hear from them. No phone, no nothing. And, uh, we took the truck and took food and water to them and see what they needed and then we went to the store and came back and brought them whatever else they needed. And that lasted about a month. It was pretty hard on my parents."[154]

[151] "Wildlife and Habitat - Lower Rio Grande Valley - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Lower_Rio_Grande_Valley/wildlife_habitat.html

[152] About the Refuge - Lower Rio Grande Valley – "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, accessed December 08, 2017, https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Lower_Rio_Grande_Valley/about.html

[153] N. E. Flitters, "Hurricane Beulah. A report in retrospect on the hurricane and its effect on biological processes in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas," *International Journal of Biometeorology* 14, no. 3 (1970), doi:10.1007/bf01742066.

[154] Sue Rork-Everett, interviewed via telephone by Mayela Cavazos, Jordan Kennedy-Reyes, and Gabriela Chapa, n.d.

Officials estimated that Hurricane Beulah destroyed 3,000 homes, caused more than 100 million dollars in property damage, and ruined 50 million dollars in crops.[155] George Adam Fike Jr. was not sure how Hurricane Beulah affected his family, but he does remember what his dad and grandfather shared with him, " I don't know how much it impacted them. They got flooded a lot; I know there was uh…dad an uh…grandpa would show us marks on houses and low spots where the water was when Beulah came over the windows."[156] For forty-one years, Beulah was the most destructive hurricane in the Rio Grande Valley's history. However, on July 23, 2008, Hurricane Dolly made landfall in South Padre Island, Texas as a Category 1 hurricane and surpassed Beulah in damages. After a drought-ridden planting season and then Dolly's downpour, cotton and grain producers of the Lower Rio Grande Valley expected a 100% loss from 91,000 acres within the LRGV.[157] According to reports, is it estimated that Hurricane Dolly caused an estimated $1.05 billion in damages in the U.S. with a significant portion coming from agricultural losses.[158]

The sub-tropical region of the Rio Grande Valley does not see freezing temperatures often, but when freezes do occur they can devastate agriculture, especially citrus farmers. Rachel Fike Villareal recalls hearing her grandpa talk about the freeze of 1983:

> "I know we didn't lose as much as others. I think we had if I remember correctly we had a lot of orchard heaters and a lot of preventative things that my grandpa did to like save a lot of the trees. But of course some didn't make it, and some did and so that freeze. I don't think there has been such a severe hard freeze since '83."[159]

Orchard heaters (sometimes called smudge pots) were designed to keep sensitive plants and fruit trees safe during harsh winters became an important part of commercial agriculture in places where freezes could be very damaging. (Figure 6.1) They were in continual use until the 1970's when they became more expensive to use and maintain.[160]

Joshua Fike has seen citrus on his family's farm for as long as he can remember, and he recounts what happened to the orchard after the freeze in 1983, "I don't know when they started growing citrus, but I know we've had it since… I know personally that I saw it in the 80s and '83 freeze and we had to dig up a whole bunch of it out cause they died."[161] The freeze event happened on December 24th and continued through to the 26th. There had been

[155] Roy Sylvn Dunn. "HURRICANES," *Texas State Historical Association.* (June 14, 2010) Accessed December 8, 2017. https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ybh01.
[156] George Adam Fike, interviewed by Alvino Flores, and Juan Matta Eric Acosta, November 7, 2017

[157] Ron Smith, "Hurricane Dolly destroys LRGV cotton crop," *Southeast Farm Press* (August 24, 2010) http://www.southeastfarmpress.com/hurricane-dolly-destroys-lrgv-cotton-crop.
[158] Richard J. Kimberlain and Todd B. Pasch "Tropical Cyclone Report Hurricane Dolly," *National Hurricane Center* (January 22. 2009) http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/data/tcr/AL042008_Dolly.pdf.
[159] Rachel Fike Villareal, interviewed by Evan Berg. 2017, November 2, 2017.
[160] Environmental Protection Agency. "Emission Factos." Food and Agricultural Industries. (January, 1995) Accessed December 8, 2017, http://www3.epa.gov/ttnchie1/ap42/ch09/final/c9s02-3.pdf, and Philip VanBuskirk. "Smudgepots" *The Oregon Encyclopedia,* (September 7 2017), Accessed December 8, 2017. https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/smudge-pot/
[161] Joshua Fike, interviewed by David Hernandez, Osiel Uribe, and Benito Contreras, November 6, 2017.

a total of 55 consecutive hours of below freezing temperatures.[162] The damage to vegetable and citrus crops after the freeze in 1983 was estimated at $200 million.[163] All the families interviewed by CHAPS were affected in some way by the freezes in the 80s. In one interview, Ruben Cantú Sr. recalled how the freezes effects on the farming community:

> "Oh yeah, it froze up. I mean, when you have temperatures in the mid-twenties and high nineteen's, high teens, um.. the tree can withstand some cold weather but not for a long, not for a very long period. And we had I mean, days in the freezing, I mean, it looked ugly once the trees lost all their leaves and all the fruit was on the ground and it um... a lot of people didn't bring back the orchards. Um...They sold it off for houses and all that. And uh, then in '89 we got another one and that was the same way."[164]

Figure 6.1: Smudge pots (heaters) in a citrus orchard. Orchard heaters were used at one time by the Fike family to prevent fruit trees from freezing. Photo credit: Edward Hand http://www.flickr.com/photos/130975381@NO3/16228554353

Working closely with the land is demanding work, but with that work comes a close knowledge of the earth, plants, and animals that occupy the same area. By interacting with their land, the Fikes are conscious of how they use the nature around them. Their interaction with their properties also keeps them mindful of how much the land around them has changed.

[162] R. I. Lonard, & F. W. Judd. "Comparison of the Effects of the Severe Freezes of 1983 and 1989 on Native Woody Plants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas." *The Southwestern Naturalist*, (1991): 213-217.
[163] *Ibid.*
[164] Ruben Cantú Sr., interviewed by Ashley Leal and Luis Reyes Jr., September 19, 2017.

The Flora Grows Wild

The life of a farmer relies upon his ability to utilize the natural landscape around him and to continue to provide the proper re-invigoration of the soil and the life-giving nutrients within the ground to continue his livelihood. As the Rio Grande Valley has transitioned from a once predominant agricultural area into a more urbanized area, the rise of urban development has helped to fuel the importance of returning the growing power back into the soil. As the Valley has always been a diverse geological location, we as chroniclers of this location must look at the chronological growth and shifting that this area has produced and to what quantities. Before the arrival of the Spanish, the Native Americans of the RGV known as the Coahuiltecans interacted with the native plants as food, shelter and material revealing the adaptability of the flora and the people who inhabited the Rio Grande Valley.[165]

Much of the plants within the Valley are hardy species of brush, grasses, trees and flowers. There are roughly 1,200 different types of plant species within the Rio Grande Valley which include species such as the Honey Mesquite tree (Figure 6.3). This tree is part of the Mimosa family of trees are common in the Rio Grande Valley and has been used primarily due to its sturdy wood as fence posts. The pods that it produces are edible and have been a staple food item within the region. [166] The same could be attested to Pecan trees as well. Pecan trees (Figure 6.2) as well as mesquite trees were some of the most important food items of early human interaction in the Rio Grande Valley. In fact, pecan trees, much like mesquite was used in many ways, not just as a food source but as material to be used as fence posts and parts of shelters.[167]

Figure 6.2: Pecan tree – a very common and important tree in the Rio Grande Valley. It is also the Texas state tree. Taken on the Fike family property for the CHAPS program.

[165] CHAPS. *Atwoods Acres: A Porcion of Edinburg.* (Edinburg: University of Texas-RGV, 2013), 19.
[166] Native Plant Project. "Honey Mesquite" Tree handbook, *Native Plant Project*, (May 15, 2012), Accessed November 16, 2017. https://nativeplantproject.com/trees/honey_mesquite.htm
[167] "Pecan Tree," *State Symbols USA.* Accessed November 20, 2017. https://www.statesymbols.org/symbol-official-item/texas/state-tree/pecan-tree

Figure 6.3: Honey Mesquite Tree – another important tree for the Rio Grande Valley
www.fourdir.com/p_western_honey_mesquite.htm

In an interview with Rachel Fike Villareal, an instructor who works at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), she describes sucking on mesquite beans and using mesquite in preserves. When asked how the mesquite preserves tasted she said "it is as sweet as the sugar you put in it so preserves are like half sugar. Like it is very sugary, it tastes like any other... it does have its own distinct flavor... if you have ever put a mesquite bean in your mouth and chewed it ...it has that flavor except sweet."[168] Mrs. Villareal's testimony reveals that the people of the Valley continue to have use of the various local plants that reside there.

The plants within South Texas are not just plants used for food or shelter. Aloe vera plants are also utilized for medical purposes. Aloe vera is a very hardy plant, where, in the right conditions, can thrive in the South Texas environment. Its use mainly as a medical treatment has proven to make the plant an incredibly important wild species within the Rio Grande Valley. [169] Aloe vera (Figure 6.4) was brought up many times with many of the Fike family members as well. Rachel says that they have plants on the farms property specifically for medical purposes. [170]

[168] Rachel Fike Villareal, Interview by Evan Berg, November 2, 1017, transcript.
[169] "Aloe Vera", Central Texas Gardener, accessed November 18, 2017, https://www.klru.org/ctg/resource/aloe-vera
[170] Rachel Fike Villareal, Interview, transcript.

Figure 6.4: Small aloe vera plant. This plant is used primarily for its medicinal purposes but can also be eaten for sustenance. Photo taken on the Fike family property for the CHAPS program.

When the CHAPS program was allowed to examine the Fike property including their recently disked farm acres, we came across many interesting plants around their home and in the fields. Some of the flora seen on the property were various types of trees, cactus and shrubs. Many of them local flora such as the Cereus cactus. The Cereus (Figure 6.5), also known by the name *Cereus Greggii,* is a plant that blooms very rarely, but is a very popular cactus in rock gardens.[171] When we looked at the farmed acres of land we also found many interesting florae there as well. Pigweed (Figure 6.6) for example, is some of the many common types of weeds found around the area. While it is seen as a pest plant for some, the pigweed actually contributes to at times to plant growth as the plant itself often helps break down tough soil to gather nutrients which allows other plants access as well; and the plant harbors ground beetles that eat more destructive insects.[172]

[171] "Night Blooming Cereus," *DesertUSA.* Accessed November 20, 2017. https://www.desertusa.com/cactus/night-blooming-cereus.html

[172] "Pigweed," *Edible Wild Food.* Accessed November 20, 2017. https://www/ediblewildfood.com/pigweed.aspx

Figure 6.5: Cereus cactus – a very hardy cactus that blooms very rarely. Photo taken on the Fike farm for the CHAPS program.

Figure 6.6: Pigweed is a type of weed that grows commonly after soil is tilled. Photo taken in the Fike fields for the CHAPS program.

Another interesting discovery at the Fike farm was these rather small looking melons. These were a type of plant known as a creeping cucumber. Creeping cucumbers (Figure 6.7) are described as being small almost melon looking plants that eventually become a dark purple looking grape sized plant. The plant is edible but only when it is green, the darker seed produces a dangerous laxative effect.[173]

Figure 6.7: Creeping cucumbers often look like small melons (melonettes) as they are growing.

Photo taken in the Fike fields for the CHAPS program.

Silverleaf nightshade (Figure 6.8) is another beautiful but dangerous plant that resides in the Rio Grande Valley. Known by its scientific name as *Solanum Elaeagnifolium* is part of the deadly nightshade family, a very toxic family of plants. However; despite the deadly toxins within it, research has shown that Native Americans actually used parts of the plant, namely the tap root to be used as natural pain killers. The fruits of the plant were also used as parts of drink, and even as parts of necklace; revealing that even a deadly plant can have beneficial uses. [174] As seen here from the small sample of plants and trees seen, the Valley and the diverse species of plants are just as hardy as the land themselves; allowing for these different plants to continue to grow and become important products for humanity.

[173] "Creeping Cucumber", Foraging Texas, Accessed November 20, 2017, http://www.foragingtexas.com/2008/10/creeping-cucumber.html

[174]"Silverleaf Nightshade", Texas Beyond History, accessed December 7, 2017, https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/ethnobot/images/silverleaf.html

Figure 6.8: Silverleaf nightshade is very poisonous but has been used for medicinal purposes. Photo taken on the Fike family farmland for the CHAPS program.

As Time Marches, the Land Shifts

The land of the Rio Grande Valley continued to be of use during the settling of the Northern Frontera in the mid-18th century by Spanish settlers as it was found to be perfect for the raising of cattle. Cattle ranching became an important economic tool for the region since it was too difficult at the time to create a substantial agricultural base due to the location and environment of the Valley, though subsistence farming was employed as well. It would not be until the early 20th century with the rise of irrigation within the Rio Grande Valley that commercial agriculture became more important. [175] As irrigation became a more viable tool, agriculture began to replace cattle ranching as an important economic resource in the Rio Grande Valley, this allowed for a focus on farming within the region. The influx of farmers from the North and the subsequent creation of a railroad and stable irrigation created a land where "between 1900 and 1910, 50 steam-engine pump houses had been built along the Rio Grande to irrigate farmland. At their height, they irrigated 1 million acres of farmland as land prices soared from 25 cents per acre in 1906 to $300 per acre in 1910." [176]

The major exports of the Rio Grande Valley during the agricultural boom of the early 19th century were citrus, cotton, sugarcane and grain. Citrus and cotton were the majority of the exports from the Valley throughout the United States. However, with growing urbanization and focus on retail, much of the importance and numbers of exportation of these various agricultural products have dwindled. [177] The importance of the land as economic resource is better to be left for the chapters focusing on irrigation and agriculture respectively. The rest of this chapter will focus on how the Fike/Rork family has interacted and dealt with the ever-changing land within the Rio Grande Valley.

[175] Rod Santa Ana. "Agriculture Tells the History of the Rio Grande Valley," *Texas A&M AgriLife.* (January 3, 2017) Accessed November 16, 2017. https://today.agrilife.org/2017/01/03/valley-agriculture-history
[176] *Ibid.*
[177] *Ibid.*

The Fike/Rork family has witnessed the changing landscape of the Rio Grande Valley and provide their accounts of their experiences with the land as well. Frank Rork, Anna Fike's brother, grew up in the Rio Grande Valley. His family emigrated from Overton, TX in 1936. The Fike family followed a few years later from Ohio. Families migrating from Ohio to the Rio Grande Valley. When interviewed about what types of crops that Frank's family planted on their farm, he said that his father has planted mostly cotton though did note that "he did some cabbage, and some vegetables, but not much. Cotton was what he stuck with." [178] Adam Fike, one of the grandsons who continues the family's business as a farmer has worked both the land in the Valley and in McCook, Texas. As mentioned in the chapter of geology; the Rio Grande Valley has a very diverse geological landscape. Adam Fike in an interview confirms this by saying "The soil is just, I mean, there is every kind of soil you can think of down here in the Valley. I have fields that have four or five different types of soils in them, you know, in the same field."[179]

When asked about dryland farming, which is where you plant more resistant crops and attempt to hold onto moisture as much as possible whenever it rains, Adam Fike described how very different the McCook land usage is compared to the land in South Texas. When asked about the kind of crops grown in McCook using the dryland method, he said:

> "We do grow fall crops here in the Valley. Dry land farm or where I farm we don't try to grow fall crops because we use all our moisture for the spring. The crops take the moisture out of the soil and we do not get enough rainfall to grow two crops. Irrigated land they can grow, they can double crop, but most majority of the crops are grown from late January, and harvested June and July time." [180]

Further interviews with Mathew Fike correlate this difference with how irrigated farmlands are treated in comparison to dryland farmlands. He describes in his interview that with irrigated lands:

> "…we may put down an extra fertilizer, an extra herbicide, you know spray for weeds, and all stuff like that on irrigated land because the potential to make your yields higher is there because you know your gonna have to water. On dry land it's a bigger gamble, it's a crap shoot, you don't know if it's gonna rain or not the weather man tells you it's gonna rain and it doesn't so." [181]

The Fike family also uses their land for personal use in conjunction with their farming businesses. In an interview, Rachel Villareal discussed many different types of plants that the family used and still uses to this day. She described many different things such as mustang grapes (Figure 6.9) which is a type of grape that is fairly common not just in Texas but through much of the Southern states. The grapes themselves are often used in jellies and preserves, since the flavor is somewhat tart. [182]

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[178] Frank Rork, interviewed via telephone by Emmanuel Torres and April Wilson, November 2, 2017.
[179] George Adam Fike Jr, interviewed by Eric Acosta, Alvino Flores, and Juan Matta, Edinburg, Texas, November 7, 2017.
[180] George Adam Fike Jr., interview.
[181] Leslie Fike and Mathew Fike, interviewed by Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.
[182] "Grape – Mustang", *Foraging Texas*. (August 27, 2008) Accessed November 18, 2017, http://www.foraging-texas.com/2008/08/grape-mustang.html

Figure 6.9: Picture of mustang grapes, a type of grape that grows in the southern and western United States and is often used in jellies. http://www.foragingtexas.com/2008/08/grape-mustang.html

In the interview, she said that her grandmother "used to have wild mustang grapes. Yeah, in the backyard. When I was a kid, I remember going out there and picking them off of the vine and, ah, they are not there anymore I think."[183] She continued on with more of the plants and trees that the family has, stating:

> "Oh, course we did have citrus trees all around the property. Even though we had orchards she would plant, you know, a valley lemon and a tangerine, like one, you know, in her yard so you could go out and pick those citrus like really quickly as opposed to going all the way to the orchard to get the fruit. We have avocado trees. She would plant avocado…my mom has fig trees, like we make fig preserves out of on a yearly basis.[184]

As urban development continues within the Rio Grande Valley, the Fike family has interpreted land change in many different ways. As population in the Valley grows in conjunction with the rising need of homes, schools, hospitals and retail businesses, this means a loss to farm lands. Matthew Fike when asked about acquisition of farmlands for commercial business usage, he said:

> "How many old farmers do you think drive along, either here or McAllen or some where like that and go, 'oh yeah, you see where that Target is or Walmart is, yeah, I used to farm that piece of ground.' And you know the younger people, 'oh, that's been a Wal-Mart for as long as I can remember.' I mean, someone used to work that field, so yeah, I think it's a really good thing."[185]

[183] Rachel Fike Villareal, interviewed by Evan Berg, UTRGV Campus, Edinburg, Texas, October 18, 2017.
[184] Rachel Fike Villareal, interview.
[185] Leslie Fike, and Mathew Fike, interview.

Rachel Villareal, when asked about the landscape changes, said:

> "Yeah, I think it is pretty much the same. The same pieces of land are pretty such worked the same as they are now. The farm really puts a lot of effort in the land and put back like the minerals and put back you know puts back everything like the fertilizer everything that the ground needs. So, I haven't really seen that it has changed for the better or the worst. Yes…urban development is way different than when I was young. The spread from town and farmers selling off their land and stuff. But as far as the actual ground itself being different I don't think, there is much of a difference."[186]

Anna Fike, the matriarch of the Fike family, does not agree with the more positive aspects of the growing development of the Valley. When asked about the subject she spoke about the state wanting to build an expressway near their property. She said:

> "I see the state building an expressway between me and my granddaughter actually taking out my granddaughter's house, and Michael my son's house they are wanting to build a great big freeway here which would divide our farm in half. Our equipment, our fuel; everything is here and they were not going to build… what they told us at the beginning they are not going to build a way to go on this road over to or other farms or down here either on Mile 18 we are going to have to use 1925 or 107 to move our equipment. It's impossible if that happens this farm will cease to exist."[187]

The Valley has been changing, and it shall continue to shift and change with the coming times ahead. Because of this, it is extremely important to see how the land's history and how farming families like the Fikes and the Rorks have continued to keep the land they use fertile and viable for their agriculture.

Finally, as we have moved from natural disasters and how the land and plants have shifted and changed with the growth of the Valley, we move now towards Man's interactions with fauna. Another important piece of the puzzle when it comes to the incredibly complex biology of the Rio Grande Valley.

The Fauna of the Valley

The Rio Grande Valley is located in South Texas and consists of four counties Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy. The Rio Grande Valley has a diverse array of wildlife that is unique to the area and the wildlife diversity is also shared with Northern Mexico. There are three environments in the Rio Grande Valley that hold this biodiversity of wildlife, consisting of rare felines, reptiles, and birds. Living in South Texas, one tends to not admire the wildlife beauty this area has to offer. The area consists of 1,100 vertebrates, 500 bird species and 5,500 types of plant and the Rio Grande River helps this wildlife thrive. The Rio Grande River and Gulf of Mexico are the bodies of water that help wildlife to thrive in the area, which also makes it a perfect stopping route for migratory birds. Most of the

[186] Rachel Fike Villareal, interview.
[187] Anna Fike, interviewed by Cynthia M. Sanchez & Roxanne Recino, October 31, 2017.

wildlife in the Rio Grande Valley faces a dilemma of urbanization, which threatens the wildlife of the area.

Mammals

The ocelot and jaguarundi are two of the rare wildcats that reside in the Rio Grande Valley. The jaguar used to roam the area when urbanization wasn't a threat to the environment. The ocelot (*Leopardus Pardalis)* (Figure 6.10) has a strikingly beautiful spotted coat and makes the chaparral thickets of the Rio Grande Valley its home. The jaguarundi *(Herpailurus Yaguarondi),* also called *Gatto Morro* by Spanish settlers, used to be very common in deep South Texas. It has a dark solid colored coat that sometimes turns reddish in winter. (Figure 6.11)

Native Americans and early settlers had exploited these great cats by trading their furs and their hide's show up in lists across trading post lists like in San Antonio.[188] These great cats have declined drastically in numbers. While the ocelot has a stronghold in La Laguna Atascosa a National Wildlife Preserve, its numbers still in danger. The last jaguars were seen and killed in San Benito, Texas in 1946, and two years later in Kingsville, Texas. According to the *Valley Morning Star*, 15,000 wild Jaguars remain in South America, Central America, and Mexico, while their roaming territories used to consist a large part of Texas including all Southwest United States.[189]

Figure 6.10: Photo of an ocelot. They are an endangered species in the Rio Grande Valley. Photo by Mary Jo Bogatto for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Laguna_Atacosa

[188] M.J. Morgan, *Boarder Sanctuary: The Conservative Legacy of the Santa Anna Land Grant* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2015), 48.
[189] Steve Sinclair, "Last Jaguar," *Valley Morning Star*, 21 June 2008.

Figure 6.11: A jagaurundi in captivity. These animals are almost extinct in the Rio Grande Valley. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Puma_yagouaroundi_Pont-Scorff_Zoo_17082015_2.jpg

Other large mammals that are more common in the Rio Grande Valley are whitetail deer, javelina, armadillo, bobcats, and mountain lions. Whitetail deer are numerous in the thorny habitat of South Texas and considered a favorite hunting game species. Javelinas, as they are called in the Rio Grande Valley, are territorial mammals related to the swine family and are very common in the area. The armadillo resembles a reptile because of its armored body, but don't let that fool you! It is a mammal that borrows into the land and scrounges the surface for insects to feed on. Bobcats and mountain lions are two wildcats that hunt in the South Texas brush for rabbits, or anything they can catch, even baby calves. This has become a problem for ranchers, especially with the mountain lion, also known as puma.

Reptiles

Reptiles are numerous in the Rio Grande Valley, with two major poisonous snakes in the area. The diamondback rattlesnake is a highly feared pit viper, due to its potent venom that kills upon striking its prey. The rattlesnake only strikes humans when it feels threatened and are very beneficial to the environment because they keep pests in check, like mice and rats. The corral snake is a close relative to the cobra and has the same venom potential of its relative. Corral snake bites are extremely rare because of its rear fangs and small mouth. They are very docile and rarely seen. They feed on small mammals and insects. The horned lizard, sometimes called horned toad (Figure 6.12) was once common in the open brush and caliche pits feeding on ants. The horned lizard has slowly become elusive but can still be seen in Starr County in areas that haven't been root plowed. The Texas tortoise (Figure 6.13) is another reptile that seems to be declining in numbers. It is a very timid reptile that feeds on *tunas* (prickly pears) and hibernates during winter.

Figure 6.12: Photo of a horned toad. These once plentiful reptiles have nearly vanished from the Rio Grande Valley. Courtesy of Roseann- Bacha-Garza

Figure 6.13: Picture of a Texas tortoise. A critically endangered reptile, they are a hardy species that still call the Rio Grande Valley home. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Texas_Tortoise_(Gopherus_berlandieri__(57391706).jpg

Birds

The Rio Grande Valley is a hot spot for birds and is a major migratory route. Many birds from the South make their way to the Rio Grande Valley, and make their home for a short period of time in the area. Native birds, like the green jay, are very common and are very abundant in places like in Starr County that still have the natural habitat. The brown pelican is an endangered species that resides along the coast including, the coastline of Cameron County and South Padre Island. The pauraque is a sub-tropical bird that is more active at night, feeding on insects. It resembles an owl. Another bird synonymous with the Rio Grande Valley is the chachalaca, an arboreal bird that makes the thorny brush its home. Their numbers keep declining. The diversity of birds in Rio Grande Valley is very unique. Even the green kingfisher makes its home along the Rio Grande River and thorny forests, eating small fish. "This thorn forest habitat is host or home to nearly 400 different types of birds and myriad of other species."[190]

Insects

The Rio Grande Valley is also known for its insects and pests, which can sometimes become bothersome to people. The Rio Grande Valley is home to two poisonous spiders, the black widow and brown recluse. The black widow and brown recluse are feared spiders that live in urban and rural areas. The black widow is a very shy spider, but comes into contact with humans because they share the same space. The brown recluse is a more aggressive spider that tends to avoid humans at all costs but can be seen throughout the Valley. Inchworms have become a problem in the Valley because they eat the leaves of plants and trees.

Other insects, like butterflies, have become more of an interest because they tend to attract visitors to the Valley. Many butterflies make their way to the Rio Grande Valley from the South. There is a wide variety of butterflies that comes in through the wildlife corridors of the Valley like the monarch butterfly (Figure 6.14). There is also a plethora of different types of dragonflies that dance around the habitat, and there is a whole new hobby trend that consists of dragonfly watching. The Rio Grande Valley has become a haven for butterfly and dragonfly watching, and many state parks like Falcon State Park have incorporated a butterfly garden as one of their attractions. The Rio Grande Valley has become one of the most important wildlife corridors in the United States, and at the same time, wildlife has become one of the main attractions that brings people from all around the world to the Valley.

[190]Mitchell Mathis and Daniel Matisoff. "A Characterization of Ecotourism in the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley. (Houston Advanced Research Center, 2014), 7.

Figure 6.14: Two monarch butterflies on a flower. These beautiful butterflies migrate through the Rio Grande Valley, and are very popular butterflies for sight-seeing. https://www.monarch-butterfly.com/index.html

Man's Dominion over the Animals

Human occupation and urbanization have become an issue because it is destroying habitat. In the Edinburg area at the Fike family farm, Sam Fike reported a puma in the farm crying out, but he said it was in the 1980's the last time he heard a puma. Rachel Fike Villareal also reported to seeing a Mexican fox crossing the property a couple of years ago, and some feral hogs around their property.[191]

When asked about this decline of wildlife, Sam reports that urbanization and people moving into the *colonias* has caused the wildlife to decline.[192] The Fikes own a big stretch of land where they harvest sorghum and citrus. The CHAPS team was at the Fike farm and there was no sign of wildlife, just a few redwing black birds, due to constant population growth in the area. The Fikes enjoy the outdoors and they anxiously wait for deer hunting season to arrive, which is the hobby the Fikes enjoy the most. While hunting deer, they also see other wildlife in the area. Sam Fike claims that there are a lot of javalinas, but they do not like to shoot them because they give off a foul smell. Whitetail deer is their favorite game animal to hunt. Sam Fike said they enjoy turning the meat into sausage and hamburger meat.[193] Every weekend it has become a tradition for the Fikes to go hunting and barbeque.

[191] Rachel Fike Villareal, interviewed by Evan Berg, UTRGV Campus, Edinburg, Texas, October 18, 2017.
[192] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia and José Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.
[193] *Ibid.*

On the Fike farm, they have around 100 peacocks. Sam said that they just have them for show because his mom likes them. They have eaten them before, and they taste like pheasant, but it is rare that they eat them.[194] The Fikes surely enjoy the outdoors. Rachel Fike Villareal's kids even enjoy catching sharks in the Gulf of Mexico for fun.

The Fikes were not the only ones to make use of the land. Before them were Native Americans and the Spanish Empire. Native Americans were the first to occupy the Rio Grande Valley, and their occupation altered the land by clearing natural habitat and hunting. The Spanish Empire also made use of the land by extracting resources like wood to build their houses and they also introduced domestic animals. The domestic animals like cattle, horses, and goats overgrazed the land destroying large tracts of land. Along with altering the land the Spanish also over killed local wildlife like the Ocelot for its beautiful fur and to protect their livestock from these predators.

Many wildlife species are in decline because of the over hunting in the area and opening new land for occupation will create more problems on the wildlife. Some birds have also become scarce, but other has become pests to framers. The redwing black birds (Figure 6.15) have become a huge problem for the Fikes. Flocks of them have destroyed their harvest. At the Cantu's farm in Edinburg, red wing black birds destroyed their crop of corn.[195] Inside his truck, George Fike shoots at the red wing black birds that are feasting on the crops at the Fike Farm. (Figure 6.16) The interaction with wildlife has become a clash between humans and the natural fauna whether they are pests or beneficial to the environment.

Figure 6.15: Photo of red-winged blackbirds. These birds are often considered pests, since they love to eat corn and grains, often destroying crops. Picture taken on the Fike farm for the CHAPS program, 2017.

[194] Sam Fike, interviewed by Ulysses Garcia and José Montoya, Fike Farm, Edinburg, Texas, November 3, 2017.
[195] Rolando Silva, Ramiro Garza, Randall Ramirez, Alexis Casiano, Kristine Adames, Uriah Curtiss, Luis Reyes Jr., Ashley Leal, Jenarae Alaniz, Ryann Fink, Raul Lopez, Joel Rodriguez, Alyssa Aparicio, Ryan Lanroy, Arturo Cortez, Nadia Borrego, Armando Montelongo, Christopher Scott, Jesus Ramos, Omar Flores Marin, Jorge Trujillo, Francisco Gonzales, Antonia Briones, Jose Garcia, Colin Newton, Randy Rosas, Daniel Nicholson, *The Cantu Family: A Porcion of Edingburg*, (The University of Texas-Pan American: CHAPS program), 33.

Figure 6:16: Inside his truck, George Fike shoots at the red-winged blackbirds that are feasting on the crops at the Fike Farm. Since they are considered pests, they are often shot at to kill them, or make them disperse. Photo taken for the CHAPS program, 2017.

As urban development swallows up the vestiges of nature within the Rio Grande Valley, it is extremely important that documentation of all of the beautiful flora and fauna that make up its biological history is saved. It is important so that future generations can appreciate the beauty of a monarch butterfly as it flies in the wind, the elusive ocelot and jaguarundi that move through the brush, and the beautiful menagerie of birds that fly through this beautiful land and paint it with natural beauty. It is our hope by publishing this primary source report that future researchers can find the confirmation they seek with regard to the vast array of flora and fauna found in our region.

Chapter Seven: The Process

Eric Acosta, Ana B. Hernandez, and Jordan Kennedy-Reyes

Figure 7.1: Front Row left to right: Jesus Sierra, Criselda Avalos, Jose Montoya, Stephanie Montalvo, Jackqueline Alejos, Yazmin Soto, Alvino Flores, Jordan Kennedy Reyes, Ulysses Garcia, Israel Vasquez, Lesley Robles and Lizette Garcia. Back Row: Mayela Cavazos, Mayela's mother, Eric Acosta, Russell Skowronek, Jessica Tanguma, Bryan Winton USFW, Emanuel Torres, Osiel Uribe, and Roseann Bacha-Garza pose in front of a flooded salt plain at La Sal del Rey in Edinburg, Texas, October 23, 2017.

As the world becomes more connected, we tend to forget how beautiful the natural world can be. Take a glimpse of life in motion through your window and you will see an adventure waiting to happen. In essence, this is what this project is about. A group of students joined together as a class to find out about their surrounding environment and document the life of one of their neighbors. A lot can be said about a group of students that came together with a common interest in hopes of sharing their knowledge with the world. These students did just that. From the photograph above, we can plainly see that they are no more special than you and me. Admittedly, the one thing that this photo does not show is how this motley crew of future historians, anthropologists, biologists and archeologists put this entire book together. If only this photo could talk, it would share the amazing accomplishments and experiences that these young students from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley embarked on in researching one of our areas most interesting families; the Fikes.

Class Setup

The basic idea for this class was very simple: to gather a diverse group of students from different classifications and various but related disciplines that attend the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. This multi-disciplinary class is made up of students who are either majoring or minoring in one or more of the following fields: Anthropology, Archeology, Biology, Ecology, Geology, and History. The class was set up as an upper-level elective for undergraduate juniors and seniors as well as graduate students pursuing a master's degree. Luckily, since this class is always evolving and on different topics each semester, every student is eligible to take this class multiple times for advanced credit.

The different aspects of this class emphasized getting to know the Fike family. Members of the Fike Family were invited to the class in order for the students to ask them basic questions to break the ice. Then, the students were asked to undertake some interview training from the Border Studies Archive at UTRGV's library in order to obtain an oral history from individual members of the Fike Family. A small group of students were asked to team up and interview various members of the family using their knowledge gained from the many lectures pertaining to Anthropology, Archeology, Biology, and History. These lectures, along with the guest speakers from various wildlife and nature reserves around the Valley, gave the students the tools necessary to prepare an accurate historical account of the land before the modernization of the Valley. This information became very important when the class did land title research. Little did we know, but the internet has made the access to that information a lot easier.

An added perk of joining the class was all the field trips that we took. From the Museum of South Texas History and the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge, to La Sal del Rey Nature Reserve and the Fike Family Farm, we were exposed to some really great experiences that built up our historical knowledge of the place we call home. Thankfully, this was all due to our great professors that bestowed such a great curriculum upon their students.

First, we have Dr. Russell Skowronek of the Anthropology department. He played a major part in instructing the students on the importance of documenting the natural and artificial artifacts we found during our research. His background knowledge proved useful and fun with the many lectures he would provide for the students as we discovered the Rio Grande Valley. His great sense of humor combined with his passion for the obscure stories and unknown history that our area had to offer was the driving force behind the class.

Secondly, we have Ms. Roseann Bacha-Garza of the History department and CHAPS (Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools) program manager. She acted as leader and director for the mass of students that needed guidance. Not only did she take charge of the majority of lectures we had in class, she also coordinated with various outside sources that lectured to us within class and outside of class while we were touring the many historical sites that the Valley had to offer.

Our third professor for the class was Dr. Juan Gonzalez from the School of Earth, Environmental, and Marine Sciences. Although quiet, reserved and very serious, he was the professor that provided the most hardcore analysis of the fields and artifacts that we studied.

His evidence-based data gave a very real scientific feel to our research, rather than have a bunch of young students take an educated guess on their findings. The geology lesson that he provided the students while they dug up soil samples out in the Fike family fields gave the class a solid scientific foundation for their research.

Lastly, the fascinating and busy-bodied Dr. Kenneth Summy from the Department of Biology, as well as Dr. Frank Dirrigl, provided us with some insight as to what some of the organic artifacts were that we found out in the farming fields. From snakes and plants to bugs and bones, these men helped us identify the many mysterious flora and fauna that were either native or invasive to the Valley. Although Dr. Summy was only to be a guest speaker for our class, he attended the many trips we took to the nature reserves as well as the farming fields in order to lend a helping hand.

Groups

It is one thing to get a class together to work on a specific project, but it is a different story to get them to collaborate with each other on writing a book. If you have not noticed already, the book seems to read differently in each chapter. The reason is that out of the entirety of the class, each student was asked to write their fair share of pages in order to contribute their own knowledge and research toward the book. In the past, the books that have been written about other farming families of the Valley, the professors of *Discovering the Rio Grande Valley* class have had an easier time defining which students were more interested in anthropology, archeology, biology, and history. Depending on who was interested in a certain field of study, those students were normally chosen to write that section of the book, but as time went on, some parts of the book were left unwritten. It would usually be left up to graduate students or even the professors themselves to supplement the book with the missing information. This time around, the organization of the book would be more cohesive.

With almost thirty students in the entire class, it is easy to pick out particular students for each section, but life does tend to happen and students may drop the course in the middle of writing their section. For this reason, it was decided to partition the chapters evenly among the students in a fair manner by letting them decide which section of the book they wanted to write. Of course, not all students would be able to get the section they wanted to write, but they were at least given the option to select from their most interested in writing to their least interested in writing sections. For the most part, each student got their first or second choice of writing assignment in hopes that this technique would reduce the likelihood a student would withdraw from the class due to not wanting to write a specific section that was chosen for him or her.

Now that one problem was solved, how would we choose what chapters were going to be in the book? Oddly enough, the answer was very simple. The same way grade school children are taught to write their own essays, we created an outline. It just goes to show that one should never underestimate the power of simplicity. The class as a whole came together during a free period and developed an outline for how the chapters of the book would be developed. Taking into account all of the research data, interviews and field analysis notes, we slowly established a working rough draft for the book chapters. Surely we'd start with an introduction of the Fike Family since they are the focus of the book. Then we would move

on to “The Journey,” an entire chapter dedicated to the Fike Family’s ancestors that traveled from their homeland of Europe to the wild continent of North America. Next, a group of students would write about the Fike family’s land ownership of the fields here in the Rio Grande Valley. This chapter would focus heavily on the deeds to their properties as well as former owners of these past lands. After that, a chapter based on the family life of the Fikes would be sufficient enough to give a little background history of the present-day family members. Naturally, the Fikes being a farming family, a chapter concentrated on their agriculture should be present. Finally, we would have one last chapter to wrap up the entire process of the book in the making. The conclusion chapter focuses on what the future holds for this successful farming family. These dedicated chapters were the initial ideas from the group in order to provide an accurate and concise history to deliver enough of an insight into the Fike Family.

Discovering the Rio Grande Valley

A series of special lectures were given to the students in order to gain the knowledge needed to understand the Rio Grande Valley, where the Fike Family have resided since the late 1950s. Even though many of the students who are part of the class are from or have lived in the Valley for some time, the knowledge from these lectures demonstrated the importance of understanding the Valley and its unique history. As mentioned before, the structure of the class is set up as a multi-disciplinary course indicating the different fields taught in the class that include Archeology, History, Biology and Geology. Along with these special lectures, the class also participated in a series of field trips and through these trips the students were able to engage with the Rio Grande Valley and learn about it through hands-on experiences.

Lectures

The curriculum was broken down into five lectures that cover all the fields taught in the course. Each lecture is given by a different professor who has major on the field or has had experience in such work. Our first lecture was given by Dr. Russell Skowronek, and focused on the archaeological findings in the Valley - particularly the arrow points and projectile point artifacts found on the properties of previous families that had been studied by CHAPS. This demonstrated the possibility of nomadic native people interacting in the area as they pass through or inhabit it. One of the points that Dr. Skowronek put a lot of importance on is on how the students should see the importance on recording the local history and its findings. Due to the pace the city is growing, many of these places or families could be gone in a couple of years without their history being recorded. Therefore, the CHAPS program wants to record their history.

The second lecture was given by Dr. Juan Gonzalez and took a focus on the Valley and its geological aspects. He introduced the South Texas Sand Sheet and deflation trough that act as temporary reservoirs. The deflation trough has also provided the evidence needed to indicate the possibility of prehistoric human occupation, along with the archaeological findings mentioned in Dr. Skowronek’s lecture. Even though there is little evidence of human occupation in the Valley, with the help of the families that have been studied by the CHAPS program, four new undocumented archaeological sites have been identified.

The third and fourth lectures were given by Dr. Kenneth Summy and Becky Reyes, and focused on Biology. In Dr. Summy's lecture, he spoke about the biodiversity found in the Valley, such as what types of native animals and native plants reside in the area, as well as invasive plants that were brought from outside and have invaded the Valley. A topic also discussed was the importance of ecotourism in the area and how the border wall could affect it. Becky Reyes, who works for the Edinburg Scenic Wetlands was a guest speaker who also touched on the importance of ecotourism and how the students could help preserved native flora and fauna.

To conclude the lecture series, the last and fifth lecture was given by Roseann Bacha-Garza. This lecture focused on the history of the Rio Grande Valley starting from the original Spanish *porciones* (land grants) and through the modern era of how Edinburg, Texas became a town. During Dr. Bacha-Garza's lecture, the students also were taught how to search for land titles through the courthouse website.

Santa Anna Wildlife Refuge

In order for the students to discover the Rio Grande Valley in a more personal level, the class took a trip to the Santa Anna Wildlife Refuge located in Alamo, Texas. The students were given instructions to meet at the refuge or were given a choice to carpool with one of the professors. Once there, they met up with a director of the refuge, Bryan Winton, who gave a brief introduction to the contraction and development of the refuge. The refuge was established in 1943 and is positioned along the east-west and north-south path of migratory birds making it a place full of biological diversity. Here many migratory birds along with native birds call the refuge home, or a hotel if they are just taking a rest before they head into South America. Along with birds, butterflies can also be found in abundance, making Santa Anna a primary place to stop for many out of state visitors. Ecotourism plays an important part in the Valley's economy.

Unfortunately due to political reasons, the refuge is at risk of being modified and of losing a section due to the controversial Border wall. As mentioned on the Santa Anna's offical website, the refuge is consider to be small in size with only 2,088 acres of land, but due to its large biological diversity it is the "jewel of the Natinal Wildlife Refuge System." It would be a sad thing to see this place go, and much wildlife would be put at risk if it does. Therefore, due to this reason it is essential for the students of the class to see something that is part of the Valley that could be gone in a few years and learn its history. During the visit, the students walked the grounds of the Santa Anna Refuge to see a glimpse of what the Valley looked like before the cities took over.

Figure 7.2: Lake at Santa Anna Wildlife Refuge in Alamo, Texas: October, 2 2017.

Figure 7.3: Center: Dr. Russell Skowronek and Mayela Cavazos at Santa Anna Wildlife Refuge in Alamo, Texas. Photo taken October, 2 2017.

La Sal Del Rey

The Sal Del Rey is another part of the Valley the students took a look at and explored hands-on. It is a 6,000 acre park located in the outer part of Edinburg, Texas. Just like Santa Anna, it has hike and bike trails for visitors to enjoy, and is part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. Unlike Santa Anna, which is located next to the Rio Grande, Sal Del Rey is nowhere near running water sources, but is made up of a saltwater lake and three reliable freshwater sources. Not much diversity of plant life is found there, but there is a effort to bring back native plants that have had a historical presence in the area throughout the years. About 700 acres in the area are still in agricultural use as the property used to be a working ranch and farm before it became part of the Wildlife Service. The salt lake has been mined for salt since the early Spanish settlers and continues to be mined by a company called MOVAC, who owns the mineral rights. The students also walked the property and looked for salt to be collected.

Figure 7.4: Front: Jose Montoya, Back left to right: Jordan Kennedy-Reyes, Jesus Sierra, Criselda Avalos, and Mayela Cavazos collecting salt at La Sal Del Rey in Edinburg, Texas. Photo taken October, 23 2017.

As mentioned before, these trips were meant for the students to go out and discover parts of the Rio Grande Valley. This was an important step to be included in order to get a better understanding of the place they call home, as well as understanding the Fike family's historical beginnings.

Figure 7.5: Leslie Robles wades into Sal del Rey in Edinburg, Texas. Photo taken October 23, 2017.

Oral History

As mentioned previously in this report, a complete oral history of the Fike family was necessary in obtaining a true historical document of what the family has become since. This was going to be no easy task. We had an entire class full of anthropologists, archeologists, biologists, and historians who had had almost zero training on how to conduct a proper interview. Luckily, we had just the class for the students to get them up to speed.

Keeping in mind that the majority of the students have personal lives, the Border Studies Archive at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley held three classes at different times of the day in order to give the students a chance to attend a class on proper interviewing techniques, as well as correct usage of recording equipment. The B.S.A. acts as a historical oracle for the people living in south Texas between the U.S. and Mexican border. The archive collects historical artifacts significant to the Rio Grande Valley, in addition to keeping detailed documents of Valley life such as Mexican-American folklore, border music, Spanish land grants and politics.

It is important to understand that in a two-hour seminar, the students were not going to become expert interviewers immediately after the class, but it did give them enough information on what to expect and what to do in order to receive permission from the interviewee, along with what to do afterwards once an interview has been recorded. Unfortunately, the students did not get a lecture on interview pitfall questions such as loaded questions, leading questions, or even closed-ended questions. A lot of the students did not know how to probe an open-ended question, nor did they know that some questions can tend

to be controversial and may make the interviewee a bit uncomfortable. With all this being said, although the students weren't proficient interviewers, their appetite for discovery did coax some very interesting data from the Fike family.

Nevertheless, the greatest thing that the Border Studies Archive offered to students was give them the essential knowledge and inner workings to the equipment necessary to record an in-depth and accurate interview. The equipment that the students were able to get their hands on was from a very high-end audio recording company, and it served two distinct purposes. Both pieces of equipment were digital audio recorders, but with different functions. The first gadget was an audio recorder that consisted of a microphone that acted as an electronic ear that one could place either in between the interviewer and the interviewee and speak freely while the machine records the conversation. The microphone could also be placed near the interviewers' cellphone in order to conduct a phone interview for those far away family members.

The second piece of equipment that we used looked very much like a small and thin cellular phone. This audio recorder had internal memory storage for the audio file and was portable enough to fit inside your pocket and take anywhere with you. The only problem with this audio recorder that some of us would soon find out was that the microphone on that recorder did not have a way to block any wind noise. This became a problem when the interview was held out in the flat and windy farming fields. Fortunately, another piece of equipment that the students were able to take advantage of was the transcribing computers. The possibility of starting and stopping or even rewinding the audio from an interview with a foot peddle so one could freely type was a technological marvel.

Oral History Interviews

When the CHAPS students started the oral interviews, the class was split into groups. The members chosen for my group were Gabbi and Mayela. We also went to an event to learn how to use the recording equipment at the Border Studies Archive located inside the university's library on the 3rd floor. Afterwards we discussed some questions my group asked the teacher and used questions that were suggested by the teacher also. In doing so, we had planned the interview beforehand. First, I called our interviewee ahead of time, but had a hard time getting a hold of her. We messaged the teacher to get some help, which helped. We planned our interview with Sue Rork-Everett for Thursday, November 2nd. When we conducted the interview, we turned the dials on the back of the Tascam off, so it didn't give off feedback, then plugged in the Omni microphone, and tested the levels before Gabbi arrived. After all this, we called Sue Rork-Everett, and asked her some questions, such as "Do you have your family tree documented?" Some, of the more pressing questions came after we got bits and parts of answers, for example, that her grandpa was a banker, and that her husband was a trucker. This was helpful in creating questions, such as did she hunt food as a kid, or was the farm in her family records. Also, "How was life after Hurricane Beulah?" These questions provided some interesting light on the farming community, although Sue wasn't a farmer and loved more of the indoor life, mostly because of the heat of the Texan summers. Her family also swam in the canal that was in her yard to keep out of the heat. Also, what I found most interesting was that she caught all the little critters on the farm which seemed non-existent when we combed the fields. Afterwards, my group met again to start on the transcribing process.

For the transcribing process, I typed a few parts out by hand and by ear. The transcribing process, to me, was highly tedious because I had to listen and pause the recordings in short intervals. So, I cut out the portion and sent it to an online transcribing program. This program showed you the time code where the section was in the audio and you can click to back track the audio to the exact spot, which was helpful, though some audio was missed. This was because software is not that accurate yet, so afterwards I finished transcribing by ear, which caused me to notice the missing content. This was helpful to keeping up with the conversations and writing the names of the people speaking in Microsoft Word. Afterwards, my group and I corrected some of the grammar issues of the transcript. My part of the transcript started at 34:01 and took about 6 hours to complete. Afterwards I emailed the teacher the transcript since I was absent that day.

Transcriptions

During the oral history interviews conducted by each group, a recording of the interview was taken by the students to leave at the Border Studies Archives. In order for this interview to be kept there, the interviewee must sign a Deed of Gift stating that they would like to gift the recordings to the University. Once given the permission needed, the recordings can be accessed by anyone who would like to use it for academic research. The recordings must be transcribed by the students. The process of transcribing requires the person transcribing to listen to the recording and write word for word what is being said, including any sound in the background or any motion capture in the recording. As mentioned before, in the training that the student took before conduction the oral interviews the Border Studies Archives also provide aid in transcribing as they have available programs in their location for the student to use. In the class, each group had a different person to interview, therefore each group was made up of three to four students. Depending on how long the interview went for and how many people were in a group, each student had their fair portion of having to transcribe a part of their interviews. The curriculum stated that the full transcription must be turned in as a draft before being submitted into the Border Studies Archives. This was done to allow the Fike family members who were interviewed to take a look at the transcription and see what was said and done. If there is anything they would like to omit, this allowed them a chance to do so. The final transcription after revision can be found at the end of this book for better understanding of the oral history conducted by the students. Not only do the transcriptions and recordings provide a primary source to the Fike family history, they also provide the different perspectives of each and every one of the interviewee's points of view.

Field Work

The Community Historical Archeology Project with Schools, known as the CHAPS program, talked to the Fike family before fieldwork took place. We gained permission to do a survey of some fields found on the Fike Farm and learned more about the family. In addition, the class looked into articles that described the history of farming, the history of similar families, and finally the history of the Rio Grande Valley. This helped in understanding why the Fike Family moved down to the Rio Grande Valley, and the various troubles they faced due to the environment.

Biology

For the biology portion, one group with Dr. Summy combed the land looking at the wildlife while taking pictures. On October 19, 2017, one of the biological surveys on the Fike Family yard found that there are Mexican Ash trees, Pecan trees, Gloveras, Tuipans, Agaves, Spanish Daggers, Sable Palms, Yuccas, Spiny Hackberrys, Libel trees, Robbilles, Mesquite trees, non-native Cactuses, English Ivies, Lelas, Fig trees, Silver Sages, Eurasian Collier Doves, Peacocks, Burr Oaks, Johnson Grasses, Bermuda Grasses, Mallows, Anaquas, Pig Weeds, Persian Ferns, Chahalacas, Silver Leaf Night Shades, Crab Grasses, Washingtonian Palms, Magnolias, Fiddlewood, Oleander, Saddle Bags, Sugar Hack Berry, Night Blooming Cactus, Pruslan, Banana Trees, Cecil Palnias, and Black Willow. There were land snails which are prey for the hockbill/kitebirds, dragon flies, and Mexican cormorant. Rats' trails indicated the possibility of cotton rats. Fire ants are located on the field and on the main property. Other plants included Berlanders Indian Mallow, camphor daisy, and Texas Nightshade. Later, we collected samples, took pictures, and wrote notes. When The Process group met Dr. Summy, it helped the CHAPS program organize its data, and was very helpful.

Birds								
Common Name, *Spanish Name*	**Scientific Name**	**Roegiers**	**Eubanks Location 1**	**Eubanks Location 2**	**Atwood**	**Cantu**	**Fike Property**	**Fike Field 2**
Cardinal*			Y					
Chacalaca*			Y				Y	
Green jay*			Y					
American coot	*Fulica Americana*					Y		
Belted kingfisher	*Ceryle alcyon*					Y		
Buff bellied hummingbird	*Amazilia yucatanensis*				Y			
Common Grackle	*Quiscalus quiscula*	Y						
Golden fronted woodpecker	*Melanerpes aurifrons*				Y			
Great egret	*Ardea alba*					Y		
Great kingfisher	*Chloroceryle americana*					Y		
House sparrows	*Passer domesticus*					Y		
Mockingbird, northern mockingbird	*Mimus polyglottos*		Y		Y	Y		
Mourning dove	*Zenaida marroura*	Y				Y		
Marsh hawk, North harrier	*Circus cyaneus*					Y		
White-winged dove	*Zenaida asiatica*	Y			Y	Y		
Whitetail hawk	*Buteo albicaudatus*				Y			
Purple Martin swallow							Y	
Peacock							Y	
Swallows							Y	
Eurasian Collier Doves							Y	
Mexican cormorant							Y	

Figure 7.6: CHAPS Biostudies

Animals								
Common Name ***Spanish Name***	**Scientific Name**	**Roegiers**	**Eubanks Location 1**	**Eubanks Location 2**	**Atwood**	**Cantu**	**Fike Property**	**Fike Field 2**
Eastern Cottontail Rabbit	*Sylvilagus floridanu*	Y						
Hare (Jackrabbit)	*Leporidae*	Y						
Javelinas*		Y						
Land snails	*Gastropoda/ Achatina fulica*	Y	Y				Y	y
Peccary, *Javelina*	*Tayassuidae*	Y						
Texas horned lizard	*Phrynosoma cornutum*	Y		Y				
Texas Garter Snake	*Thamnophis sirtalis annectens*	Y						
Texas Horned Toads*		Y						
Black snakes, Indigo snakes*						Y		
Rat Snake								y
Dog	*Canis lupis famimiaris*						Y	y
Bob Cat								y
Golden Orb Muscle								

Plants								
Common Name ***Spanish Name***	**Scientific Name**	**Roegiers**	**Eubanks Location 1**	**Eubanks Location 2**	**Atwood**	**Cantu**	**Fike Property**	**Fike Field 2**
Night blooming cactus							y	
Sable palm							y	
Silver leaf nightshade							y	y
Mexican ash							y	y
Indian Mallow							y	
Mesquite							y	
Nonnative cacti							y	
Yuccas							y	
Libel trees							y	
English Ivies							y	
Lelas							y	
Pecan							y	
Gloveras							y	
Silver Sage							y	
Spiny Hack Berry	*Celtis ehrenbergina*							y
Burr Oaks							y	
Bermuda Grasses							y	y
Anaqua							y	y
Pig Weed							y	y
Prothians							y	
Texas nightshade							y	
Washingtonian Palms							y	
Magnolias							y	
Fiddle Wood							y	
Oleander							y	
Saddle Bags							y	
Sugar Hackberries							y	
Banana Trees							y	
Pruslam							y	
Cicil Polnias							y	
Black Willow							y	
Johnson Grass							y	y
Wild Squash								y

Figure 7.6: CHAPS Biostudies

Insects and Arachnids								
Common Name ***Spanish Name***	**Scientific Name**	**Roegiers**	**Eubanks Location 1**	**Eubanks Location 2**	**Atwood**	**Cantu**	**Fike Property**	**Fike Field 2**
Antlion	*Myrmeleontidae*	Y						
American snout	*Libytheana carinenta*					Y		
Brown lacewings	*Hemerobiidae*				Y			
Brown longtail	*Urbanus procne*					Y		
Ceraunus blue	*Hemiargus ceraunus*					Y		
Checkered white	*Pontia protodice*					Y		
Dainty sulphur	*Nathalis iole*					Y		
Dragonfly	*Anisoptera*	Y						
Great southern white	*Ascia monuste*					Y		
Gulf fritillary	*Agrulis vanilla*					Y	Y	y
Harvester ants	*Pogonomyrmex barbatus*	Y			Y		Y	y
Jumping spider	*Pyrrharctia isabella*			Y				
Little yellow sulphur	*Pyristia lisa*					Y		
Lyside sulphur	Kricogonia lyide					Y		
Mallow scrub-hairstreak	*Strymon istapa*					Y	y	
Monarch butterfly	*Danaus plexippus*				Y			
Painted lady	*Vanessa cardui*					Y		
Phaon crescent	*Phyciodes phaon*					Y		
Red admiral	*Vanessa atalanta*					Y		
Fire ants, Red ants	*Solenopsis invicta*	Y			Y			
Rounded metalmark	*Calephelis perditalis*					Y		
Snout butterfly	*Libytheana bachmanii*				Y		y	y
Swallowtail butterfly	*Palilio polyxenes*				Y			
Tropical checkered-skipper	*Pyrgus oileus*					Y		
Western pygmy-blue	*Brephidium exilis*					Y		
White peacock	*Anartia jatrophae*					Y		
Wooly bear	*Salticidae*			Y				
Yellow sulphur butterfly	*Pieridae*	Y			Y			
Pantropical Jumper	*Plexippus paykulli*							
Carabide beetle								
Bold Jumping Spider	*Phidippus audax*							
Giant Wolf Spider	*Hogna carolinensis*							
Orb-weaver spider	*Araneidae*	Y						
Cabage looper								y
Beat Army Worm								y
Tomato Horned Worm								y
Prairie Rabdotus							y	
Green Grasshopper								y
Pygmy Grasshopper								y
Short Horned Grasshopper								y
Blue Legged Grasshopper								y

Figure 7.6: CHAPS Biostudies

Geology

What the class did for the geology portion was hand drill into the soil until we hit the water table. After the CHAPS class drilled the boreholes, we looked and took pictures of the samples, while describing them. The chart below contains all the information from the hand drill.

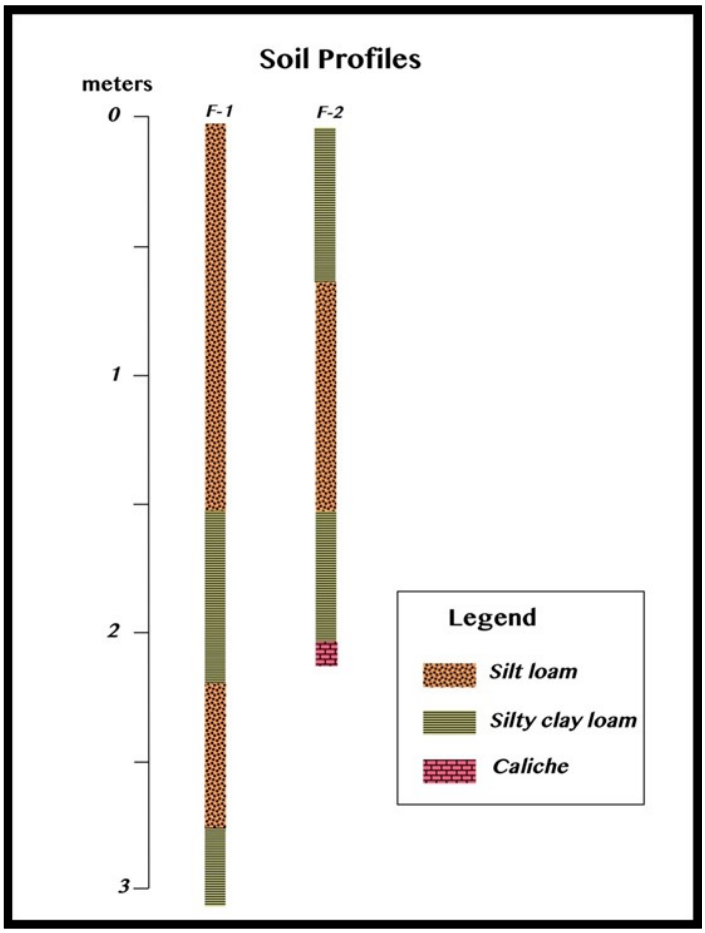


Figure 7.7: Geology profiles.

F1 is the borehole from Field One on the Fike Farm, which was the deepest we have drilled in the class's history. It is more than three meters deep and contains silt loam from 0 meters to 1.6 meters. At 1.6 meters, it shifts to silty clay loam, at 2.3 meters it shifts silty loam, and at 2.7 meters it shifts to clay loam. The drill got stuck at 3.3 meters. Field Two starts at 0 meters of silty clay loam to 0.7 meters, where it shifts to silt loam, next it shifts at 1.5 meters to silt loam, and finally at 2.1 one meters it shifts to caliche. Field One had the deepest borehole on our records.

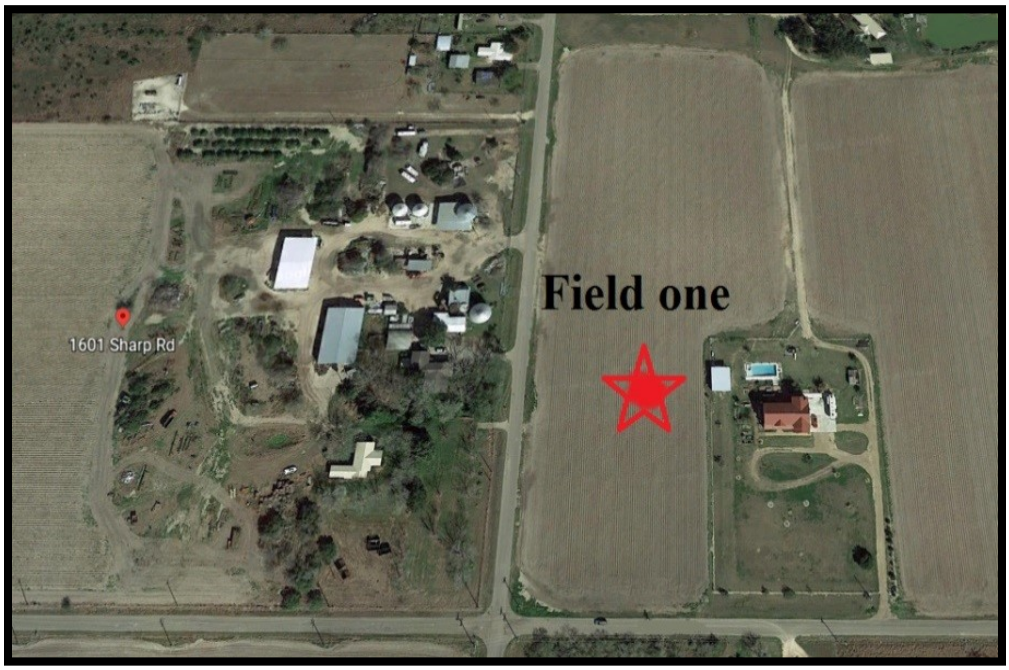


Figure 7.8: Field One location at the corner of 17 ½ Mile Road and Sharpe Road in Edinburg, Texas.

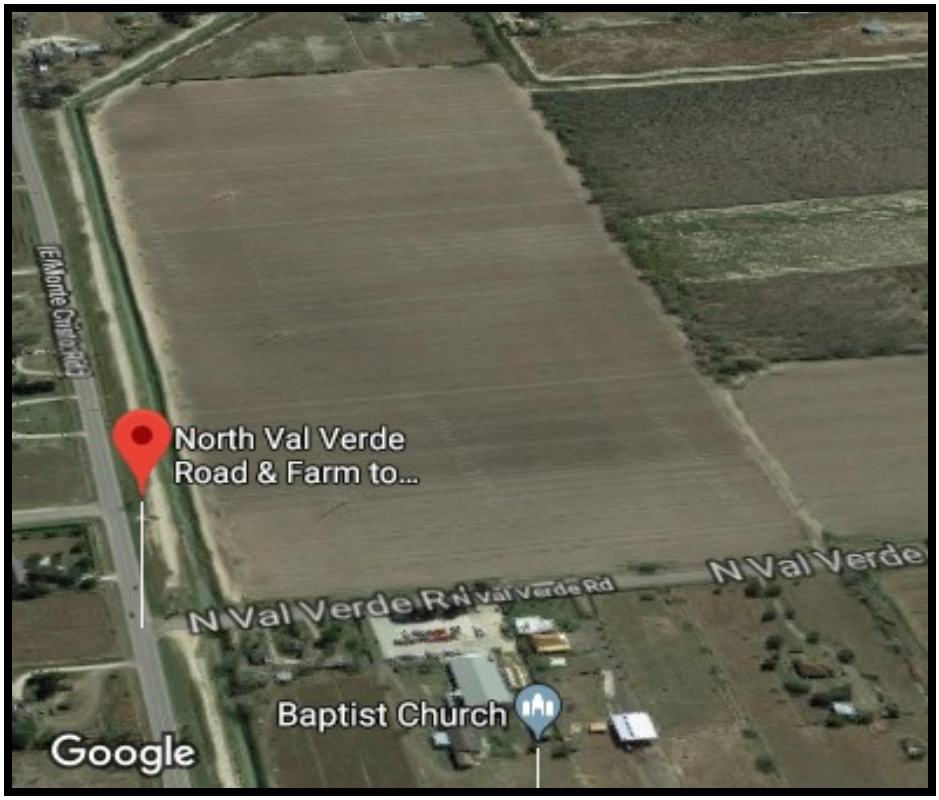


Figure 7.9: Field Two location near the Baptist Church.

Figure 7.10: José Montoya and April Wilson operating the hand drill.

Figure 7.11: Soil sample with concretions at Fike Farm in Edinburg, Texas.

Archaeology

Furthermore, in the archeological process, we combed the fields, which yielded modern artifacts (incidental trash). This included bones from charred animal remains. When interviewed, Sue Rork she said they liked barbequeing and hunting. At 37:33 of the interview, Sue said "Do what? Oh, ok, uh, we did a lot of ribs and course hamburgers, and doe, deer if we had it. We even did a goat one time and rabbits. We did rabbits, (pause) whatever we had basically."[196] In the second field, shot gun shells were found concentrated towards the back of the second field, where they might have been shooting at bird pests like the red wing black bird (Agelaius, *Agelaius*) which eat the corn on the fields. After we collected and cleaned the incidental trash, the process group took pictures of the items at different angles and perspectives, to give a clear view of what we had, so that the other members of CHAPS could use them. The next step was to bring the bones to Dr. Dirrigl to examine. Once in Dr. Dirrigl's office, we decided to create a quantitative structure for the bones so we could organize them by number, starting at .001. After that, the process group members organized the bones by similarities. After the bones were organized, we tried conjunction, in which we attempted to piece the bones together. Dr. Dirrigl said the bones were (Bovine, *Bos Taurus*) domestic cow and possibly deer (Cervidae, Odocoileus *s.p*). The group also had to freeze bags from Field Two because bugs entered the bag. It is a necessity to keep insects away from artifacts. On some of the remains, we found cut marks and charring, which again showed that the family liked to barbeque. We also found golf balls in the first field, which shows signs of the leisurely activities of the Fike family. As Mathew Fike stated "Yep, well occasionally we'll sit over there, sit in front of the grain bed, and just hit a few golf balls, talk and relax. You know, you go buy a bag of recycled golf balls for seven bucks, and then you'll laugh and joke with your cousins. You know, occasionally it's good to hit something." [197]

[196] Sue Rork-Everett, interviewed by Gabriela Chaps, Mayela Cavazos and Jordan Kennedy-Reyes, November 7, 2017: 37:33.
[197] Mathew Fike and Leslie Fike, interviewed by Priscila Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017 line 40.

Figure 7.12: Bones found in Field One at Fike Farms.

Figure 7.13: Incidental trash (modern artifacts) found in Field One at Fike Farms.

Conclusion

Priscilla Cardenas, Benito Contreras, Jacob Garza, and Cynthia Sanchez

Here in the Valley there are many farms, many of which have been here for a long time. Among these farmers are the Rork and the Fike families. These families have been here for over half a century. Oral interviews were conducted to know more about these families. A lot was learned from these interviews.

The story began with the Rork family, when a man by the name of Patrick O' Rorke immigrated from Ireland. The reason? During this time young boys were put to be at war. To avoid being enlisted, Francis decided to leave to the United States. This is how he ended up in New York. It was said that he traveled through Ellis Island. When questioned, Sue Rork Everett, his great-granddaughter, said she went to Ellis Island. "I could not find his, his uh name in the book, so ah, we were always told that's where he came, but he must have snuck onboard or something cause he wasn't listed".[198] Either way, he came to the U.S. and settled in Pennsylvania. They later moved on to Nebraska in the 1830s. Soon after, he ended up in Arkansas where he began a small farm.

Francis Frank married Kathleen Rork and they had 12 children. One of whom would be known as William Rork. William (Bill) Rork married Ruth Analee and they would go on to have five children together. The children would later be known as Anna, Bobby, Frank, Catherine Sue, and Johnny. Sue in one of her interviews says that: "My grandmother on my mother's family died when [Ruth] was three, and she was raised by an aunt or something that wasn't very nice to her, so I'm sure that's part of the reason my mother was always so sweet to all of us, she was an angel, and uh, but she died when she was three, and they lived in Arkansas."[199]

Bill was not a farmer. In fact, he owned a trucking business that took a turn for the worse during the depression in the 1930s. That is when he was told of a wonderful place called the "Magic Valley". He left east Texas and moved to the Valley. His goal was to buy a house so that he and his family had somewhere to stay and so that they could begin their own adventure in a new place. This was not the case, however. When he and Ruth arrived in the Valley, not only did they not have a house, but they soon realized that this land was not all magical as it was promised. Bill's family had to live in a tent and cook in a fireplace. This caused Ruth to cry, quite frequently. However, Bill would not let this stop him.

Within a little less than a year, Bill bought some land that was sold him by a motel who ran out of business. It was here where he built his home and created his first farm. Here he began to grow sweet corn. Ruth had her own little garden where she planted "English peas, plant onions and so she could make a meal. Lettuce-leaf lettuce".[200] Something that all of Ruth's kids remember about her is her cooking. They all recall that Ruth was a great cook. She would make the best pie, cottage cheese, and flour tortillas. Anna remembers her mother's passion for cooking. Ruth and the Spanish neighbor would trade recipes and that is

[198] Sue Rork-Everett, interviewed by Gabriela Chaps, Mayela Cavazos and Jordan Kennedy-Reyes, November 7, 2017.
[199] *Ibid.*
[200] *Ibid.*

why she knew how to cook, flour tortillas and beans. “And boy did my boys love her cooking”.[201] Although Anna did not have the same cooking skills as her mother, she still can’t forget her mama’s meals. Her father on the other hand was a hardworking man and loved his wife dearly.

Figure 8.1: The Rork family

The Fike’s story begins when Michael Fike left Alsace-Lorraine. This, according to Anna Fike, was:

> “French one year and German the next and I think Grandfather Michael got tired of being German one year and then French the next and also…there was…I think…this is my- just my…from reading what…little bit I have…I think that his son Steven was killed in a clash between the German and French and he decided to come where we weren’t fighting…and he came to Ohio…and bought a farm.”[202]

He came to Ohio in the 1839. There he began a dairy farm. Michael Fike married Ida and together they began a family. It is unknown how many children they had together but there is one man called Harry Fike that can be accounted for. Harry Fike married a woman by the name of Mildred Hannah. Together they had nine kids. They were called Willard, Evelyn, Betty, Harry Jr., George, Janet, Mary, Shirley, and Patsy.

Harry Fike and his family decided to leave Ohio and move to The Valley. The reason, again, the "Magic Valley". He was told, just like the Rorks, that the land here was perfect for crops. He began his farming with oranges and grapefruits and other vegetables. He bought land in Donna where he did his farming.

[201] Anna Fike, interviewed by Cynthia M. Sanchez & Roxanne Recino, October 31, 2017.
[202] *Ibid.*

It is here where Harry's son, Willard, met Anna (then Rork). Anna recalls meeting Willard because of his motorcycle. She says:

> "We had a piece of property that my daddy was renting across from our property with a little road that went up to the woods on the ranch. And this guy kept driving his motorcycle, loud as he could ride it, you know, down between and passed the house and my daddy would get so upset, "That hoodlum is out there again!"[203]

To this she thought, he was a cute hoodlum. They began their relationship in October and married on December 15th of the same year. Her father disapproved of their relationship. Years later, Bill got to appreciate and love Willard.

Anna worked at the Texas Employment Commission for about 34 years until she retired in 1982. Willard worked on the board at the water district. Before he began his farming. The way they got their land can be considered as a gift and a great opportunity. Anna talks about their experience buying land after she married Willard:

> We didn't have- when we got married uh I had seventy-five dollars in war bonds…and he had a little he had made some on the cotton crop…up there on the east highway…so…this was offered to us by a man who admired my husband. He said…I will finance the farm…you-you pay me what you can when you can…and then started with this ten acres…right here…and then Judge Baird got to know Willard and he owned the ten acres over here and uh he thought he was a good man and a hard worker and so he gave us the same deal. Pay me what you can, little bit, you-you do what you can do, I'll work with you. So now we've got twenty acres.[204]

Then the mayor during that time, Joe Davis, presented Willard the same opportunity along with a neighbor who was quitting his farm. Anna sees this as a blessing. It because of these people that they began their farm.

Willard and Anna went on to have four kids. Nothing was more important than her loving four boys. Michael born on September 12th, 1952. George was born on July 28, 1954, Harry born on June 8th, 1957 and passed away on June 19, 2003. Sammy was born in August 15, 1952.

Michael is married to Karen and together they have three kids: Rachel born in February 19, 1978, Daniel born in October 25, 1980, and Josh born in January 22, 1982. Daniel is married to Shelly Fike and together they have two kids, Betsy Ana and Beverly born on July 29, 2012. Josh is married to Athena and together they have two kids named Harper, born on September 18, 2011, and Hannis, born on February 13, 2010. Rachel is married to Daniel Villarreal and they have two sons: Warren, born on August 15, 2005 and Woodrow, born on September 25, 2007.

[203] Anna Fike, interviewed by Cynthia M. Sanchez & Roxanne Recino, October 31, 2017.
[204] *Ibid.*

George Fike is married to Wendy Fike and together they have two boys: George Adam Fike, born on December 21, 1981, and Mathew Fike, born on May 31, 1984. George Adam is married to Kim Fike and together they have two kids, Copper and Teddy. Mathew Fike is married to Leslie Fike and together they have two boys. Kale born on November 27, 2002, and Hunter born on June 19, 2005.

Anna Fike is very proud of her family. She says that her family has sent all her kids to college and every one of them returned. Her grandson, Daniel, got a degree from Texas A&M University in Agriculture and Business. He was offered three jobs when he graduated, but he said, "I'm going back to the farm". Her granddaughter, Rachel, has a master's degree and is currently working at UTRGV.

Although the family is extensive, Anna and everyone interviewed has made sure to note that the most important thing for everyone is each other. They care for one another and are constantly looking out for each other. Anna says that the future of her farm lays in the hands of her grandchildren. She believes her grandchild, Josh, will likely take over because he has already shown interest in the farm life. Currently, Sammy, George, Josh, Matthew, and Daniel are caring for the farm.

Anna wants to leave her kids with an important message. A message that leads to happiness. She says the key to a healthy life is being active and to not hold grudges. She says:

> "The other thing to remember, don't forget to forgive the people that hurt you. Because if you hold a grudge it will ruin your body and your mind. Sorry you feel that way, because if you stew on it you will get sick I guarantee you, you will have heart trouble, and your mind… you will be on the bed unable to sleep, because you'll be what did I do, for her to say that, or whatever, don't hold grudges. It is what Jesus told us to do, to forgive, and if you do, you'll sleep better, you'll be happier, and stay happy, there's always something."[205]

One thing the Fike kids have learned over the years is to work hard. Anna and the Fike women agree that "you will never find hardworking men as the Fike boys." Their legacy will likely move on and their farm will continue to carry on the Fike name.

For those who are native to the land, and perhaps even to those who are not, The Valley has always been an agricultural place. It does not take much to see that a vast majority of the Valley is composed of farms. One cannot drive without seeing corn, lettuce, oranges, grapefruit, onion, or the like sprouting from the earth. But has anyone ever stopped to question the history of these farmers? Has anyone ever wondered how these farmers came to the Valley? More importantly, has anyone ever stopped to think of the difficulties these farmers have gone through over the years?

It is no surprise to know that, as a farmer, life has not been particularly easy. What with the Great Depression, droughts, and hurricanes, life as a farmer is essentially a gamble.

[205] Anna Fike, interviewed by Cynthia M. Sanchez & Roxanne Recino, October 31, 2017.

It takes a special kind of person take such risk and come out victorious. Such is the case with the Fike and the Rork family. Both of these families have been known for taking risks. They have done so known that if they failed they could lose more than just their crops. Even so, they have turned to be one of the most successful farmer families here in the Valley.

Based on interviews held either by phone or face to face encounters, much can be learned from these two families. Beginning with the Rork family, it is known that they began their adventure when Anna Fike's great-grandfather left Ireland and became a farmer in the 1830s. Though her dad was not a farmer, he and his family left their home in East Texas and came to the valley. It was rumored that there was this wonderful place known as the Magic Valley where you could "just put a pencil in the ground and it'll sprout roots!"

He would later find that this was not entirely true. What was known as the Magic Valley was not all entirely magical. With the land, came troubles, but it wasn't all that bad. Anna's father began planting sweet corn. He was a risk taker. He decided to plant his crops in December. To the disbelief of many people, this was a successful plan. This was followed by cotton and some cabbages.

For the Fikes, life as a farmer has also been a gamble. They left Ohio, where they had a dairy farm, and moved to The Valley the *magical* land for farming. The main difference between the Valley and Ohio is mainly the seasons. The farm they had in Ohio was dry land, which basically means they relied on Mother Nature to provide water for their crops. Whereas in The Valley, the weather is more unpredictable. Farming is mostly flood irrigation based.

The Fikes came here to sell mainly oranges and grapefruit. But when they arrived they couldn't "grow good stuff as it was promised". In fact, since they first started their plantations, they had to cut down their citrus trees due to freezes. When asked about difficulties with farming when it came to the weather, Mathew Fike revealed that during the freezes of 1983 and 1988-89 the family had to cut down all of their crops. They cut down all of their citrus trees and started over from the beginning. This is a huge problem considering that newly planted crops do not provide fruits straight away. In fact, it takes an average of "four to five years before you get a crop off of it". This meant that for the Fike family, they had to "pinch as many pennies" in order to get through to the situation. Mathew Fike recalls the situation and says that in such circumstances the best thing to do is to get through it as a family.[206]

Problems with the citrus trees have not been the only problem this family has encountered. The Fike family used to grow cotton. Mathew recalls having a bad experience with the crop due to the Boll Weevil Eradication Program. This program sought to end Boll Weevils that were harming cotton crops. It was sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture. It was created to help protect the cotton's revenue. Instead it created a lot of issues for the farmers.

[206] Mathew Fike and Leslie Fike, interviewed by Priscila Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez and Israel Vasquez, October 24, 2017.

Bugs do not cease to haunt these farmers. According to Adam Fike, "bugs are really the main pest for different things".[207] He says that they have had a real problem in the last few years with the sugarcane aphid. These bugs get into milo crops. This caused Daniel and his family to plant milo crops that are resistant to these bugs, or at least more tolerant. But these issues have still caused a problem in this farm's agricultural life.

The Fike family were asked if there are other issues that affected their crops. Adam Fike responded saying that they also have a huge deer problem on some of the farms. He recalled that "[I] had a hundred and fifty-acre farm that [I] lost half of it last year to deer".[208] It can be seen that not only do famers have to be preoccupied with bugs or pesticides, but also watch out for the wildlife as well.

Anna Fike talks about a threat that is affecting their citrus trees. It is something called citrus greening. According to her, the only cure to citrus greening, according to the Agriculture Department is to cut down all trees. This causes farmers such as the Fikes to replant smaller trees which only delays their revenue. This is due to the fact that, as it was previously stated, citrus trees take about 5 years to provide any fruits.

Not only do they have to be on guard against bugs and/or wildlife, but these farmers must also be at the mercy of Mother Nature. Especially if their crops are on dry lands. Dry lands as it was discussed earlier, is using rain as the main source of irrigation. For the Fikes, some of their farms actually dryland to grow their crops. If there is sufficient rain, then the crops will prosper. If there isn't enough rain, well, they would be taking a huge risk.

This is especially true here in the Valley where the weather is quite unpredictable. For example, Adam Fike confesses that his biggest challenge he has overcome is the drought. He admits that when he first began farming after getting married in 2005, there was no rainfall. He estimates waiting about sixteen months for rain to fall. Adam admitted that his first of year farming was probably the toughest. But thanks to family and friends encouraging him to keep going, he was able to find himself some confidence to keep going.

The opposite can also be said when it comes to dryland farming. On the one hand there can be no rain for months and that causes a strain to the crops. While on the other hand, there can be an excessive amount of rain that will also harm the crops. This was the case when Hurricane Beulah hit Texas. This hurricane struck the Valley in 1967 and caused an immense flood throughout the city. Most of the family, both Rork and Fike, recall stories or personal experiences from this natural disaster. For the most part, they recall a flood that came to affect the entire Valley.

It is somewhat obvious that as a farmer, the main harm for crops might be the weather or bugs that can cause harm to their crops. What is less known is that as a farmer, one must also fight against the government. This was something Anna Fike was sure to mention in her interview. When asked about the future of her farm, Anna says she sees the government building an expressway between her home and her granddaughter's home. This

[207] George Adam Fike Jr, interviewed by Eric Acosta, Alvino Flores, and Juan Matta, Edinburg, Texas, November 7, 2017.
[208] [208] George Adam Fike Jr, interviewed by Eric Acosta, Alvino Flores, and Juan Matta, Edinburg, Texas, November 7, 2017.

construction would be dividing their farm in half. She says that the government is not going to build what they had originally said they were going to. Instead, they want to build a way to go over the farm on Mile 18. This means that in order to move their equipment they would have to drive through FM 1925 and/or FM 107. She says this is an impossible task. She is afraid that if the construction takes place, that might be the end of their farm. She says this would not be the first time they lose land, however. They lost a fight over on FM 1925 when the county was trying to condemn their property so they could build a road from the south to the north up into the game refuge. Although she says they still have an acre on each side of the road, the devastation of losing their land still affects the family. She explains that the farm has lost land also due to realtors buying off their land. "We have some people that were approached by real estate people, and a farmer can't pay rent as much as the real estate pay person will pay you for your ground. Right now, ground in this area is bringing 14,000 dollars per acre."[209]

The Fike's are exploring barley to Anna's dismay. She says that this will probably not work. History tends to repeat itself, so she says. Wheat was not a successful crop here in the Valley but according to some, they have developed some that are resistant to this kind of weather. Even so, Anna is resistant to the idea.

Although they have gone through hardships, the Fike's have always overcome their difficulties. They have not let any obstacles get in their way. In fact, they have used their difficulties to propel them to success. Such is the case with George Adam. Who now has his own farm and is working on it quite diligently. His farm is around 6,000 acres which compared to his family's 1,500 acres, is quite large.

He says however that size does no matter. Because they "work just as hard as [he] does because it's a lot more labor intensive on irrigation and manual labor". He sees himself as constantly trying to grow. He believes that if you are not trying to improve and move up then a person shouldn't be doing what they are doing. These are words he lives by and the reason he and his family have been so successful with their farms.

Throughout this entire experience it can be seen that life as a farmer is not easy. From hurricanes, droughts, insects, and sometimes even the government, life is a constant struggle. But the Fike's and the Rorks have always fought. They believe that their family gives off strength. Together they have overcome any struggle.

The Fike Family Farm has been a part of the Edinburg community for many years. The members of the Fike family have been loyal to the City of Edinburg, as well as to the State of Texas. A wide array of crops, including sorghum and corn, have been planted, cultivated, and harvested on the Fike Family Farm. The land currently owned by the Fike Family was originally purchased by earlier generations of the same family with the hopes to keep the farm running for as long as they could. The Fike family is a large family consisting of many farmers. They all work together and do their part in order to make their farm prosperous, although they have run into some setbacks along the way resulting from Texas State and the City of Edinburg regulations. These state and city regulations currently give them most of their problems. Over the years, from time to time, the Fike Family has been forced out of growing certain crops due to stringent regulations. In recent times, the family

[209] Anna Fike, interviewed by Cynthia M. Sanchez & Roxanne Recino, October 31, 2017.

has experienced the threat of loss of land by an aggressive push from the City of Edinburg and the State of Texas to build a new highway that would go straight through their land. This highway would be detrimental to the stability of the family farm and would hurt, not only the Fike Family, but the financial well-being of the surrounding farmers, as well.

The proposed new Texas highway is to be named Highway 68 and was supposed to start construction in 2013. According to the Texas Department of Transportation, the Highway 68 Project is a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and is a part of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The dimensions of the proposed Highway 68 would consist of four rural lane highways. In addition, it would include a divide in the middle as well as mainlines and overpasses, 22 miles in length. The Texas Department of Transportation states that Highway 68 should improve mobility and allow for increased travel. Safety always being a number one concern for governing officials; the new four lane highway would provide a necessary and better evacuation route in case of emergency, such as a massive hurricane. The Edinburg area has fortunately missed a direct hit by all of the recent hurricanes approaching from the Gulf of Mexico, however, a decent escape route is a "must" for the significant population of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). Hurricanes such as "Dolly", "Beulah", and, most recently "Harvey", could have potentially devastated Hidalgo County. If Hidalgo County had taken a direct hit from Hurricane Harvey, the people of the Region could have lost their homes and maybe even their lives. Because of the severe devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey and its' aftermath of torrential rain in the Houston area, it has become apparent that an additional evacuation route out of the RGV is desperately needed. The proposed Highway 68 is a need, not a want; "The project need is a lack of sufficient north/south mobility corridors for local and regional traffic and for additional emergency evacuation routes, which are the result of historical and continuing population and traffic growth in the region." According to the Texas Department of Transportation, as the RGV has become an increasingly populated region, highway expansion must meet the needs of the population growth. The Texas Department of Transportation states that before construction begins on Highway 68, a compromise will be reached to make sure certain non-negotiable factors are met. These factors include, "Transportation, air quality and noise, water quality including storm water runoff, waters of the United States, including wetlands, floodplains, historic and archeological resources, threatened and endangered species, socioeconomics including environmental justice communities, potential displacements of land use, vegetation, residents and businesses, aesthetic and visual resources." According to the Texas Department of Transportation, the Fike Family Farm would fall under the "Potential displacements of land use, vegetation, residents and businesses" factor. In the eyes of the State of Texas and the City of Edinburg, Highway 68 would be a great addition to the RGV making everyday life easier and better for the people of the region. The Fike Family, however, would beg to differ with such an assessment of the situation, posing a very different point of view from that of the State of Texas and the City of Edinburg.

After the completion of an oral interview with Daniel Fike, a direct descendant of one of the original owners and the founders of the Fike Family Farm, his point of view on the construction of Highway 68 was exceedingly clear. Daniel answered several questions regarding Highway 68 and how its' construction and completion would affect the Fike Family Farm. Daniel affirmed that Highway 68 would, indeed, be going straight through his land and, more specifically, through one of the fields where crops are grown. The Fike

Family Farm is located on 1601 North Sharp Road, East 107, Edinburg, Texas, 78542. According to Daniel Fike, the proposed route of Highway 68 will run just east of the Fike Family Farm which would be detrimental to the livelihood of the farm. The homes of Daniel Fike's father and sister would have to be demolished along with the difficulty of figuring out the logistics of moving farm equipment across a six lane highway in order to till, plant, cultivate, and harvest the crops of their land across the highway. Daniel Fike communicated that he had suggested viable compromises to the State of Texas, but such compromises had repeatedly been rejected. Daniel Fike stated that he had suggested that Highway 68 should be moved to the north of the Fike Family Farm. The State of Texas has rejected that alternative due to a gas line being located in the proximity north of the Fike Family farm. In addition, there is an electrical substation that takes up considerable space in that area that would make it difficult to construct Highway 68 there. Daniel Fike also suggested that the highway be placed to the west of the Fike Family Farm or close to 493. The State of Texas rejected these suggestions as well, stating that there would be a disruption to too many residents in that area. Daniel Fike, however, is in disagreement because he believes that there will be more of a disruption to the lives of people if the highway is built in of that area where they want to put the highway right now, and it is even more close proximity to the Fike Family Farm than if it is built by 493. Fike declared that there was a route running along Val Verde Road that, if utilized for the Highway 68 Project, would not affect the Fike Family Farm as much. The biggest contributor to the Highway 68 Project is the Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority. According to Daniel Fike, the Hidalgo County RMA wants to make a loop around the City of Edinburg. The City Council of Edinburg is in favor of the loop because it is more than likely that the end result of such a route will be more land annexed for the city. Fike mentioned that he has sought legal assistance, but to no avail. After seeking the help of an eminent domain lawyer, he realized that the farm could not withstand the expense. Fike lamented that what his family was experiencing was underhanded politics followed by state and local governments for decades used to justify putting local farmers out of business. In addition, paying to postpone or stop a vote on the proposed highway by the City of Edinburg or the State of Texas could hurt crop yields. The Fike's have, however, taken part in a few of these legal meetings. The Fikes have traveled to Austin to speak in front of a state government panel as to why Highway 68 should be located elsewhere instead of through the middle of their family farm. Daniel Fike stated that all he can do at this point to save the Fike Family Farm from going out of business is to continually write letters to the Texas Department of Transportation and encourage the surrounding farm families, such as the Perez Family and the Rivera Family, who own a machinery business, to do the same. It is clear from Daniel Fike's statement that it is hard in this day and age to be a farmer. For the Fike Family, it is apparent that there are times when the family business is at the mercy of state and local politics and government.

State and local regulations have become progressively inconvenient for farmers to abide by over the years. Regulations can be expensive and can hurt farmer's yields in many ways. The Fikes are no stranger to this predicament. According to Daniel Fike, regulations imposed by the federal government on local farmers have placed them in such dire circumstances that their farms sometimes fold. When asked, "Why continue farming when the profession is so hard? Why do you continue to try to keep the family farm afloat?" In answer to those questions, Fike explains that farming is a way of life. Many farmers cannot see themselves doing anything else for a living because they love working on the land and want to continue for the rest of their lives. Advice that Daniel Fike would give to another

farmer or to young people looking to get into farming is to be open-minded. The industry of farming is constantly evolving. To succeed in the profession, one must be willing to change with the times by staying in tune with technological advances. Farmers who are set in their ways and refuse to change with the times will eventually get phased out.

In addition to representing a great traditional American farm family, the Fike family also exhibits many of the fine characteristics that define countless residents of the City of Edinburg. The Fike family is in jeopardy of losing a sizable amount of farm acreage which will significantly affect the profit margins of their farm for years to come. Highway 68 could be devastating for the future profitability of the Fike Family Farm. A compromise of sorts would be palatable to allow for the construction of Highway 68 without destroying the profitability of any of the family farms in the region. For now, a compromise or solution has not been ascertained. However, all is not lost for the Fikes and their surrounding neighbors as the governing body of the State of Texas has not yet set a construction start date for the Highway 68 Project, although the project is said to start soon.

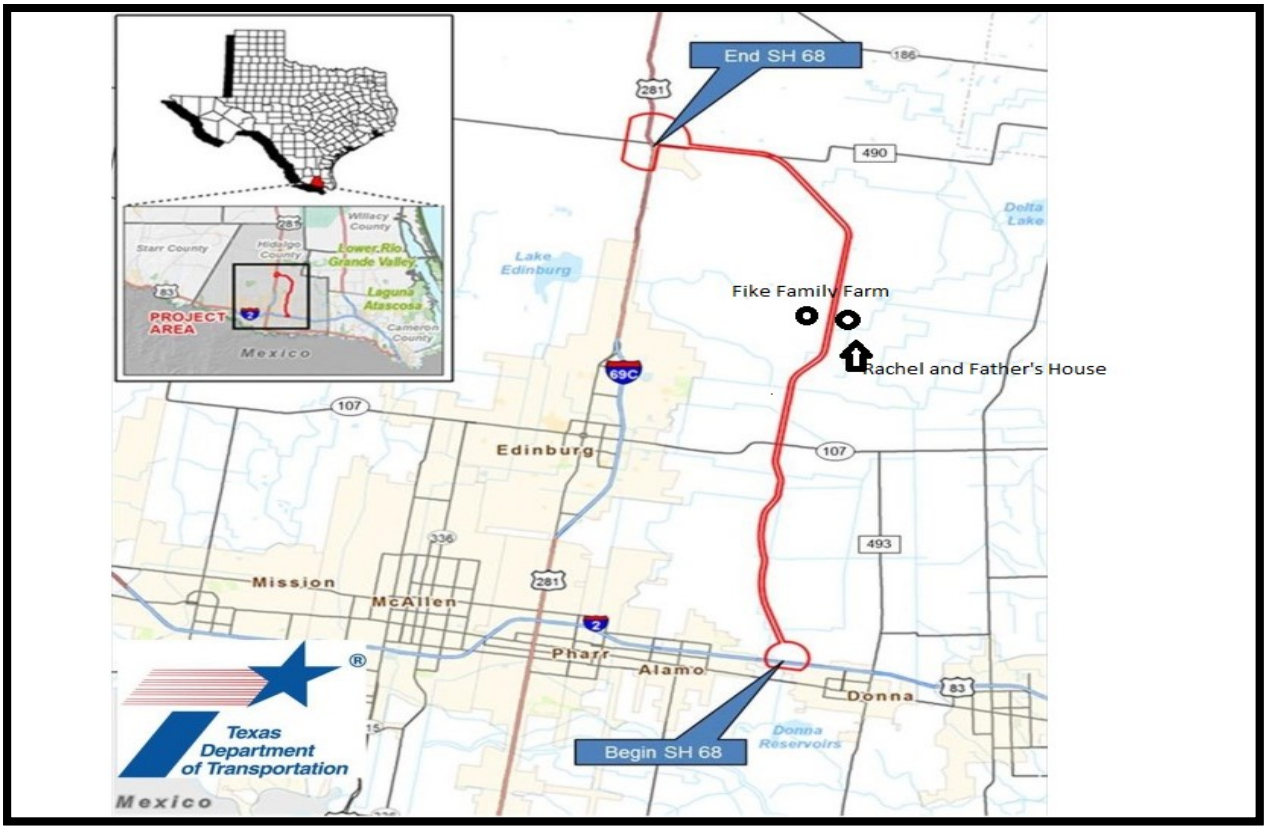
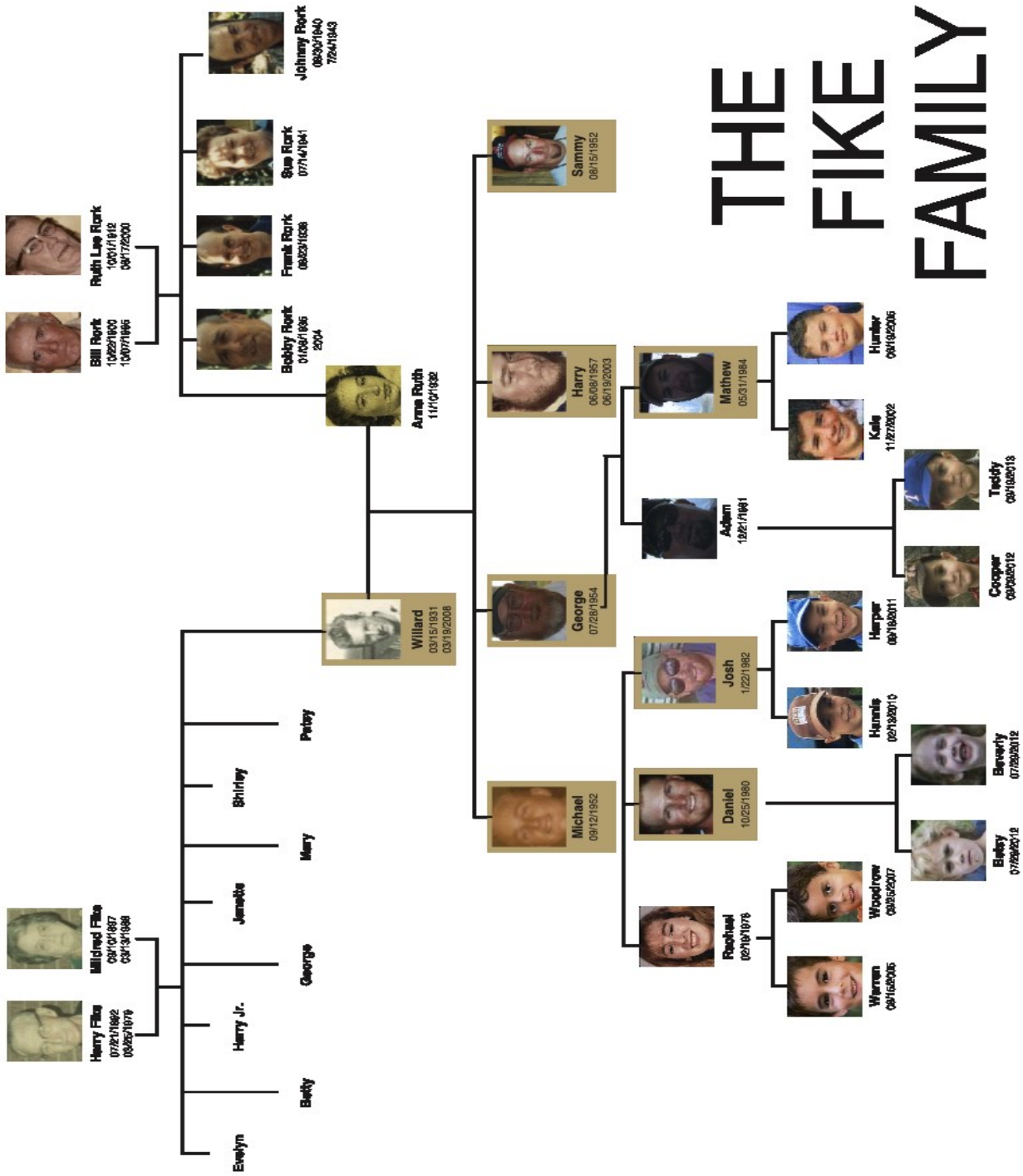


Figure 8.2: Proposed route for Texas State Highway 68.

The Fike family gave so much of their personal history to be obtained and portrayed for generations to come. It is with importance to document the history of the Fike family, for they are one of the few families that continue to farm in the Rio Grande Valley. While exploring their farm lands and conducting archaeological surveys, students pondered which individuals of the Fike family liked golfing, since golf balls were found on the farm land; along with finding out which individuals preferred shooting out on the fields, as many s hotgun shells were also found. The biological findings and encountering how some of the insects collected could pose a threat to the crops, was a valuable lesson. Information provided with the use of equipment and how planting the seeds without irrigation affects a farmer's life was also very interesting. Choosing to make farming your source of income and becoming a farming success is a time-consuming lifestyle. Being able to read the land and understand the growth of crops is something you work at and must love. The Fike family has proven that passion for that farming lifestyle and continue to grow. There are always struggles as learned with this family, nothing comes easy. At this moment there is a highway that is being planned that will cut through the Fike farm, which would affect the family farm. The Fike family has made it clear that they are against the highway, and that they were going to fight against it. Having the opportunity to interview members of the Fike family, gave an insight into how each person makes this family whole. The Fike family history portrays how two people from different countries immigrated to the United States and evolved into the family they are today. The Fike family and how they became who they are today is important because it demonstrates how a family makes sacrifices from the very beginning. Members of the Fike family are well known through the community and showed within this book how respected they are for being who they are. The Fike family have had many ups and downs when it comes to farming, but one thing is for sure - their will to succeed is much greater than anything else. The Fike family has proven its growth and success within the farming business, with expansion from what they started with too what they have now. This book portrays a life of farming, as well as great family values that come with the history of the Fike family. The future of the Fike farm lies within the new generations of children and the will to continue the legacy of the Fike farming business.

Figure 8.3: Fike Farm cotton field in 1990.


THE FIKE FAMILY
Harry Fike
07/21/1892
09/25/1979
Mildred Fike
09/10/1897
03/13/1988
Willard
03/15/1931
03/19/2008
Arnie Ruth
11/10/1932
Billi Rork
10/25/1900
10/07/1995
Ruth Lee Rork
10/01/1912
09/17/2000
Bobby Rork
01/06/1936
2004
Frank Rork
08/23/1938
Sue Rork
07/14/1941
Johnny Rork
08/30/1940
7/24/1943
Evelyn
Betty
Harry Jr.
George
Jeanette
Mary
Shirley
Patsy
Michael
09/12/1952
George
07/28/1954
Harry
06/08/1957
06/19/2003
Sammy
08/15/1952
Daniel
10/25/1980
Josh
1/22/1982
Rachael
02/19/1978
Adam
12/21/1981
Mathew
05/31/1984
Woodrow
09/05/2007
Warren
09/16/2005
Hannie
02/13/2010
Harper
09/16/2011
Kate
11/27/2002
Humber
09/19/2006
Cooper
09/26/2012
Teddy
09/19/2013
Bailey
07/29/2012
Beverly
07/29/2012

Appendix B

Interviewee: Leslie Fike, and Mathew Fike.
Interviewers: Priscilla Cardenas, Ana B. Hernandez, and Israel Vasquez.
Date: October 24, 2017 6:32pm
Location: Residence of Mathew Fike and Leslie Fike.

In this oral interview we are collecting memories and experiences of the Fike Family. Topics that are discussed in this interview are agriculture, family life, farming practices, and cultural background of the Fike Family.

Israel Vasquez: Okay, so we are going to start with Question #1.
Mathew Fike: Alright.
Israel Vasquez: Today is October the 24th, 2017. It is 6:32 pm. Question #1: Farming has always been a tough job how do you manage to stay optimistic when a season isn't favorable on your part? And how do you counter a bad season? Do you have other sources of revenue?
Mathew Fike: No, we're a completely farming family. That's where all our money comes from. That's what we do to earn a living. As far as when seasons are not favorable for us, we are actually very lucky we are in District One irriga tion which means all our land is irrigated. So if hot or dry we are able to irrigate our land to keep the crop growing basically. As far as countering a badseason, the only real bad season I can remember is 1995, and that is when we grew cotton and the Boll Weevil Eradication Program came in and they had a bunch of non-farmers in there trying to help with farming and made it a mess for a lot farmers all around the Valley.
Ana B. Hernández: Um, sorry you said?
Leslie Fike: Boll weevil.
Ana B. Hernandez: Boll weevil. (Momentary pause)
Ana B. Hernandez: Was that the boll weevil?
Leslie Fike: No.
Mathew Fike: Boll Weevil Eradication Program it's a government program they come in and try and help.
Ana B. Hernandez: Oh.
Israel Vasquez: Okay.
Mathew Fike: And I say that in quotation marks "try to help". (Momentarily laughter in the room).
Mathew Fike: They don't.
Israel Vasquez: What separates the success your family has had in the area of South Texas to other families that are in the agriculture business here in South Texas as well?
Mathew Fike: I think from an early age, our entire family has been grown, or we have grown up on a farm for one, but there's always has been a passion from my grandfather down to my dad and uncles to the generation that I'm in even with my son and the great-grandchildren. I guess we could be called the fourth generation. The fourth generation is very young and very infancy in that process.

Leslie Fike: But did your great-grandfather come here first?

Mathew Fike: Well my Great-Grandfather Rork which is on my grandmother's side came down here was down here already. Um, I believe that's true… my grandfather came down here from Ohio in or around the forties, somewhere in there.

Leslie Fike: Okay.

Mathew Fike: See he farmed. He had a dairy farm up there and when there was these mythical stories about the Valley how you could throw anything on the ground and it would grow.

Ana B. Hernandez: The Magic Valley.

Mathew Fike: Yeah.

Mathew Fike: That wasn't true. (Momentarily laughter in the room).

Mathew Fike: So.

Leslie Fike: But technically, your Grandfather Fike was a farmer so then it would be.

Mathew Fike: He was a dairy farmer.

Leslie Fike: So, then it would be one, two, three.

Mathew Fike: We are third generation.

Leslie Fike: You'll are third, so there would be fourth generation.

Mathew Fike: Hunter's age would be fourth generation.

Mathew Fike: Aw, no it's just everyone works so well together, and we love it and I think our family gets along so well. Me, my cousins, my dad, my uncles, everyone gets along so well that it helps with working. If you get along with who you are working with every day and you enjoy going to work and you love what you are doing, you'll love the people you are working with, and it makes it a lot easier. And if is a lot easier, you put more into it and you are more successful.

Ana B. Hernandez: Third question: From our past meetings in class, you mention recognition at the State and National level. How often are farmers given credit for their hard work? Do you think our local, state, and federal governments do enough to recognize the hard work and dedication of farmers all cross the United States? Lastly, is there a goal or standard that defines success of the Fike farming practices that you'll follow to this day?

Mathew Fike: Well, starting from the beginning, how often farmers are given credit for their hard work… if you talk to anyone out there in public and you tell them you are a farmer, ninety percent of the time they thank you for what you do. They understand that it is a hard life and most of them say they couldn't do it. Do you think the local, state, federal government do enough to recognize the hard work and dedication of farmers all across the United States? Probably not.

Leslie Fike: I would say no.

Mathew Fike: But…

Leslie Fike: Because the state and federal government have put so many, they are put ting so many regulations on these things, so the farmer has to pay out of pocket to meet the standards of the regulations and if they don't meet those they are fined.

Mathew Fike: Yeah.

Leslie Fike: A lot of hoops.

Mathew Fike: Yeah, it's like everything else. Someone… let's say someone wants to build a car. There is so many things they got to go through to do so to be able

to sell it. It's the same thing with farming. I can't just go and grow a crop and take it to the elevator and sell it. I have to have license to spray pesticides I have to you know…

Leslie Fike: Keep records.

Mathew Fike: We have to keep records.

Leslie Fike: Yeah, you have to keep records of pesticides.

Mathew Fike: You have to keep records about everything you do.

Leslie Fike: You have to keep your chemicals segregated has to be done in a lock and key, and you have to have a hand washing station, and an eye washing sta tion. You have to have logs for everything.

Mathew Fike: The government makes it a lot harder than it should be.

Leslie Fike: Yeah.

Mathew Fike: So, is there any goal or standard that defines the success of the Fike farming practices? Well, we want to produce the best crop we can year in year out. We don't farm to collect insurance. There are people around who plant a crop purposely to fail to get government help from it. We don't do that. We plant a crop to grow a crop. We want to produce the most we can of every acre we have, and you know as far as that goes you hope it speaks for itself.

Leslie Fike: And they do everything. I mean they don't, ah, nothing is skipped you know what I mean? They are watering when they're supposed to be watering, and they are spraying their fertilizer. They're doing… they are not trying to cut on cost. I'm just saying they're all in to make sure their crop is the best crop it can possibly be.

Ana B. Hernandez: Um, we did ask and mention the recognitions? State and national level the… was it trophies…or?

Leslie Fike: What you got.

Mathew Fike: Yeah yes, the trophies recently we start participated over the past four or five years it's the National Corn and Sorghum Producers. I probably got the name of that exactly wrong of it what they do. They recognize farmers throughout the nation for a specific way you farm. So if you do single crop corn, that's one category. If you do double crop corn that's another cate gory.

Mathew Fike: Irrigated, non-irrigated minimum, till, different stuff like that. What it does, it allows everyone to compete on fair playing field and on a fair playing field in our specific category, which we farm under double crop irrigated. We have received state awards for the last three years, and we won national either two or three years ago.

Mathew Fike: Three years ago, we won the national award and years ago, I believe, we got third in the nation, so you know as far as do what we do the way we do it that's a real prideful thing. When you get those awards, it lets you know that the other people who are in it are in the same exact situation as you are. You are doing as well as is you can.

Leslie Fike: And a lot of farmers don't do double crop they do one crop, or they do a crop once a year.

Mathew Fike: They do not have the ability to do double crop because of the winters. We do not have the winters they do up there. That helps with the double crop, but they can also grow four or five hundred bushel of corn. We can't, so.

Ana B. Hernandez: When you mention double crop, is it the same soil?

Mathew Fike: We plant a crop in late January, early February, and we'll harvest late middle to June to mid-July, and then we get the ground ready again and we plant again that same year in August.

Ana B. Hernandez: So same year?

Mathew Fike: Yes, then we harvest again in late December.

Leslie Fike: So that's why they call it double crop because they're doing a crop two times a year.

Mathew Fike: Two crops on one piece of ground in a same year.

Israel Vasquez: Do you have something planted right now?

Mathew Fike: We do. We have 550 acres of fall corn planted.

Leslie Fike: And about hundred-sixty acres of citrus. (Everyone giggles in the room)

Mathew Fike: Well, the citrus is all year round.

Ana B. Hernandez: Number four: How have the Fike and Rork… sorry for the mis pronunciation…families survived periods of adversity?

Israel Vasquez: Adversity.

Ana B. Hernandez: Adversity through time? For example, through the years of the Great Depression?

Mathew Fike: Well the Great Depression was, I guess, the thirties and Fike Farms didn't, I guess, become entity until the early fifties so that was a little before our time as far as…We had freezes. We've had the eighty-three, eighty-eight, or eighty-nine freezes we had those two freezes. We've had little things here and there. When it came through it froze. We lost all of our citrus.

Israel Vasquez: All?

Mathew Fike: Yeah, it kills everything off. We've re-planted, so these trees out here have been planted probably since 1990. So they're getting up in age, so most of the time when we have difficulties through the farm everyone cuts back. You tighten your belt. You try to pinch as many pennies as you can and get through it. You gotta get through as a family. (Citrus trees are in the back yard of the home of Mathew Fike.)

Israel Vasquez: When was the transition of these farming families from 'farming as a way of life' into 'farming as a family business'?

Mathew Fike: I don't know if we are there, yet we still farm as a way of life. I mean it's… you wake up in the morning, you farm, you farm all day, you go to bed. Sometimes that's all you're thinking about.

Leslie Fike: Sometimes you stay up thinking about it.

Mathew Fike: This last week or so we actually have been farming… me and my two cousins Josh and Daniel just started a new entity.

Mathew Fike: It's off shoot of Fike Farms. It's going to be Triple F Farms, and it will just be me, Josh, and Daniel. What we've done is we rented about five-hundred to six-hundred acres north of here, and we are still going to work at Fike farms but we're going to do that as well. We're going to coexist both farms, but yeah, last week I guess we been working eighteen-hour days up there trying to get things prepped and ready so that we can plant. Hopefully catch some rain within the next couple of weeks, and then plant. Have some good submoisture to plant in January. So as far as difference between a way of life and a family business… I think it's one in the same now for us.

Farming is our life. It's what we do, it's what we think about, that's what we talk about when we go out to supper, when we get around for barbecue. It's everything to us.

Leslie Fike: Sometimes he works over when they're irrigated… him, Josh, and Daniel will take shifts. Mathew is the one for twenty-four hours from eight in the morning to eight in the morning, and then Josh goes twenty-four hours, then Daniel goes. Then they start over sometimes they're doing that… just de pends.

Mathew Fike: A few months.

Israel Vasquez: I guess this goes along with some of them that we have asked already but, what is the secret? You know, how the Fike Family has still stayed on the radar?

Mathew Fike: The withstanding the test of time question.

Israel Vasquez: Yes. (Everyone giggles in the room)

Mathew Fike: Yeah I think it is my grandmother. [She] is kind of the linchpin. Every one has to give her a hug in the morning. Everyone has to give her a kiss (cell-phone goes off in the background), and we are a very close family, and makes it so much easier to work together when you are a close family. And grandma makes very sure of that. I'll put that out there too. (Everyone giggles in the room)

Mathew Fike: She may be eight-four, but she is still in charge of everybody and every one knows it. (Mathew Fike laughs)

Leslie Fike: And they have… like the Fike kids… when he was a kid they're so re spectful, and just… Mathew, ever since the day I known him, opens my door for me. And if he doesn't, Hunter will. You know, they're just 'yes ma'am', 'no ma'am'. He doesn't say that to me… you know, the kids, the children… kids are so respectful, and they just have this built-in integrity that they learned from their parents.

Mathew Fike: Yeah, you know, your parents expect for you to be… parents want you to grow-up and be a good person… a productive member of society. You know, my mom is very… being polite and respectful is very important to her. Even is 'till this day, you know. I learned from her… that was one of the things she saw in my dad. That he was very polite, very respectful and my dad learned it from my grandpa. So it's one of those things that is being lost among the youth now. They don't have that respect for their elders, or for women, or respect for just themselves in general. I mean, like little things like 'yes ma'am', 'no ma'am', 'please', 'thank you'… those go a long way when you're talking to someone. Both of the texts that I got back from you all said 'thank you'. We really appreciated it. That's something that means to me something when you get a response back,'Thank you. I appreciate you giving me your time.' You know, that's a respectful thing that shows a lot of character in the both of you all too.

Israel Vasquez: Thank you.

Ana B. Hernandez: Thank you.

Israel Vasquez: So the good work ethic is being passed down generation to generation?

Leslie Fike: Yes absolutely.

Ana B. Hernandez: In a sense working together as a family is what kept you together?

Mathew Fike: Yes.
Ana B. Hernandez: Through the hard times.
Mathew Fike: It's a family business. You love your family. You want to see everyone succeed… so.
Israel Vasquez: Question number seven: Have they ever participated in economic incentives such as the Green Revolution and Food for Peace programs?
Mathew Fike: You know I'm not exactly sure. (pauses and laughs) You know, we help around here with the people we can as far.
Mathew Fike: I couldn't say yes or no one way or the other. I don't really have an answer on that question for you all.
Ana B. Hernandez: It doesn't have to be exactly these, but like you said, you've helped the community out here.
Mathew Fike: Well, we do barbecue for the Edinburg Beef Club. We been doing that for twenty plus years. What the Edinburg Beef Club is, it's an organization that raises money to help out the kids in the FFA and the 4-H, and we have a couple of barbecues a year. We have the kids sell tickets, and then my family and I, we barbecue and have a big… I don't know…
Leslie Fike: It's a whole night event. They get there at noon on Saturday, no on Friday.
Mathew Fike: What we do is cook all night Thursday night.
Mathew Fike: Friday morning when the meat gets ready, we slice the meat and put in hot boxes.We all meet up at… what's that place called? The activity center besides the police station of Edinbrg… I think it's the activity center. Any way, and what we do is we cook like twenty-three, twenty-four hundred pounds of sirloin butt and everyone who's bought a ticket from all the FFA and 4-H kids shows up there. They're served… usually there's a band playing, so we have a dance and we have an auction once a year, and that's something we been doing twenty plus years. It's a big deal.
Leslie Fike: They give their time there out there. Thursday afternoon they spend the night out there sleeping in their trucks, watching the food, and then get up in the morning and start cutting, and then they deliver it. You all do the beans?
Mathew Fike: We do the beans.
Mathew Fike: We do the beans, we do the tomatoes, we do the onions. The jalapenos come in a can. We do the meat. One of the schools does the coleslaw, but yeah it's… that's a big charitable thing we done, you know. We have friends of the farm who come… friends like Joe Viejo who lives in Pharr, who has nothing to do with the farm. Nothing to do with the city of Edinburg but he has been out there for the last twenty years helping because he sees it as such a good thing. We got friends who come down from Corpus West… Wittner and his family.
Leslie Fike: A lot of people… a lot them their parent's kids don't even come help to cook.
Mathew Fike: I mean…
Leslie Fike: It's really the Fike family.
Israel Vasquez: The Fike family keeping the tradition alive.
Leslie Fike: And all the wives go out there. They are there working on the farm but they're working or another cause.
Mathew Fike: Well, it's all of that. All the money that is raised goes to the kids and I think that's one of the important things. These kids are raising animals to

show in the Mercedes Livestock Show or the Star Show here in Edinburg, and a lot of the time if they don't place or they don't get grand champion re versed anything like that they don't get their money back for they have put into it, and with this we raise money and it's all percentaged out… but if you have a cow you get more. If you have pig, you get a little less or something like that. It's all percentaged out to try to help them recoup their cost and their time that they put in.

Israel Vasquez: Yeah, yeah FFA does take time to raise an animal.

Mathew Fike: Yeah. What are we on now?

Ana B. Hernandez: Number eight

Israel Vasquez: Number eight… ahh, did they ever produce surpluses, and if yes, how do they store them?

Mathew Fike: Well we contract with Garcia Grain down in Progresso. What we do is we say, okay we are gonna contract you twenty cars of sorghum this year, and we will deliver that. And if we have extra what we will do is we sell it to him, or ship or send it down there. Sell it to him, or we will store in the grain silos we have at the farm. We can hold roughly 35 carts that are stored ----and a cart is a hundred thousand pounds so we can store a little bit there. But most of it we try to send down there and sell, and you know, you get paid for it. (Laughs)

Israel Vasquez: Sometimes when you send it to those places is it because the price is not right or is it just there is no demand?

Mathew Fike: When you contract, ah, you contract your… let's say its corn, ah, you are locking yourself in a at a certain price. Now the market goes up or the market goesdown, you are still lock in at that price. So if I contracted at eight dollars and it goes up to ten, I can only get it for eight now. If it goes down to five, hey, I am happy. I am getting eight, but in here is you contract an x number of carts let's say twenty you have to produce that. If you don't produce that you have to buy it somewhere else and deliver to them, so if you… if you contracted at eight and it goes up to ten and you don't produce your twenty carts that you own them, well, you have to go buy at ten---- and sell it to them at eight so you are losing money just to fill your contract.

Mathew Fike: It's a lot of hope and prayer. (Leslie laughs)(Matthew laughs)

Mathew Fike: I mean, farming is like gambling, you know. I am putting a whole lot of money out in the field and hoping that I get something back. So you know, I don't go and take a hundred thousand dollars to Vegas. I put it in corn in the field (Leslie laughs)… hope I get something back out of it.

Israel Vasquez: That is your gamble.

Mathew Fike: Yeah I know, I know what am doing better out here in the field than I do in Vegas. (Matthew laughs) (Leslie laughs)

Mathew Fike: So let's see, where are we at now? Nine?

Israel Vasquez: Yes.

Ana B. Hernandez: Yes.

Israel Vasquez: Did they experience certain successes along the way that enable them to expand their family farm? That could be any farming techniques or…

Mathew Fike: Um, as far as far as certain success, Grandpa believed that hard work was success if you worked hard you get what you wanted. You know ninety-nine point nine percent of the time that is true. If you are willing to put in the work and the

effort and the time for something you can achieve that. Grampa's goal was always to expand the farm. That has been my father's goal as well, and that is my goal to this day. You know, you always want your farm to get bigger as your family grows. Obviously you need more income coming in so that you can take care of your family, um, so its, ah, I am not really sure about certain experiences. I mean, yeah, you sell land every once in a while when it gets --- basically when --- grows up around it. Uh, and what we try to do in this area is buy as much land in one central area as possible so that we don't have that problem, because the last thing we ever wanna do is sell land. We are always wanting to buy land and expand our farm you know because the world always as ----

Israel Vasquez: Oh yeah.

Mathew Fike: So… (Matthew laughs)

Leslie Fike: When your grandpa was… when you all… when we were little… when you will work for him and you will go to school for half a day.

Mathew Fike: That was that was, ah, probably seventh grade, sixth, seventh grade… somewhere in there. No, that was when we were farming spinach. This was for Allen Company back in, oh gosh, I guess the late nineties, ah, we would get up in the morning about three o'clock, and we would go run tractors until about seven and then we change and go to school. After school, we'd go back to the field where we were cutting spinach, grease the machinery, get everything ready to do it the next morning again and that was a lot of fun. (Leslie laughs) (Israel laughs) That was a lot of fun (everyone laughs) but, you… its looking back at it now. Things like that this were just do horrible. You know that… they build character. I know its cliché to say that, but it makes you respect what you have, because you know how you got it, so…

Ana B. Hernandez: Do you feel like when… like if you were… what you did before like that before you started working… like if you had not been like that and you started working hard…

Mathew Fike: I think it will be a lot harder.

Ana B. Hernandez: Okay.

Mathew Fike: We grew up on the farm. I been on a tractor for as long as I can remember. I remember riding in the tractor. My dad, you know, when I was four, five years old… you know, you sit on the armrest all day long and watch the crops.

Leslie Fike: Because they did go to daycare, like when they were little, they didn't go to daycare. They were there. Even if the moms worked somewhere else, typically and they didn't go to daycare they stayed with their dad, and the kids were on the tractor all day long.

Mathew Fike: Daycare was a tractor (all laugh) but, ah yeah, it was fun when we were little. It was fun. We picked cotton back then and, ah, we played in the modules, ah, when we cut corn we will be up in the tractor playing with corn. I mean, when you are a kid work was fun. When you got older and you realize, hey this is work it stops being so much fun (laughs) but like you were saying if I had not grown up that way, yeah, work will be a lot harder now then it actually is.

Leslie Fike: Can I ask one question?

Mathew Fike: Sure.

Leslie Fike: Do I put the chicken fried steak in egg, butter first and then put it in the flour, or am I just doing chicken fried steak?

Mathew Fike: I don't see that question on here.

Leslie Fike: I know. (all laugh)

Mathew Fike: Yes.
Leslie Fike: Egg first.
Mathew Fike: Egg first in the butter, then the flour.
Leslie Fike: This one over here looks hungry. (all laugh)

Mathew Fike: So, ah, lost… where was I?
Leslie Fike: Sorry.
Ana B. Hernandez: Question eleven.
Mathew Fike: Eleven.
Ana B. Hernandez: Yes.
Israel Vasquez: Did they have experience with the Farm Bureau, and if yes, how does it work?
Mathew Fike: Yeah, Farm Bureau is our insurance agent, ah, Paul Thomson down at Pharr. He does the insurance for the farm. He gives us advise on certain things, 'Hey you know you might need more insurance on this or that'. It's mostly for our vehicles, our homes, our crops. Well, our crops go through, ah, what is his last name, what is Ted's last name?
Leslie Fike: Pruka.
Mathew Fike: Ted Pruka. He is not with Farm Bureau but he's another insurance agent, ah…
Leslie Fike: He is the crops insurance guy.
Mathew Fike: Farm Bureau insures all of our stuff. (Laughs) So not our crops, but our acual stuff
Ana B. Hernandez: But your house…
Mathew Fike: Yeah, I like Farm Bureau. They have been good to us over the years so, I think I just answered number twelve a second ago.
Ana B. Hernandez: Yes, about your childhood and…
Israel Vasquez: So you started working, like officially putting in the labor at what age?
Mathew Fike: I could reach the pedals around eleven. (all laugh)
Israel Vasquez: Eleven?
Mathew Fike: So started… you drove a tractor as soon as you were physically able to... safely!! You know, if you could drive it but couldn't stop it then, yeah, you didn't drive it. (laughs) But if once I or to the age that we could you know physically reach the pedals and drive and you know what to do... you know what to do because you been watching all your life this was before we had Gameboys and cell phones and what not. (laughs) So if you were sitting in the tractor, you were watching what was going on. You know, I can remember my dad working the hydrologic and what not and I was watching what he was watching, and I will ask "what are you watching?" and he would say, "Oh well I am watching to make sure this does this and this doesn't do this…" So you know when he was ready to let me drive, we know what to do. You know it's the same thing with Josh and Daniel. I mean, we grew up on the farm driving tractors. I remember Daniel, I think, driving a cotton picker like at eight years old. It was your childhood. It was growing up in a farm was different then growing up in the city. Been driving trackers, and trucks, and everything we could since you could reach the pedals.
Israel Vasquez: Large farm equipment.
Matthew Fike: Yeah.
Ana B. Hernandez: So you will say you learn how to drive a tractor first then, ah?

Mathew Fike: Yeah I knew how to ride a tractor before I knew how to drive a truck. That's for dang sure! (All laugh)

Israel Vasquez: Can you recall any accidents? Have you ever had one when you were young in a tractor?

Mathew Fike: Not on a tractor. (laughs)

Israel Vasquez: Not on the tractor.

Mathew Fike: No... I mean let me think you know maybe you run over an irrigation vault or something like that but you don't…

Leslie Fike: Or maybe a sign…

Mathew Fike: Yeah, stop sign or something like that.

Leslie Fike: It should had not been there anyway. (All laugh)

Mathew Fike: Well no, I mean..... yeah I hit ah.... road sign or two, ah, most of the time is because you have other drivers coming at you and you have to get off the road. They don't slow down. They expect you to just get out of the way (all laugh) which is dumb on their part because you are in a great big vehicle and they are not, but as far as accidents with the tractor, I can only really think of one ever. My cousin was on a disc and a car run into the back of it, but .... no we are very careful with our equipment because, you know it's very expensive.

Leslie Fike: Hey Matt, tell them what happens when a kid at Fike Farm says they are bored? (Laughs)

Mathew Fike: They get to go to work. (All laugh)

Leslie Fike: They make them they will find a hole ... they will find a shovel and they will make them just go start digging a hole. I mean they will make them start hand picking the weeds. I mean they are like, oh no. That is not a word around here.

Israel Vasquez: Same thing in my house. You say you are bored… well… (Leslie laughs) Then they will go see if your room is clean, or why don't you go wash the truck. (All laugh)

Mathew Fike: Well you know, it's the exact same... and exactly… its nothing good come out of being bored. You learn to be engaged and you learn to be... well I'm paying attention to what you are saying so you didn't tell everybody bored cause… yeah. (laughs)

Israel Vasquez: Question number 13: Growing up in the Rio Grande Valley, a place that has a lot of Mexican American influence and traditions, have you seen or noticed influences in your own culture by the local traditions that might be similar to you?

Mathew Fike: Yeah, I like Mexican food... (laughs) ah yeah, we have a lot things around here like that I mean what...where you grow up really is who you are. I mean, if you grow up in New York you are different then if you grow up in El Paso, Texas or McAllen you know. Yeah, I like Mexican food, you know, when we barbeque you usually have fajitas or tortillas or something like that. As far as work goes, I had to learn Spanish. I mean, I don't speak it real well, but I did had to learn it. You know most of the people down here are willing to do farm work don't speak a lot of English. You know, their parents were more then likely illegals who came over and didn't speak any English, and then this children have grown up usually.. Not to say, not to be rude but I mean most of the times they grow up there uneducated they don't have the background but have the will and the desire so much more than the people that are here 90 percent of the time. But yeah, they are second generation American so they are willing to work their butt off, but they don't speak English, so you have

to learn how to communicate with these people. Uh, you know, there is couple of guys that have worked for us. They gotten over the years... I mean they are family now. You love them. I mean the one guy, Eddie, has worked for us thirty years. He remembers when I was a little baby, so I mean, you grow up with someone like that who always been there… they are not family, but they are, if that makes sense?

Israel Vasquez: Yeah.

Mathew Fike: You know, you see them every day. You work with them every day just like you do your own family. You know they become... they are not blood but they are family.

Ana B. Hernandez: Yes.

Israel Vasquez: Yeah, they look over your interests.

Mathew Fike: Yeah...oh yeah. They have your back the same way you have theirs just because we work together and I write you a paycheck at the end of the week doesn't mean I don't care about you. We care about all of our guys.

Leslie Fike: They give them a lot of stuff too.

Mathew Fike: Oh yeah, you know we go hunting… we get hogs or deer or something like that, you know. We come back… if we have more then we need we are always giving them, you know, hogs or deer or we do our own.

Mathew Fike: I recently tore down a house that was here. The guys who work for me they helped me. All the stuff they took…I let them take counter tops, the furniture, the stove, the washer and dryer. Everything that was in there that they wanted that they could use, the ceiling fans, you know, just little things that you wouldn't think about. I mean you are always.... things that are... that you are trying to get rid of are thing that might be huge to them.

Mathew Fike: Oh when there was three brothers who work for my grandfather, Eddie, who I mentioned earlier, Juan and Greg, the Cruz brothers and my grandfather... they were all living in this one little travel trailer. Probably about an eighteen-foot travel trailer. It had, you know, three bunks and a little propane stove and half of a bathroom. I mean, you could reach out with both arms and touch both sides of it. he went down and bought them three movable homes. Uh, he told them, he said, you know I will buy them for you, you will pay for them, you will pay me back. I am not going to charge you interest… will take, you know, 100 dollars a month for however long it take you to pay them off, and he did he went down and he bought them this three, you know, eighty foot movable homes.. sixty or eighty foot. I don't know, however big they are. I will never forget, when my grandfather died, the one worker told me in Spanish, he said, 'Your grandfather was an angel. He was in flesh but he was an angel. He was everything we needed when we came over here.' You know, then came... one brother came over illegally and he was, I don't know, like probably twenty year old. At that time had nothing. He just had the will to work and my grandpa said okay. Well back then we could. He says 'I will give you a job,' and he gave him a job and, ahh over the course of the next few years helped him get citizenship stuff. I don't know how well that works, but helped him get his citizenship stuff done, and he became an American citizen, and so are his brothers, and you knew they were in his funeral they loved him... at least that's what.. one thing always stood out to me. He work them so hard, but he also did so much for them. He did treat them like they work for him; he treated them like they were his family, and you know, when you see someone who you worked with who is not

family… this is where I get back to the they are family to me they are not blood but they are family. When you sit there and you cry together when my grandpa passed away, it was at a point like that that, you know, I knew who my real family was whether they were blood or not. You know, you treat people well your entire life and you may not see it when you go but your family does. So my grandpa was a great man.

Israel Vasquez: Going back to any influences uh, the music… any dishes that you like particulary?

Mathew Fike: Uh, I don't know. I mean, I don't really know what's…

Leslie Fike: What?

Mathew Fike: Mexican dishes or not, I mean I grew up… it just food (starts laughing) But I get up North and I do know that a taco is not a taco (chuckles) that for dang sure.

Ana Hernandez: Or Taco Bell is not.

Leslie Fike: He likes, he likes… ugh.

Mathew Fike: I like my breakfast tacos in the morning

Leslie Fike: Yeah.

Mathew Fike: Uh you know…

Leslie Fike: He likes carne asada.

Mathew Fike: Yeah.

Leslie Fike: He likes refried beans.

Mathew Fike: Look at that. I like Mexican food.

Leslie Fike: Mathew likes the fajita taco, the Mexican rice, chips and salsa, all the real good stuff.

Israel Vasquez: [chuckles]

Mathew Fike: I grow avocados does that count?

Israel Vasquez: Oh yes.

Ana Hernandez: That counts a lot. {chuckles]

Israel Vasquez: I was gonna ask, uh, since I saw those and they look like you didn't buy them.

Mathew Fike: No, no these are actually Lulus, the ones you buy in the store are Hass. And then these over here [showing avocados] are Pow Wows. These are actually something you can't buy in the store. They're bigger ones, and they're more of a milky avocado. But, yeah, we got these out in the orchard.

Israel Vasquez: Nice.

Ana Hernandez: They definitely don't look store bought. They're like…

Mathew Fike: Well here. We'll send one home with both you all. [Handing avocado over]

Ana Hernandez: Oh, thank you.

Israel Vasquez: Thank you.

Mathew Fike: But uh…

Ana Hernandez: I've never seen them actually.

Mathew Fike: So, I mean, yeah, I guess, I guess, yeah, I mean I like Mexican food [chuckles] Um, I don't know as far as culture goes. I'm not really into Tejano music or mariachi, or stuff like that, but I mean it doesn't bother me. It's not like it's something I can't listen to. It's just, you know, it's not what I prefer, uhm. What else could be…

Ana Hernandez: Uh, well I know you mentioned like how family life and being close to your family is something very special to you, and this is actually considered like

kinda like in the Mexican culture. We also see that family like being very close to each other.

Mathew Fike : Yeah.

Ana Hernandez: And being hard working as well. And like usually were also, as you mentioned, were also, like if you're bored you have, like, you're never bored. Like you have to go clean this, or do this, and I noticed that as you mentioned, I see a little connection… like our Mexican culture, with your culture.

Mathew Fike: Well, it could very easily be that. I mean, you know it could be the growing up on the farm, or it could be the culture I was raised in you know. I went to school down here, and grew, and its 90 percent Hispanic, so maybe, you know, that had an influence on me as well.

Ana Hernandez: Uh…

Israel Vasquez: Fourteen… uh, before there was any medical care such as hospitals how would you and your family treat an ill family member? Was there any use of home remedies. If any, do you recall any particular one?

Mathew Fike: Uh [chuckle] we use aloe vera for a lot. [laughs]

Israel Vasquez: Aloe vera.

Ana Hernandez: Aloe vera.

Mathew Fike: Yeah, you got aloe vera growing… there is some outside, there, it's a lot of places, you use aloe vera for…

Leslie Fike: Mat doesn't go to the doctor for anything.

Mathew Fike: You go to the doctor if you're dying.

Leslie Fike: Yeah, basically**.**

Mathew Fike: Uh, I do remember…

Leslie Fike: But you have to convince them that they're dying first.

Mathew Fike: I do remember, I won't say that. [laughing] Oh well, I cut my knee open one time. We were working on an engine. I cut… my knee got cut in the fly well and it was, you know, it was probably 3 inches long, and I don't know, a half inch wide. It wasn't bad, uh, but instead of going to the doctor, we just kinda washed it out with some alcohol and then put some super glue in it and kinda closed it back up so… Probably not the safest thing [chuckles] but you know, what's the point of… I'm not big on doctors. If I go to the doctor right now they'd find something wrong with me, so I don't know. I know my great-grandma use to be able to fix everything, so I don't know, as far as doctor's stuff.

Leslie Fike: Mathew doesn't even take an Advil.

Mathew Fike: I take Advil.

Leslie Fike: Rarely. Only if like you're a number nine in pain. [Coughing in background]

Israel Vasquez: Work seems to be the medicine for the Fike family.

Mathew Fike: Yeah. [Everyone laughing]

Leslie Fike: I think so.

Mathew Fike: She'll tell me when I'm sick. [Everyone laughing]

Israel Vasquez: Fifteen, ugh. Was there any recreational past times you recall doing as a child, such as swimming or playing any particular sports?

Mathew Fike: Uh absolutely. We didn't do a lot of this with me unless you count going to the beach. What we did was we go hunting, we go fishing, stuff like that. Um, I do remember taking occasional trips up to, uh, ranches to look at, stuff like that. But no, every winter as long as I can remember we go hunting, we go deer hunting, and it's not so much the hunting part, it is the getting away from everything back home. You

go up there, you barbeque, you have, ugh what is it, comraderie with your family… with your friends.

Leslie Fike: Like a camp life.

Mathew Fike: Yeah, its, that's what we call it. We go the deer lease for camp life more than we go for the hunting part. The hunting is actually secondary. Uh, and it always has been, we were on this one place called Taco Valle for like fifteen years. And we'd get up there, and we would have poker games, we would throw horse shoes, we'd play dominos. Uh, it was like I say, getting away and having a good time with your friends every weekend from October till January, And then, you know, you go back to reality once dear season was over. Until about April, then you start going to the beach and you fishing every weekend, and doing the exact same thing. Fishing was always secondary, it was more for spending time with your friends and family, and uh, you know, my friends are my family, 90 percent of them. Uh, I played sports in high school, but you know, nothing… I wasn't good enough to be good at anything. (laughing)

Israel Vasquez: What sports? If you don't mind sharing?

Mathew Fike: Uh, I played football. I played basketball occasionally, with the church over here guys, uh that's about it. I tried to play golf, but I'm not any good at that either. Its mostly for fun. It's an escape.

Israel Vasquez: When we were on your, uh, property a couple of weeks ago, um, we noticed a couple of golf balls in the property. Don't know where they came from. Do you have an idea?

Leslie Fike: (laughing)

Mathew Fike: Yep, well occasional we'll sit over there, sit in front of the grain bed, and just hit a few golf balls, talk and relax. You know you go buy a bag of recycled golf balls for seven bucks, and then you'll laugh and joke with your cousins. You know, occasionally it's good to hit something. (everyone laughing) It's much better hitting a golf ball, than you know, something that's gonna hurt.

Ana Hernandez: And these fishing and hunting trips? Do you still do them?

Mathew Fike: We do them, yeah, we do them now. We still do them, uh, you know, it's kinda changed a little bit. We all got kids. No, uh, as we gotten older… I got kids, my cousin Daniel has children, uh, Josh has children. So we can't all hunt together on the same place anymore as we once did, so now we all hunt in different places. We still get together occasionally, at one place to have a big pow wow, or for old time's sake or whatever, but uh, no uh, I hunt with my dad and my son, and my wife in Rio Grande City. My cousin, Manuel, is over in Raymondville, and Josh is up in towards Alice. It's not like it was when we were younger, but it's expanded to where it's were still doing it, just with our more immediate family now.

Israel Vasquez: You have your own boat?

Mathew Fike: I do not, she's not gonna look at me at that one. But I would like to have one [starts laughing] If you couldn't see, she rolled her eyes at me. [starts laughing] One of these days I'll have a boat. Yeah, I do, I do like going out on the boat, my brother has one and he takes us out. My Uncle Sam has one and we go out with him too. I'd like to have my own boat!

Leslie Fike: I'm fine with that. I would like to have a boat

Mathew Fike: Okay [chuckles] Uh, sixteen I guess?

Israel Hernandez: Yes, where do you hope to see the Fike Farm in the far future?

Mathew Fike: I'd like to see my children, my nephews, my grandchildren, I would like to see them continuing the tradition. You know, in some form or another continuing what my grandfather started so many years ago. You know, it's really a sense of pride when you could watch your children take over something that you've done, whether it's a big thing, a little thing, whatever. Uh, I know it made my grandpa happy to see all of his boys and his grandsons follow in his footsteps. So, uh yeah, I'd love to see Fike Farms expand and, uh you know, maybe it's not on the land we're farming now. Maybe the city pushes us out and we have to move north, but uh, I would love to see them continue.

Ana Hernandez: I know you mentioned about a new ranch with you.

Mathew Fike: Yes, that's uh, me, and my cousin Josh, and my cousin Daniel and its all still Fike Farm, it just it kinda, it's its own separate entity. But uh me, Josh and Daniel are still gonna do everything for both.

Ana Hernandez: Do you see that ranch as an extension to the Fike Farm.

Mathew Fike: That's, uh, going to be more of a dry land farm. This is gonna be our irrigated farm, so you kinda have to separate them, just you know, worst case scenario purposes.

Ana Hernandez: When you mentioned dry land, does that mean, like there is no irrigation?

Mathew Fike: They are relying solely on rain.

Ana Hernandez: So is this more at risk?

Mathew Fike: There's more risk on that, because you have to rely on the rain, but there's not as much you put into it. You don't put the amount of fertilizer, you don't put in the amount of preparation and stuff like that [noise of dishes in the background being put away].

Mathew Fike: You still try to get your ground clean and ready as possible, but you know, we may put down an extra fertilizer, an extra herbicide, you know spray for weeds, and all stuff like that on irrigated land because the potential to make your yields higher is there because you know your gonna have to water. On dry land it's a bigger gamble. It's a crap shoot. You don't know if it's gonna rain or not the weatherman tells you it's gonna rain and it doesn't so…

Ana Hernandez: With our weather, it's very crazy down here.

Mathew Fike: Yeah. [chuckles]

Israel Vasquez: What different changes if any, could you see the Fike farm doing in the future?

Mathew Fike: Uh, the only thing I can really see us changing is, you know, the genetics for these seeds. The corn, and the grain that we grow, they keep modifying year after year so you have to stay on top of what the newest, best seed is that you could grow. This year it may be Pioneer, next year it may be Decal, the year after that it maybe something else. They're always developing a newer product that, you know, produces more, has better disease packages so it doesn't get ate up by worms or bugs or stuff like that. Uh, that something you change very often, the only thing I can see major changing is if the city of Edinburg and the city of Elsa come together and starts pushing us out. We may have to pick up and move north one day, and I would hate that, because, you know, I've grown up here, lived here for so long. But I'm not qualified to do anything but farm, so I got to farm somewhere [he chuckles]

Israel Vasquez: Lets go to eighteen… uh, as the new generations continue thriving on the Fike Farm, are there any concerns that you might have for the future towards the farm?

Mathew Fike: Well you always worry, uh, you know there so much distractions for children these days. They don't grow up the exact way you did, so trying to get them to wanna do and work on the farm like you do it's not as easy. They have a lot of distractions, and a lot thing that can pull them in different directions… video games, pop warner football, t-ball, anything. I mean, we grew up with three channels and no video games, and you know, you kinda saw what you wanted to do at an early age. I don't think children get that these days. I think they have more, more stuff on their mind. They can't see it at such an early age what going to be good for them the rest of their life. I mean it could be good, it could be bad, it allows them to expand their minds and find other things. But you know, I'd like for them to stay on the farm and keep going, but I'm not gonna force them to. I would never force them to stay with me and farm, if it's not what they want to do. But if it is I'd be happy. [coughs]

Israel Vasquez: Uh, last question, question number nineteen. The CHAPS Program is here to preserve the history of local farm families like yours, what have you thought about the process so far? Is there anything missing that you will like us to talk about?

Mathew Fike: No, I think you all covered about everything, uh, I think it's good. I think anytime you can chronicle a family's history, and you know, get a piece of where they're at in this day in age and what they remember from when they were younger uh, I think it great. The fact that you all are doing it with me, my cousin, my grandma… you're getting several different perspectives, so what I remember and what they remember may not be exactly the same, even though it was the same event. [coughs] Sorry about that. Getting different, uh, different accounts of the exact same history give you a better understanding of it. I think it's great. I think this is a really good program you all are putting together, so, uh, I was really happy be able to help and be a part of it.

Israel Vasquez: Yeah, uh, with the CHAPS program we're trying to have every farming family of Edinburg kinda solidify their legacy for future generations to come and learn about the Fike farm and other farms.

Mathew Fike: Yeah.

Ana Hernandez: Unless, you mentioned how Elsa and Edinburg combined become a bigger city it's pushing away our farmers, and we are losing that history and we really appreciate you giving us your time to get to know that history.

Mathew Fike: Absolutely.

Ana Hernandez: And you never know if you do get moved, there still gonna be that piece of history that people from around here can look at and be like, oh there use to be farming, which we hope never finishes.

Mathew Fike: How many old farmers do you think drive along, either here or McAllen or somewhere like that and go, 'Oh yeah, you see where that Target is or Walmart is, yeah, I used to farm that piece of ground.' And you know the younger people, 'Oh, that's been a Wal-Mart for as long as I can remember.' I mean someone used to work that field, so yeah, I think it's a really good thing. It'll be an interesting read when you all get done so…

Israel Vasquez: We really thank you for your time.

Mathew Fike: Absolutely.

Appendix C

Interviewee: Mr. Frank Virgil Rork
Interviewers: April Wilson, and Emmanuel Torres
Date: November 2, 2017, 3:00 pm
Location: UTRGV Library, 3rd Floor, Room 3.115 (Interviewers)
Waco, Texas (Interviewee)

Interview was conducted via telephone with Mr. Rork. Both April and Emmanuel asked questions regarding their specialized topics. Mr. Rork gave interesting stories regarding his family's military involvement as well as family history.

April Wilson: We are here interviewing Mr. Frank Rork for the CHAPS class project on Fike-Rork Farm. I am April Wilson.

Emmanuel Torres: Emmanuel Torres.

April Wilson: And we are going to begin the interview with Emmanuel.

Emmanuel Torres: Hello, my name is Emmanuel… EJ for short. Mr. Rork, how are you doing today?

Frank Rork: I'm good EJ. You doing alright?

Emmanuel Torres: That's good to hear, sir. Yes sir, I am. Um, we do have some questions if you don't mind, and I am going to start first. Are you ready, sir?

Frank Virgil: Ok.

Emmanuel Torres: Ok. Let's start off with how did the Rork family end up in the Rio Grande Valley?

Frank Rork: (long sigh) My dad and a fellow named Dick Reynolds were in Overton in the oilfield business, or oil rental. They had a trucking business in Overton, Texas. And they came down to the valley. I don't know (sighs) for sure who got them into this, but they were gunna go down there and farm down there in the valley because it was irrigated farm land and all that good stuff. So, they came down and bought pieces of property side by side out on Monte Cristo Road. My dad bought forty acres and, I'm not sure how much the Reynold's bought, but more than that. I think he bought like a hundred-twenty or something like that, but I'm not sure. Then they had a gentleman that owned the forty that was right next to my dad's that rented my dad his land and so dad farmed eighty acres.

Emmanuel Torres: Ok.

Frank Rork: It was eighty less what the house was on, you know, all taken out.

Emmanuel Torres: Ok Mr. Rork. That leads me into my second question, Mr. Rork. How did your dad, uh, decide what to plant? What to grow? What kind of crops?

Frank Rork: Well, he mostly grew, um, cotton, at first, and he did some cabbage and some vegetables, but not much. Mostly cotton was what he stuck with.

Emmanuel Torres: Ok, thank you for that. Now, uh, let's talk a little about family traditions. Do you currently or did your parents practice any traditions, or anything like that, that they might have learned or were taught by their parents or grandparents?

Frank Rork: I can't think of anything that would be out of the ordinary. My mom was a good cook. When she was just a kid, she, her mother died when she was just a

toddler. I'm not sure, her younger brother was born and there were complications and and she died, so mom was kinda, um, I guess (stammers) thinking back it was a little young to be, uh, the housewife or whatever (chuckles). She got put into the situation where she was the cook and the bottle washer and all for my grandpa. So, anyway, uh (sighs), the only thing I can think of is that she learned cooking early and, uh, did well (chuckles softly). She was a good cook.

Emmanuel Torres: Wow! That's great to hear. Well, thank you, Mr. Rork. Now let's, uh…when your dad bought the farm, did it require a lot of work before the crops could be planted?

Frank Rork: Oh yeah! He had to clear some, some mesquite off of it and they never did have it levelled til way later when my brother-in-law came into the picture, Anne Fike's husband. And they levelled the property and made it more (chuckles) easily irrigated and, uh, pipelines they put in and they'd just open a gate and the water didn't have to go down a ditch. I can remember when I was a kid and we irrigated, we had ditch breakage every time (laughs)! They'd have to make a dirt canal, you know, for the water. Boy, every time the dirt would break. We had a time irrigating the crops, when dad was farming.

Emmanuel Torres: Wow! Sounds like quite an undertaking, sir. Thank you for that answer. That's a good leeway for my next question: How early did you, uh, as a child, start helping around the farm?

Frank Rork: I really can't answer that. I know that, uh, probably I remember driving the pickup truck around, a '35 Ford or something like that pickup, when I was just, could hardly see over the steering wheel. I'd say maybe 10 or 12.

Emmanuel Torres: Ok.

Frank Rork: And, so, at that time I was driving the tractor too.

Emmanuel Torres: Wow! That is pretty neat, sir. Ok, now, uh, assuming that the weather was the same today as it was when your family bought the farm; did the weather ever make your dad or mom second guess buying land here? Did they ever consider selling it due to the weather? Be it heat or heavy rains or anything like that, sir?

Frank Rork: No, as far as I know they never even considered selling. Never, never looked twice at the decision. Dad did later on when my brother and I got old enough to take care of most of the farming part, my dad drove a Valley Transit bus for a number of years. And he was always home and we did the farming…

Emmanuel Torres: Wow!

Frank Rork: Bobby and myself.

Emmanuel Torres: Uh, do you have any memories of Hurricane Beulah?

Frank Rork: (laughs) I sure do! I was married at the time and working at the First National Bank there in Edinburg, and we were lucky. We were high and dry but the bank was not (chuckles). The whole downtown was flooded and we had a basement there in the bank where we had all the, a lot of our records and one of the check valves and one of the … well, it was not a garden but an end flower bed that was locked open and a lot of the water was coming in the basement as fast as our sub-pumps would pump it out.

Emmanuel Torres: Wow!

Frank Rork: In fact, it got very close. There was two levels, a mechanical level and then the level where we kept a lot of our files, and we almost got water into the file room. We were just barely keeping ahead of it. We had a 3 inch pump down in the

basement pumping out the back door, along with sub-pumps that initially were working and after, uh, they got underwater, they went out so we had two different pumps, pumping water out of the basement out the back door (laughing sigh), to keep it from filling up … (still chuckling)

Emmanuel Torres: (chuckles)

April Wilson: (chuckles)

Emmanuel Torres: Yeah, sir. Sounds like a lot of water.

Frank Rork: Yeah, it was a lot of water!

Emmanuel Torres: Well, Mr. Rork, I thank you. This concludes my questions. I thank you for the responses. I'm going to pass it over to April so she can ask her questions.

Frank Rork: Alright.

April Wilson: Ok, Mr. Rork. My questions focus on the military and as far back as you can remember …

Frank Rork: Ok.

April Wilson: The first question I have is to the best of your recollection, was military service important to both sides of the family?

Frank Rork: My uncle served in Guam, my mom's brother, and my dad did not have to go, he was (pauses), older …

April Wilson: Ok.

Frank Rork: …and five kids so, uh, he got a deferment I guess. And my brother and I both served. He served, he joined the Army and, well, no … backup. He got drafted.

April Wilson: Ok. (chuckles)

Frank Rork: Well, that was when there was a draft, and he was drafted for two years for the army, and he went to Colorado for his basic training. And he was within, there's six weeks basic training, and he was in the fifth or sixth week of the basic training and he had gotten pneumonia, and he had to start over with basic training when he got out of the hospital …

April Wilson: Oh no!

Frank Rork: (laughing) So, he got a double dose of it! (Still laughing)

April Wilson: Oh God, that's horrible. (Frank still laughing) And what branch were you in?

Frank Rork: I was also in the Army. I was in the Army Reserves, one of those six month wonders.

April Wilson: Oh, ok. (chuckles)

Frank Rork: Uh, I went in the Army Reserves when Bobby was drafted. A little later, I joined the Army Reserves, and I went to Fort Leonardwood, Missouri for my basic training, and it was in the summer time and it was hot!

April Wilson: Oh, yeah, it's a horrible place. (chuckles)

Frank Rork: (laughing heartily) It's not a fun place to be! (everyone laughing) And, anyway. When I got back, my brother was working at a bowling alley and he was out of the service at the time and he had served his two years and, so I tried to have him join the reserves with me. He had to serve so much time in the National Guard or Army Reserves and he opted to join the National Guard and got a deferment because of his work. He worked at night and so he didn't have to attend the meetings.

April Wilson: Oh, ok.

Frank Rork: So, anyway, the National Guard Unit got called up and he had to go back …

April Wilson: Oh dear!

Frank Rork: (chuckles) He went to Louisiana from when he got called back and never did go overseas or anything, but it was during the Korean conflict thing. And I never did,

well, National Guard got called but Army Reserves from down there didn't get called. So I was down there, and I served my six years Reserve time and had to go to summer camps up north, but we never did get called out.

April Wilson: Oh, well that's good.

Frank Rork: Yes it was. (chuckles)

Emmanuel Torres: (laughs)

April Wilson: (laughs) Ok, do you know if any of your family served in any war like World War I or II or anything before that? Or what's the oldest war that you know of that a family member might have served in?

Frank Rork: World War II is the only one that I remember having any recollection of any of our family, immediate family in.

April Wilson: And who was that, do you know?

Frank Rork: Well that was my uncle. Uncle Virgil, my mom's brother. The one that served in Guam.

April Wilson: Ok, was just making sure.

Frank Rork: Yeah.

April Wilson: And was he in the Army?

Frank Rork: Yes, he was in the Army.

April Wilson: Ok. During World War I and II, the Rio Grande Valley did have impact through like small settlements that were here, especially with Moore Airbase down the road here. My question is, was the farm impacted at all by the wars?

Frank Rork: No, but you know I, uh, it was years later that I thought we were way, way, away from the war, but I learned that German submarines were right off of Brownsville …

April Wilson: Yeah.

Frank Rork: … in the Gulf of Mexico, and that even they sunk tankers coming out of New Orleans,

Emmanuel Torres: Yes, sir.

Frank Rork: ... in the Gulf. And none of this made the news. So we thought we were a long ways from the war (chuckles).

April Wilson: Yes.

Frank Rork: When in reality, we weren't very far from it.

April Wilson: That's why I was asking like with the Zimmerman Telegrams in World War I and how Mexico was looking at targeting us and I was just wondering if the farm or the food would be allocated for troops or anything.

Frank Rork: Well, the only thing I remember was sugar rations. Tires were hard to get. You could only get a tire, I don't know, don't remember how it was rationed. I know that sugar was and gasoline was and rubber was and tires, you know. And I remember some of that and I don't recall the details of it at all.

April Wilson: Oh, ok. My next question is when a family member was away serving in the military, like your uncle, you or your brother, how did that affect the daily life of the farm? Was there an impact on anything?

Frank Rork: Well, 'course when my brother (clears throat) left he was already married, and I was already married, so we were away from the farm. At that point in time, I think my brother-in-law was probably actually doing the farming work kind of like renting from my dad except my dad got most of the profits. I mean, except for the expenses, you know?

April Wilson: Yeah. Ok, do you know if there's any photographs of you gentlemen in uniform during y'alls time in the service?

Frank Rork: (laughs) I know I used to have some, but I don't even remember if I can find anything of mine that would have me in uniform.

April Wilson: Ok. Well if you find anything, we'd like to, if you can, send it to Roseann or email it to us so we could use it in the book, if you'd like.

Frank Rork: Ok, alright. If I find something I will.

April Wilson: I'd appreciate that then. I don't have any more questions. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss with us?

Frank Rork: Uh, I can't think of anything. If you come up with any more questions, give me a holler.

April Wilson: I would look forward to doing that, and thank you for your time in the service, sir.

Frank Rork: Alright, tell EJ thank you too.

Emmanuel Torres: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

Frank Rork: Alright, talk to you later.

April Wilson: Have a great day, sir. Goodbye.

Emmanuel Torres: Bye, sir.

Interview terminated at 3:19 pm.

Appendix D

Interviewee: Daniel Fike
Interviewers: Jacob Garza and Criselda Avalos
Location: Fike Family Farms office, 1601 Sharp Road, Edinburg, Texas
Date: November 6, 2017

Jacob Garza: My name is Jacob Garza. I'm here with Daniel Fike at his farm at his office at 1601 Sharp Road in Edinburg, Texas. I'm here to ask him a couple of questions about my chapter conclusion. I'll be talking about the highway recursion that might happen here that this farm and about his land. Ok, so first question, in what way or from my prior knowledge you said that a highway could be coming through your land is that correct?

Daniel Fike: Correct.

Jacob Garza: Okay, what's the name of the highway that could be coming through here?

Daniel Fike: Highway 68.

Jacob Garza: Okay, in what way could Highway 68 affect your land and if so how bad?

Daniel Fike: Well it's supposed to go in right here east of our farm. Most of our land is to the east of our farm. If it's harder to move equipment over a six-lane highway that they want to put here. Plus it would take my sister and father's house.

Jacob Garza: And do you have any compromises that could be able to be made with Highway 68?

Daniel Fike: Yes, we have asked them to put it on the west side of our farm or go to 493 and put it over there.

Jacob Garza: And what are their responses?

Daniel Fike: That's not feasible.

Jacob Garza: And why is that?

Daniel Fike: Over here there is a gas line just north… yeah, just north of us, and they said it would be too close to that, and plus their electrical substation over here just to the west of us and they said there's not enough room. 493, they say it will disturb too many other people, but I don't believe that because if you look at Google maps you can count the houses and everything, and it seems like going through here would disturb a lot more people than winding 493. Plus, they already have the easement over there.

Jacob Garza: If it does end up going through your land what is the best ways you can minimize it?

Daniel Fike: Well like I said, putting it to the west side of our farm over on 493, they also have another route that goes down Val Verde that would affect us that bad.

Jacob Garza: What emotional value does your family and you hold for this land?

Daniel Fike: Well, we have been farming here for over 50 years and it's just our way of life. If they come in and do that then its going to disturb our whole farming operation.

Jacob Garza: Does the state or city want this highway?

Daniel Fike: Not sure, the state, I know it's the, what is it called? The R… the Rio Grande Valley RMA. If the valley or the, it's the Hidalgo County RMA. They want to make a loop around Hidalgo County and I know they're pushing for it. Edinburg probably is but it's out of their reach… city limits so I think they just want to push it just because maybe they can annex a lot more land for Edinburg.

Jacob Garza: Prior to this, have you had any [problems] with the state or the city, trying to regulate you or just giving you problems and stuff for your way of life?

Daniel Fike: We, like we used to do vegetables, and they… I think it is more the federal government not the state, but they had put a lot more regulations on what you can do with fresh vegetables and how you're supposed to manage it and there was just some regulations that we couldn't handle so we got out of the vegetable business.

Jacob Garza: So now what do you typically grow?

Daniel Fike: Corn, sorghum, citrus. Which is citrus is getting bad enough and we don't know… we just take out the trees.

Jacob Garza: Have you looked for any help with regard to the highway like as far as a lawyer?

Daniel Fike: We have looked into an eminent domain lawyer. I mean, we have asked around and they would help us but it's going to cost a lot. Nothing to stop they highway because that's too expensive. I mean, we don't want to run out of money or go out of business trying to pay for them not to do it. And we have been to Austin and we have spoken in front of the… I guess it's the transportation department or whatever it is up there. We have got up in front of them and spoke.

Jacob Garza: Have you reached out to any, or is there anything as a community that we could do to help, or vice versa? Or like have you reached out to any community members?

Daniel Fike: Everybody who is affected we have reached out to.

Jacob Garza: What have they said?

Daniel Fike: All we can do is keep writing those letters and tell them to put it somewhere else, and so far that, it's been 3 years now. They said it was going to be going through here already, and they haven't started it, apparently something is working. At least to slow down the process.

Jacob Garza: So how many other farms in the area will be affected by this? Do you know how many?

Daniel Fike: Perez Farms, which is right down the road… they would be affected. Riviera Machineries out on the expressway… they were going to take his whole business. And then, just families and everybody who's down through this area. We have a big spot right here from 107 to Monte Cristo. That I think they just see a lot of farm land that go across. Which typically would be the best place to put something like this so you would want to dislocate a bunch of people. But that's our way of life. And I think there's a lot better way for them to do it.

Jacob Garza: How long has the Perez family and the Rivera [Company] been here? How long have you farmed side by side with them?

Daniel Fike: Well, Perez have been here as long as I can remember. He worked for Aderhold Farms which owned that business before he did and I guess…

{Phone rings}

Just as long as I can remember that they have been there. Riviera, I think he moved there in the 80's or 90's. He's just a little machinery dealership.

Jacob Garza: Typically, who do you buy equipment from?

Daniel Fike: Barming new houses or Whilley.

Jacob Garza: And do you buy used or brand new?

Daniel Fike: Both…tractors, the last couple of times we have bought new, but we have bought used equipment before.

Jacob Garza: And as far as storage you said you store most of your corn?

Daniel Fike: As much as we can. We can't store it all here, but we do have quite a bit of storage here.

Jacob Garza: And what elevator do you usually sell to?

Daniel Fike: Garcia Grain. He's in Progesso, Donna, he got a bunch of them around here.

Jacob Garza: How hard is it to typically transport? Do yall have semis and stuff?

Daniel Fike: We call them and they have all that set up. They send us out trucks and we fill them up and send them back.

Jacob Garza: As far as, because I'm doing the conclusion chapter in my thing. So typically for my chapter, I have to get everyone else's chapter a kind of just… give like a run through. So is there anything you would like to add besides? Like to put at the end of the chapter or something like that?

Daniel Fike: I don't know, I don't know what everybody else has said.

Jacob Garza: As far as operations here is it you and your brother that just run most of it?

Daniel Fike: No, it's a family operation. My uncle, my dad, my two uncles, and my dad run it. We are basically farm hands right now, but my brother, me, and my cousin, we all contribute a lot. And we just recently picked up some more acreage out north of town. We formed our own little partnership that we are getting. Its going through right now. That's what I was doing on the computer when you came in. We are trying to get our own partnership started. Just to go along… I mean we are not going to separate from the farm, but we want to have our own little thing going.

Jacob Garza: And whenever you do form this partnership you going to be working very close with the farm, right? **Daniel Fike**: Yeah.

Jacob Garza: Well, all proceeds go to the middle, or you will have your own?

Daniel Fike: It's probably gonna… we're not really sure how its gonna work yet, but right now we have our own partnership. We are pretty much renting our equipment from this farm to use out on that farm, and we are trying to keep them separate but we can help each other out. We have the labor and they have the equipment.

Jacob Garza: For future farmers, who will take over the farm after… like, for example, my family… we farm a bunch of land up north in Illinois, and my uncles are already getting close to their 60's. None of me and my cousins want to start farming anytime soon, so that's the problem they're having. They don't know who's gonna take over the farm after they can't work anymore. Do you have any idea who would do that for yall?

Daniel Fike: Well, my nephews, my brother's boys, seem pretty interested in it but they are eight and five years old right now, so who's to say what they are going to want to do in a years, so…

Jacob Garza: So if they don't decide to do it what would you end up doing?

Daniel Fike: We would probably work on it until till we retire and sell off. I'm pretty sure one of them are gonna want to do something with it. They seem very interested in it but like I said they're five and eight years old. Did you know what you wanted do when you were eight? I kind of knew what I wanted to do, but who knows? Things change. I think it's too difficult. Too many roads, too much urban development happening around here. You just never know what you can do in twenty, thirty years.

Jacob Garza: What age did you start working on the land?

Daniel Fike: I was running the tractor at about ten years old, maybe a little younger on my dad's lap. He would let me drive it round. There are pictures of me somewhere… I don't know. I've got old open cab cotton picker… I'm probably eight, nine, ten years old. And I'm running that thing by myself.

Jacob Garza: That's crazy. I wouldn't be able to.

Daniel Fike: I don't know how. My dad trusted me that much. My kids are getting to be five years old. And they aren't… no way I would let them run a piece of machinery. Maybe I was a little older, but I remember being really young.

Jacob Garza: My uncle, the last time I went, he put me on a one of those big combines or something like that and was having me drive around one of his silos, and I didn't know how to work it, and almost hit one of them and I was freaking out. And this was last year and I was way older. It's scary!

Daniel Fike: I've been around it all my life. I mean we didn't have babysitters when we were real young. My dad would take us on the tractor and we go with him. That was our day before we went to school, or every summer. That's what we were doing.

Jacob Garza: So for other farmers that I can give a paragraph about at the end of my chapter… how would you describe the overall business of farming? Would you describe it as a prosperous business, or a declining business for people who might want to get into farming, or people who are in farming?

Daniel Fike: It's prosperous if you're willing to change. If you wanna stick to your old ways or do stuff that we done twenty, thirty years ago… with urban development, with new regulations… you just have to change all the time. You just can't stay the same. You will just phase out. So you have to be willing to change.

Jacob Garza: So its an evolving business.

Daniel Fike: Yeah, it's evolving. Farming, it's basically, I mean, it's been the same for ages. It's been the same for ages. You put a seed in the ground, you grow it. That's never going to change, but dealing with regulations, urban sprawl, all of that…you have to be willing to change with it or sell off.

Jacob Garza: And that's something you do not wanna do right?That's like last resort, right?

Daniel Fike: Yeah, that's last resort. We wanna, I wanna be doing this till I'm ready to retire. Which, look at my dad and uncle. You never retire you just kind of…you just kind of keep going. You become more of a manager when you get older, or hopefully, our kids will be wanting to take over for us one day.

Jacob Garza: Alright then, if there's anything you want to add that concludes my interview. Anything else you would like to add?

Daniel Fike: No. I'm not a big talker. If you don't ask me a question, I'm not just going to talk.

Jacob Garza Yes sir. Well, my name is Jacob Garza once again. I'm with the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley and I'm studying for a history degree, with a minor in kinesiology. I'm along with Daniel Fike of Fike Farms. He is one of the sons of the orginal owners, and he's a very good farm hand, and hopfully he will continue to work as long as he wants to.

Daniel Fike: And prosper.

Criselda Avalos: Ok Daniel, what are some of your old family traditions that you still practice today?

Daniel Fike: Family traditions? (laughs)

Criselda Avalos: Anything that might have come from wherever your family is from?

Daniel Fike: No, no, no….

Criselda Avalos: Anything different from here….

Daniel Fike: I've never really just thought of our family having traditions. We just kind of do our own thing. I…Get together, we're always with family. We don't really just…There's nothing we just do every year that seems like it would come from…

Criselda Avalos: Nothing different?
Daniel Fike: We kinda have our own traditions, I guess…we get together for Christmas. Just like everybody else. Christmas, Thanksgiving, that's about it.
Criselda Avalos: Oh wow! Okay.
Daniel Fike: (laughs)…I don't know about any like traditional food or anything like that…
Criselda Avalos: (laughs) Okay, so basically you do, like say for example, here in Christmas we have like what, tamales and whatnot. Do you all have that?
Daniel Fike: We have tamales, we have…
Criselda Avalos: (laughs)
Daniel Fike: …turkey, I mean…
Criselda Avalos: Mexican food?
Daniel Fike: (laughs) We do it all.
Criselda Avalos: (laughs) Oh wow. Okay, so how about, for example, quinceaneras? Do the girls in the family have quinceaneras when they turn fifteen?
Daniel Fike: No…uh…there's only been one girl in the last thirty-five years, my sister, no she's almost thirty-seven. Anyhow, uh…when she was young we did not have a…maybe a sweet sixteen, but not, it's not a big deal. It's a birthday party. And then there was a cotillion…
Criselda Avalos: Oh wow.
Daniel Fike: I'm not really sure what that was. I know somebody told my dad, hey why don't you bring her…
Criselda Avalos: It's a coming out.
Daniel Fike: Yeah. She did that, but I don't know if that's a tradition. We don't have too many girls in the family. I've got two right now, they're only fie years old, so I don't know what we'll do when they turn sixteen or…
Daniel Fike: I don't think we'll have a quinceanera but uh…
Criselda Avalos: Oh wow. Okay so that's one thing you haven't had then?
Daniel Fike: No.
Criselda Avalos: Oh wow. Okay.
Daniel Fike: But traditional food, I mean tamales anything…tacos, fajitas. We love all that. We do all of that.
Criselda Avalos: Who doesn't like Mexican food, right?
Daniel Fike: I know, it's great.
Criselda Avalos: (laughs) Okay, well then uh…this is a little bit of a different topic. If none of younger generation decide to continue with the farm, what will happen to the farm?
Daniel Fike: Eventually it'll…if…It's just me, my brother and my cousin and we get old we're, we're going to do this until we can't do it anymore. Whether our kids, next generation want to do it that's another story but if they don't we'll just have to see what happens when it comes to that time.
Criselda Avalos: Wow.
Daniel Fike: Because, if no one is going to run it, I mean what are you gonna do?
Criselda Avalos: Well, you don't have any other, like additional extended family members that might be interested or…?
Daniel Fike: Maybe. I mean, I've got my nephews that are from my sister. They're the Villarreals, but they might want to.
Criselda Avalos: Do they help around here now?

Daniel Fike: Oh yeah. They're right across the street. That big white house that's across the street. They live there.
Criselda Avalos: Oh wow.
Daniel Fike: But my sister's a dietician, her husband's a pharmacist. Maybe the youngest one might want to. His name's Woody, but his older brother, he doesn't have any interest. He wants to do something that's gonna… "I'm gonna go to college to get something that I can make money of, that's what I'm gonna do."
Criselda Avalos: (laughs) Okay, um…so then in 10 years where do you see the development of the farm? Do you see if progressing?
Daniel Fike: Hopefully we're growing, buying more land and you know able to just grow. With me and my brother, my cousin, my uncles, we just want to keep steadily growing until we get to where we can have a…I mean we love this, we don't wanna…if we keep shrinking that's not good. We need to keep growing so we can keep going you know.
Criselda Avalos: So how many family members, more or less, would you say you have here in the farm with you guys?
Daniel Fike: It's my two uncles, George and Sam. My dad, he's kinda not on the farm right now, he's had a…health problems but as soon as he gets better he wants to come back and then my brother, and me and my cousin.
Criselda Avalos: Wow.
Daniel Fike: And then we have a couple hands that work for us.
Criselda Avalos: Oh, like students coming in?
Daniel Fike: Not like students, a couple of guys…uh…
Criselda Avalos: Regular employees?
Daniel Fike: Yeah, regular employees.
Criselda Avalos: Oh wow. Okay. Well, um. Those were my questions really, just basic questions. Didn't know how much you know, we were able to ask.
Criselda Avalos: (laughs) But yes. Well thank you.
Daniel Fike: 'Cause they're always asking about traditions and…
Criselda Avalos: Well, it's because, you know, coming from, you know, a different area we think maybe…
Daniel Fike: Yeah. Well I've been here all my life.
Criselda Avalos: You were born here?
Daniel Fike: I was born here. My dad he was not born here, but he was very young when he came.
Criselda Avalos: I think we read that.
Daniel Fike: My grandpa was the one that came down. My grandpa and his dad were the one that came down so we're pretty much tex-mex. (laughs)
Criselda Avalos: (laughs). Well that'll work.
Daniel Fike: Beer, barbeque, that's our tradition.
Criselda Avalos: Oh. Okay.
Daniel Fike: I guess you can say beer 'cause…(laughs)…we do drink quite a bit.
Criselda Avalos: Of course. Who doesn't drink beer?
Daniel Fike: But uh…not to an unhealthy…
Criselda Avalos: Of course. At least that you can say right?
Daniel Fike: Right (laughs)
Criselda Avalos: Or remember. (laughs). Okay, well then, thank you.

Interviewee: Rachel Fike Villareal
Interviewer: Evan Berg
Location: Rachel Fike Villarreal's office, Room HSHW 2.102W, University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley.
Date: October18, 2017, 1:30 pm

This interview is about how the Fike family has interacted with nature, such as plants and animals. There is talk of natural disasters, and the growing and expanding urban development within the Rio Grande Valley.

Rachel Villareal: You're gonna guide questions and I'm just gonna answer, right?
Evan Berg: Yes ma'am.
Rachel Villareal: Okay (laughs).
Evan Berg: Okay, hello this is October the 18th, uh 2017. I am Evan Berg, I will be conducting an interview with...should I say Mrs. or Doctor..?
Rachel Villareal: Mrs.
Evan Berg: Okay. Mrs. Rachel Fike Villarreal. She is a professor at the university, and we will...I'll be asking her interview questions about a project for the CHAPS program that I am working on. So, I shall begin. I am doing one on nature, and we had talked a little bit before the recording, but you said that you had seen a fox on your property.
Rachel Villareal: Yes. About a couple years ago, my brother...it was either Josh or Daniel, saw a fox outside at the headquarters near the farm with a couple of babies with it. He took a picture of it, and then I would say as recently as a couple months ago, I saw it dodge out of the corn field around my property which is right across the street. Right east of the headquarters.
Evan Berg: I see.
Rachel Villareal: Mmhm.
Evan Berg: We don't see many foxes around here.
Rachel Villareal: No
Evan Berg: So that is actually pretty interesting. In fact, while we were on the property on Mon..no. I mean last Monday, we found prints, we found prints in there. It could have been a wild dog, could have been, some people say it's a coyote, but it could have possibly been a fox. So…
Rachel Villareal: Mmhm.
Evan Berg: Ah, I believe we took pictures of that. So…
Rachel Villareal: Okay (laughs)
Evan Berg: So maybe we can identify, like ummm. How has, well, interactions with wild life, like aside from, like you said taking a picture of a fox and witnessing it and what have you. What other kind of wildlife have you seen around here on your property?
Rachel Villareal: We have seen in the last five years some hogs..some wild hogs.
Evan Berg: So javelinas basically?
Rachel Villareal: Javelinas are a little different than hogs. So, I think that they're just feral hogs… feral hogs.
Evan Berg: I see.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, because they don't have the big tusks, the nice facial features of javelinas.

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: Other than that, regular wildlife I guess. You see out there, snakes… there's a big black snake at my parents' house. It comes and eats the chicken eggs. Very frequently actually. Probably like a six foot .. seven-foot black snake.…Lots of birds. I am not very good at identifying the types of birds, but we do have a lot of different colored birds. And then we have those huge hawks too that are circling round. I know that my mother had seen a horny toad in the drainage ditch next to her house. I know that she was really excited about that because she used to be a science teacher and she knew that was kind of an interesting find because there's not many horny toads around.

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: I think that is about it as far as wildlife. I mean we have…

Evan Berg: Well…

Rachel Villareal: Had of course the escaped horse and the escaped cow from the neighbors and stuff like that (laughs) but they are not really wild.

Evan Berg: But aw…well, perhaps in that aspect of it… as the interaction of wildlife maybe as when you were a child, perhaps did you see animals then that you don't really see now? Or was it kinda… you didn't see a lot of wildlife as a child?

Rachel Villareal: I guess I don't remember seeing a lot of wildlife out there. Maybe as an adult I remember more because it is recent. Actually, one thing that has changed is we have a lot of squirrels in our trees but I don't remember any squirrels as a kid. This is something that has actually changed in the opposite direction. There have been more squirrels lately. I remember my grandma telling me there were no squir rels when she was young because that was something that settlers would eat (laugh ter).

Evan Berg: Hmm…

Rachel Villareal: They were using or eating anything the land provided and they kinda didn't see very many squirrels, and now there are many more squirrels out there. I guess people aren't eating them.

Evan Berg: Eating them (laughs)

Rachel Villareal: As much. (laughs)

Evan Berg: Well, being that your family, of course, is an agricultural family, and you know part of the aspects of that is, you know, working the habitat. Working the land. And have you seen it? The nature habitat, the way that the land is, have you seen it kinda changed over time? Not just from agricultural work …and of course urban develop ment as just an overall process has that changed over time from since you were a kid until now? Or has it always been kinda like a good steady kind of change?

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, I think it is pretty much the same. The same pieces of land are pretty such worked the same as they are now. The farm really puts a lot of effort in the land to put back the minerals and put back everything like the fertilizer every thing that the ground needs. So I haven't really seen that it has changed for the better or the worst. Yes, and like you said urban development is way different than when I was young. The spread from town and farmers selling off their land and stuff. But as far as the actual ground itself being different I don't think there is much of a differ ence. I guess, of course. I am not the expert on that considering I went a different

route in life as an adult than my brothers who are actually working the land right now. So that might be more of a question for them. They may see a difference.

Evan Berg: That is a perfectly reasonable answer to that question. (laughter) What about…natural disasters for example? Of course, I think its hmm..its hmm… been said that your grandparents were they here for Beulah.

Rachel Villareal: Yes, and lots of stories from my grandma and grandpa about Beulah and from my parents how 107 was covered. The roads were covered in water. And it most got into my grandma and grandpa's house. The land was covered in water because it is a flood plain out here. So, it was running that direction. I know that during Dolly too, it was totally full.

Evan Berg: See, that is one of the things people don't think. That perhaps Dolly wasn't as huge of an impact as Beulah was, but it still created an impacted as a fairly more recent storm…

Rachel Villareal: Right. And with Dolly I know that they were trying to get the crops out before it came and a lot farmers didn't get them out, and so a lot of stuff was ruined. The water was sitting on the land a long time before it kinda drained away.

Evan Berg: What about any…aside from like storms for example…perhaps even some of the freezes that have occurred here?

Rachel Villareal: I think I would always hear my grandpa talk about the freeze of '83.

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: (laughs) Yeah, because it was like a saying. It's not going to be as bad as the freeze of '83 that killed a bunch of citrus.

Evan Berg: Yes, it pretty much crippled the citrus industry, and it took a very long time for people who had made that their livelihood. It really hurt a lot of people.

Rachel Villareal: I know we didn't lose as much as others. I think we had, if I remember correctly… we had a lot of orchard heaters and a lot of preventative things that my grandpa did to save a lot of the trees, but of course some didn't make it and some did. I don't think there has been such a severe hard freeze since '83.

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: So, we are up for one probably. (laughter) I don't know.

Evan Berg: It is entirely possible.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah.

Evan Berg: With the way that weather works.

Rachel Villareal: Uh hm.

Evan Berg: We saw on your family's property… we saw a lot of peacocks. When did you start having peacocks on your property and what are they used for? Are they kinda domesticated pets or essentially what made you have an interest in raising peacocks?

Rachel Villareal: My grandma loves nature. She is the one that wanted peacocks because of their beauty, and they are not really domesticated because they do stay there, but I mean they breed on their own and lay eggs, and you see baby peacocks walking every once in a while and they take care of themselves. We don't feed them or any thing. When did that start? Oh, probably twenty years ago. It was a long time ago. I know it was before… I can't remember. It was before my brothers got married, so that was like ten years ago so somewhere in the fifteen years ago range. My grandma has always been into nature. Birds, and to tell you the truth, people go out there to hunt birds during dove season and they aren't allowed to hunt inside the fence at grandma's house because she feels like that is their little sanctuary. So, she likes the birds to be able to go there and she likes to look at them. As well as plants. My

grandma was always planting different plants in her yard. And trying out new things and actually she is really good about giving us plants. She'll go buy plants and have us try them in our yards. 'Cause she really likes the beauty of nature.

Evan Berg: You are talking about plants for example. Did your grandmother ever talk about uses for some of the plants? As you said, she loves nature and, ah, she gives you plants. Does she or has she be kinda showed you or said what these plants can be used for?

Rachel Villareal: Like for medicinal?

Evan Berg: Medicinal, or as for food, since on the property we did find, ah, hackberries.

Rachel Villareal: She used to have wild mustang grapes, in the backyard. When I was a kid I remember going out there and picking them off of the vine but they are not there anymore. My great grandmother, her mother, used to can jelly, you know, made out of the grapes… mustang grapes.

Evan Berg: Preserves?

Rachel Villareal: Preserves, yes. Out of the grapes. So we did have those. Oh, of course we did have citrus trees all around the property. Even though we had orchards, she would plant a valley lemon and a tangerine in her yard so you could go out and pick those citrus really quickly as opposed to going all the way to the orchard to get the fruit. We also have avocado trees. My mom has figs, fig trees. We make fig preserves out of them on a yearly basis. But that was from the other side of the family. There was always fruits and vegetables and then of course we have aloe vera all over.

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: That is always more of a medicinal for burns and things like that. That was always in the yard. I think all of us have aloe vera growing in our yard for that purpose. Of course, we would suck on mesquite beans. We would always pick up the mesquite beans in the yard and chew on them or taste them. I know my sister-in-law, she has made mesquite bean preserves.

Evan Berg: ohhh ahhh

Rachel Villareal: And that is Athena Fike. She is very handy.

Evan Berg: Mesquite preserves.

Rachel Villareal: Uh hm. the mesquite bean.

Evan Berg: Ok, mesquite bean preserves… Athena Fike. How does that taste? I have never had… I don't think I have ever had a mesquite bean preserve.

Rachel Villareal: It is as sweet as the sugar you put in it. Preserves are like half sugar. Like it is very sugary. It does have its own distinct flavor. If you have ever put a mesquite bean in your mouth and chewed it has that flavor except sweet. It is kind of a clear preserve.

Evan Berg: Trying to think of another thing… it says here on the paper here..it says 'special field trips.' I don't know if that is something like, you know, you call like a, like a family vacation with quotation marks around that a meaning to that or is it or perhaps you can elaborate on that.

Rachel Villareal: Field trips, or as like a family we went everywhere?

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: The summers were always difficult because we were harvesting so we really didn't go on many vacations (laughter) it was always harvest time for cotton, corn and grain so the only places we went together. We went to the beach.

Evan Berg: Yeah, ok the beach would be.

Rachel Villareal: South Padre. We would go there as a family…what we did do..I don't know if they showed you all…what we called The Brush…the Fike Park.

Evan Berg: The Fike Park. They may have but please elaborate on that.

Rachel Villareal: So that is over on Skinner Road where my brother Josh lives, right next door to that and the family cemetery is there too.

Evan Berg: Uh hmm.

Rachel Villareal: When my grandpa first started farming down here, he and my grandma of course loved nature. He sectioned off a piece of land and didn't furrow, didn't cultivate it. It was just wild.

Evan Berg: It was allowed to grow as is?

Rachel Villareal: They allowed it to grow. They put a cabin in the middle of it and we would have all of our family birthday parties, Easter egg hunts, all of that there. It had all the native trees in there. mesquite, huisache and those kinds of trees. My grandma would go in there and plant like Barbados, and different things to make it really beautiful and we would even have sleep overs. I remember having a sleep over at maybe eight or nine years old. Have all my friends over and we would sleep in the cabin there and kinda camp out.

Evan Berg: Perhaps since that particular area was like allowed to grow as is, did you see any..?

Rachel Villareal: Animals, were there animals there? That is where we had seen some hogs, yeah.

Evan Berg: Is that where you saw the wild hogs?

Rachel Villareal: Yes. I don't know how they get in there. It is fenced but I guess they find their way.

Evan Berg: Well hogs are…hogs are…

Rachel Villareal: Yeah.

Evan Berg: Hogs, they can burrow things, so entirely possible.

Rachel Villareal: But other than those animals, I don't. When I was a kid there weren't squirrels there and now there are. But other animals I don't remember seeing. I remember we couldn't go barefoot 'cause there were stinging nettles so we had to always wear shoes there …we would even have dances there. My grandpa laid a concrete slab and we would have dances out there.

Evan Berg: Nice. No, just like animal pests, but like again since your grandmother. Again since grandmother loves nature how did she deal with and yourself perhaps dealt with weeds… kinda of invasive species, plants, and animals? Since that is a major concern down here.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, like weed control? My dad would always tell me these stories of when they first moved into the house on Sharp Road, my grandpa made all four boys get on their hands and knees and pick stickers out of the yard and put them in a bucket. They had to pick them by hand and get them out of the yard so there wouldn't be any stickers in the yard. Now in the fields and around our fence lines and stuff like that to keep weeds out of the yard. Out of the yard we do use Round Up. I mean chemicals. We do use, along with a hoe. (laughter) When I was young, I don't know if things were different, or I don't know if they didn't have the same chemicals back then, but I remember in first grade given a hoe and it would be me and my brother Daniel, my brother Josh, my cousin Adam, my cousin Matt and we'd all have a row and they'd give us a hoe and we'd have to hoe all the way up and down the rows to get the weeds out. Now they have better equipment. (laughs) I

don't think anyone is hoeing up and down. Not that I know of, but I could be wrong. As far as our crops are concerned. As far as pests…like bugs.

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: …and stuff like that again. Chemicals.

Evan Berg: Like regular bug killer?

Rachel Villareal: Yeah. Like at the house, I know we all use the same thing. I think we use that comes in a white bottle with a spray, Home Defense. (laughs) We use Home Defense because in the country there are a lot of bugs and they try to get in your home. Ants and especially cockroaches and spiders and you just can't hardly keep the spiders out. It's like there is no winning with that there are spider webs in every corner, and so we use that on the outside and then like usually our home gardens. I know I use seven which is kind gets the worms and stuff like that out as far as the farm is concerned. I am not sure what chemicals they use but I am sure they use something. Yeah, it is not an organic farm. (laughter)

Evan Berg: Do you hunt personally? I know your brothers, for example, when we were meeting them for the class, ah, initially they talked about how they like shooting and barbequing and things like that.

Rachel Villareal: Right.

Evan Berg: Do you perhaps, do you like doing that, or are you?

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, I guess I grew up a little differently we are old fashioned, and I am a girl. I did not drive a tractor. I was with my mom and we didn't really go hunting, we would stay home. Now do I mind it…no. I cook the meat, yes. (laughs) So my husband goes hunting, my brothers go hunting, and I will go on occasion and watch but I don't usually… I am not usually the one doing the hunting or the skinning. But I will cook it and eat it. (laughs) I know they really enjoy that. Fishing on the other hand, I love to fish. So, I do fish and again we cook our fish and everything. The thing about our family is we do eat everything. We fish and hunt. The only thing I ever buy is chicken. I never have to buy beef. I never have to buy any type of red meat because we have so much pork and so much deer and then the fish too. We fish most summers and we have fish for the whole year to eat so we pretty much rely off the land. I personally like to add some chicken because I am a dietitian (laughter) so I do have to buy chicken. We do have chickens on the property too. My mom has chicken a coup, I have a chicken coup, my brother Josh has a chicken coup so we raise our own eggs. I never have bought an egg since I lived here. When I lived in Corpus, I lived away for ten years, after I got married. I actually thought my son was allergic to eggs. He would break out in a rash and the eggs from the store would give him a rash but the eggs from the farm do not. So, it must be something in the store bought egg. We haven't bought eggs since we have been down here.

Evan Berg: It is perfectly fine.

Rachel Villareal: Chickens…yes we tried to do a chicken, my husband and I. Let's get the rooster and ring its neck and do all of that. That is a lot of work. I know that my great-grandma used to do that, and, you know, pluck all the feathers and cook a whole chicken. It's a lot, a lot of work and I think for the conveniences we have now, I would just rather go buy a chicken at the store.

Evan Berg: And as you said you like to fish. Where do you go to fish? Do you go say like the island for example?

Rachel Villareal: We go to the island and we go off exit of access six and then we probably drive about ten or twelve miles out there as a family every weekend during the

summer, so it is like a huge caravan of us. My mom, my dad, my two brothers and their families, cousins and then basically we fish all day and then come back and fil let everything.

Evan Berg: Do you did you see any…did you catch any kinda of particular fish? Because I know, like during the summer and stuff, crabs tend to burrow out at night and some times you can shine the light on them and…

Rachel Villareal: Tons of crabs, but we have caught a lot of whiteing, so it is not a lot of redfish and stuff like that… and sharks. We catch a lot of sharks.

Evan Berg: Oh…a lot of sharks.

Rachel Villareal: Yes, my son actually caught a five-foot shark this summer.

Evan Berg: Do you know what kind of shark?

Rachel Villareal: I think it is a blacktip. I think that is what is it called. I have a picture I can give to you.

Evan Berg: Oh, that would be wonderful.

Rachel Villareal: Uh hm…oh there is the fox.

Evan Berg: Uh Hm..there it is right there (laughter) .

Rachel Villareal: So I will send you that picture too. And then the year before my son caught another five-foot shark. My son Woodrow is a fisherman. He loves, loves, *loves* to fish. If he didn't have to do anything else he would just fish. And we have that I don't know if you have been to my parents' house there by the farm but they have a pond behind their house and it is stocked with you know redfish, catfish and it has tilapia. You can go and catch and release. There's turtles back there. Those we did not put there.

Evan Berg: Have you ever gone to some of the wildlife refuges that are around here?

Rachel Villareal: As a kid, I went to.. what's that place called? Laguna Atascosa?

Evan Berg: I think so.

Rachel Villareal: I think I've been there. I don't remember much about it. It was when I was really young, about seven. My mom took me…my mom and dad took me there, or maybe we were meeting somebody there but I remember going there. Um, in the last seven years I went to the park that is, I think it's a wildlife refuge like Benson road? Near but going toward the…I don't even know what it's called… It has a nice running trail, that's why I went there. Yeah, I can't remember the name of it. But there's a lot of 5k's and stuff that they do there.

Evan Berg: Benson Road.

Rachel Villareal: It might be called Benson Park. I don't, I don't know.

Evan Berg: Uh, I'll check.

Rachel Villareal: But it's near, like between McAllen and Misson? Toward the Rio Grande River. Other than that I don't think, down here I haven't been too many. I've been to Rockport, but, other than that I don't think…

Evan Berg: All right, after that you said, that, uh, had lived in Corpus for a while right? For ten years.

Rachel Villareal: I was away for ten years.

Evan Berg: Away for ten years.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, but part of our time was there, so three years was there.

Evan Berg: All right.

Rachel Villareal: We actually lived in South Carolina, and then New Jersey, and then San Antonio, and then Corpus and then back. 'Cause my husband was in the military and so was I.

Evan Berg: Well you know. During that time, how was the nature in those areas different? Being that a lot of them, San Antonio of course is a city. So is there.

Rachel Villareal: Mmmhmm, so well it was like culture shock when I left here, because I hadn't really gone anywhere? Culture, nature, everything shock. So when I left I was twenty-one. I got married when I was twenty-one, and we moved to South Carolina. There's tall pine trees, and pine cones on the ground, and the weather is totally different. It was humid still because it was by the ocean. We were in Charleston. Lots of squirrels, lots of deer you know just moseying around and stuff, so it was a big change. It snowed while I was there. That was the first time I ever saw snow in my life. 'Cause down here of course. Of course I think there was a Christmas...

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: But it did snow here.

Evan Berg: I believe it was, it happened in…'95..I think it was in '95 or '05… something like that.

Rachel Villareal: '05 I think because, my son was born already, so it had to have been '05. In New Jersey, it was totally different too. They also had, where I lived, pine trees and pinecones, and of course it was much colder up there. I remember when it first hit 70 I was still bundled up, and all my friends at the university, because I went to Rutgers were in shorts and cut-off t-shirts. I'm like "Oh wow." In the Valley, like today. (laughs) This morning I was totally gonna change clothes but I was in a sweatshirt and it was only like 70 or 65 degrees outside. And then we moved to San Antonio. Lots of deer, yeah, it's almost like they have a deer problem, because they're in the neighborhoods and they're eating your flowers and everything. There was of course squirrels and hogs and all that kinda thing? Corpus mhm… I don't remember seeing much wildlife because I lived in CalAllen outside of Corpus. Oh right I remember seeing squirrels there. Birds I guess. Yeah.

Evan Berg: Well, since you know your family obviously has a love of nature and things like that, have you perhaps have you gone to the places that has a lot of birds for example? And butterflies? The Valley has a lot of birds and butterflies.

Rachel Villareal: Yes. Of course, we've been to the Edinburg Butterfly Garden with the kids, there in Edinburg Municipal Park. It's right beside there. At our house, we have lots of butterflies because I plant a lot of flowers around the house, there's tons.

Evan Berg: We saw, during our time there, we found some snub-nosed butterflies.

Rachel Villareal: Mmhmm.

Evan Berg: And we found carabid beetles. We found lots of worms. We found one that was a caterpillar, I forget what it's called, but it's the one that has the red horn thing on the back.

Rachel Villareal: Mm! Yeah, oh yeah. Oh we have asps too. Those ones that really sting you, yeah. You have to watch out out there. My son got stung by one, the really fuzzy ones.

Evan Berg: Yeah.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, that fall out of the trees. Oh, and another thing we have right now are hummingbirds. We have tons of hummingbirds. They love the Esperanza plants at my house. I've seen them (laughs) get into fights. Like I've seen a hummingbird guarding my hummingbird feeder and not letting other hummingbirds to drink from it. I've never known them to be territorial like that (laughs). So I guess when I think of wildlife I think things like big animals. But, we have tons of butterflies and moths

and all kinds of stuff like that. Not so great for the vegetable garden. But to tell you the truth, moths and butterflies are terrible. I have some veggies growing right now and as soon as my broccoli gets big enough there's worms all over it. Because they really like them (laughs) the leaves. And also, cabbage, it's really hard to grow cabbage. Without any pesticides (laughs) instead of, you know, just going out there and picking them off one by one.

Evan Berg: Right.

Rachel Villareal: (laughs)

Evan Berg: What about, since the Valley being so close to Mexico we have to deal with we have a steady supply of bees and wasps and hornets and mud daubers…and scorpions.

Rachel Villareal: Definitely.

Evan Berg: Lots of nasty things that like to bite and sting people.

Rachel Villareal: Mmhmm.

Evan Berg: Have you had to, have you had to deal with them?

Rachel Villareal: We had a beehive under our container, right next to our house.

Evan Berg: Really?

Rachel Villareal: Yes.

Evan Berg: How large of one?

Rachel Villareal: We don't know because it's underneath the container. But it did have quite a few bees, and we left it alone. We thought "Well if they aren't bothering us, we're not bothering them." You know they come and eat on the flowers and they really never bothered anybody. Well, about six months ago, my husband was just doing something over there. One attacked him and then another attacked him, and then the next day they were attacking the dog. And then one chased my son into the house, like crazy, I've never seen bees chase somebody and he wasn't even doing anything, he was in the yard, he wasn't near their hive. Because it's on the other side um, near the fence, kinda far away from the house.

Evan Berg: Did you ever? I'm assuming you got them removed. By a professional remover.

Rachel Villareal: Mmhmm. That's when we were like "Forget it, we're not gonna have these here anymore." My brother actually removes bees. Josh, and he collects the honey, but we couldn't get the honey from there because it was under the container.

Evan Berg: Did they ever identify what kinda bees, 'cause we have honey bees and then we have…

Rachel Villareal: They were little black bees, but they didn't tell us what type of bees. I know they were black and kinda small for a bee. They weren't the pretty bees that you're used to, the one with the yellow.

Evan Berg: Yeah.

Rachel Villareal: They weren't those bees. (laughs) They were black ones.

Evan Berg: But what about, um, wasps and hornets.

Rachel Villareal: We have a lot of wasp's nests. That come out around our house and they get into the eaves or under the playset where the kids all are. Honestly since we have a pool in the backyard it seems like..of course they are attracted to water, but as soon as we see one, my husband gets that hornet spray. And we kill them, we don't want them attacking our kids. Yeah.

Evan Berg: They are not fun.

Rachel Villareal: No, no and they're not. Bees, if they don't bother me, I'm not gonna bother them. Let them do their thing. But, yeah, wasps are mean and hornets yeah,

they just come right after you. If you're anywhere near them, they will come after you. Last weekend I know it's kinda a little further out then our property, but my husband went hunting. Its 45 minutes north of here. Still in Hidalgo County, they were sitting outside. They go bow hunting. So, my husband and my son are sitting there and there was a millipede? Is that the one with a bunch of legs? They're black and about this long (extends hands to show about 6 inches long)..about a foot long?

Evan Berg: Yes. If they don't have yellowy legs and red feelers in the back, those are millipedes.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, they bite, right? Or sting?

Evan Berg: For millipedes, uh they can bite, the centipedes are the ones with the really nasty...

Rachel Villareal: Yes, maybe it was a centipede. Because my husband looked it up on his phone. He said it's the one that can get you. And he killed it with the bow and ar row.

Evan Berg: Yeah, millipedes are usually, they're toxic. Well some of them are, some of them can have, they release it from their bodies.

Rachel Villareal: Oh, okay.

Evan Berg: Yeah, it's not something, you basically don't wanna touch your face or any thing with it.

Rachel Villareal: Well, because my son was really impressed, he said, "I thought that was just something out of the movies. I didn't know that was a real thing in real life." (laughs) We haven't seen that in our home.

Evan Berg: We were talking a little bit earlier about spiders… have you seen any of the spiders that are prominent down here? Of course, wolf spiders.

Rachel Villareal: Wolf spiders. Those are ones we see a lot of wolf spiders.

Evan Berg: Black widows.

Rachel Villareal: I don't think we've seen any poisonous spiders. Not that I know of, we used to have a spider who lived outside our backdoor, it was huge and its legs were pointy on the end. But we tried to look it up but we couldn't really find it. It was big.

Evan Berg: Like a big one.

Rachel Villareal: It was very big one with scary pointy..

Evan Berg: I believe…

Rachel Villareal: It would make these big like elaborate webs.

Evan Berg: Yes, I believe one of the professors, he talked about them. I'm fairly certain I can ask him and he'll tell me which one it is. It's not an orb weaver. I know that it has a very specific name for it.

Rachel Villareal: Mmhmm.

Evan Berg: But he did say that they have large webs.

Rachel Villareal: Mhmm, like you'll be walking and then you're in it.

Evan Berg: Yes.

Rachel Villareal: (laughs) And you're like "Oh no." Gone clear across the pathway.

Evan Berg: Have you, uh, ever had to trap any animals? I know that sometimes, uh, I have seen racoons around.

Rachel Villareal: Mmhmm.

Evan Berg: And I have of course seen possums are available down here.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, we've seen possums yeah. I didn't mention that; I guess some things you just live with so you don't think it's wildlife (laughs) it's just part of the family you know. Yeah, there's definitely been possums. We have these huge I

think, everyone keeps saying they're field mice or rats but they're really furry and round look like a hedgehog but they have a long tail and they eat our eggs. They can get in that chicken coop and they can eat our eggs, but they burrow under the ground so you'll see like a big hole and they'll be in there. We've tried to trap them to get rid of them, but they're very smart. We'll put corn in there and they won't go in. It seems like they only come certain times of the year and then they're gone. When I was a kid my dad would say there was Nutrias in the drainage ditch. But they're not quite as big as a Nutria. They kinda look like that.

Evan Berg: Yeah .

Rachel Villareal: I think like a marsupial.

Evan Berg: I've probably seen one.

Rachel Villareal: Yeah, but they cause some havoc. Those guys, they'll also bury under our like back porch and we have pavers so the pavers will fall in because they're getting under there. There's caliche under the pavers so I guess they just make themselves a home under there. I didn't mention but, yes there are rats and lots of mice (laughs).

Evan Berg: (laughs)

Rachel Villareal: Especially right when they cut the corn it's like,whoo! They'll come running out of the corn into our yard because it's the only shelter around. And that's when we've seen an increase. We have cats so the cats help us with that. (laughs)

Evan Berg: (laughs) I don't think I have any more questions since my questions kinda pertained to know animals and nature and what have you, and you've seen the fairly stable animals that are around here. What about exotic animals? Animals that you don't really see all that much or almost shouldn't be here?

Rachel Villareal: Well, the fox I guess is the weirdest thing we've seen, because I would think they would be in the cold weather. I didn't know that they would come down here. Other than that no I don't think any exotic you know, something that's been introduced down here that shouldn't be here.

Evan Berg: Yeah.

Rachel Villareal: Not that I know of.

Evan Berg: I think that should be enough.

Rachel Villareal: Okay.

Evan Berg: Thank you ma'am for doing this interview with me. I hope that you have a nice day.

Rachel Villareal: Oh, you're welcome. Thanks for interviewing me. (laughs)

Interviewee: Mrs. Anna Fike
Interviewers: Cynthia M. Sanchez and Roxanne Recinos
Location of Interview: Fike Farm, 1601 N. Sharp Rd., Edinburg, Texas
Date: Tuesday, October 31, 2017, 11:05 a.m.

Cynthia M. Sanchez: So, um, we are going to start the session. My name is Cynthia Sanchez.
Roxanne Recinos: I am Roxanne Recinos.
Cynthia Sanchez: I am sorry can we do it one more time, so this is Cynthia Sanchez…
Roxanne Recinos: and Roxanne Recinos.
Cynthia Sanchez: And your name?
Anna Fike: My name is Anna Fike.
Cynthia Sanchez: Ok so, um, Mrs. Fike we are going to be asking you a couple of questions.
Anna Fike: I probably have a couple of answers (Laughing)
Cynthia Sanchez: (laughing)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughing)
Cynthia Sanchez: Um what if you happen to say something that you want us to disre gard I know sometimes we blurt out stuff that, 'oh no don't put that in there'.
Anna Fike: Oh no. Don't put that in there.
Cynthia Sanchez: Let us know and we will color it red like this is what you said at the end if you change your mind. Oh you know what just put it just leave it in there.
Anna Fike: Yeah, yeah.
Roxanne Recinos: After in transcription, as well you will be able to see that if you want anything retracted we can still do that
Cynthia Sanchez: So, Ms. Roxanne I will let ask the questions and then I will do them.
Roxanne Recinos: Ok, um I guess let's start with the beginning. Why did your family leave Alsace… Alsace…
Anna Fike: Why did we leave where?
Roxanne Recinos: How do you pronounce it Alsace… Alsace… Alsace-Lorraine?
Cynthia Sanchez: Oh yeah, um…
Anna Fike: My personal family? The Rork family or the Fike family?
Roxanne Recinos: The Fike family, so sorry.
Anna Fike: Fike family left Ohio to come to the Valley
Roxanne Recinos: Ok.
Anna Fike: Shortly after the World War I think, probably '45, '46.
Roxanne Recinos: And what was the reason that they left Ohio?
Anna Fike: Well they were in the dairy business and, um this is the part maybe we do not want to put in print…(section removed at request of Anna Fike)
Roxanne Recinos: That's a good answer. (laughing)
Anna Fike: It was a bad time at that time.
Roxanne Recinos: So, was transitioning to life in the Valley hard or very different from Ohio?

Anna Fike: Very much so, um, Ohio has seasons they have snow in the winter and they have plenty of rain they don't irrigate at all. It's all from God's hands to them. Lovely country, beautiful country, but they thought that she would be better down here and I guess she was a little so you can't help illnesses and mental illness is a bad thing, but my husband was fourteen when they moved here and he didn't like that they put him in a class to learn Spanish so he refused to go to school and… But he, he was one of the smartest man I ever knew really. Anyway…

Roxanne Recinos: Um, yesterday we came across a name on the, on the, some files from Hidalgo County and there was a name, Arty Rose Fike. Is that someone one in your family?

Anna Fike: No.

Roxanne Recinos: No?

Anna Fike: No.

Roxanne Recinos: Ok.

(Phone ringing)

Anna Fike: Is that yours, mine, or ours?

(Anna Fike answered call.)

(Sanchez and Recinos talking amongst each other.)

Anna Fike: I never heard, what was it Archy Rose?

Roxanne Recinos: Arty Rose.

Anna Fike: Arty Rose?

Roxanne Recinos: Yeah.

Anna Fike: No that is not our family.

Anna Fike: I took sign language a long, long time ago, but I am not understanding your signing (laughing)

Roxanne Recinos: (laughing)

Cynthia Sanchez: (laughing) Sorry the internet was…

Anna Fike: You don't want to get it on tape, do you? Whatever you're doing?

Cynthia Sanchez: Ok Mrs. Fike… where do you hope to see the Fike farm in the far, um, far future?

Anna Fike: What I see?

Cynthia Sanchez: Um, where do hope to see the Fike Farm in the far future?

Anna Fike: I hope that the grandsons will continue, and the grandsons are continuing, but I mean their sons [great-grandsons]. I think Joshua's boys will stay be cause they already want to go farm with daddy. Like I told you one time, first word Hannis said was not mama, papa, but he was with his dad on the tractor, he said tractor! (laughing) We were surprised.

Roxanne Recinos: Um…

Cynthia Sanchez: Oh, he's going to stay in the farm.

Anna Fike: I believe he will yes, uh the granddaughter no. I don't think so unless they marry a farmer. They are few left and uh, Hunter my oldest grandson he says no and my great grandson says no he doesn't want to farm he's going to be a computer expert. (laughing)

Cynthia Sanchez: He will be back. (laughing)

Anna Fike: Probably.

Roxanne Recinos: (laughing)

Cynthia Sanchez: What different changes if any…

(Grandson came in, and Fike is talking to him)

Cynthia Sanchez: What different changes if any could you see the Fike farm doing in the future?

Anna Fike: I see the state building a expressway between me and my granddaughter actually taking out my granddaughter's house and Michael, my son's house, they are wanting to build a great big freeway here which would divide our farm in half our equipment our fuel, everything is here and they were not going to build what they told us at the beginning they are not going to build a way to go on this road over to our other farms or down here either on Mile 18 we are going to have to use 1925 or 107 to move our equipment. It is impossible if that happens this farm will cease to exist. We're fighting.

Cynthia Sanchez: I mean especially… I mean because you guys have been here a long time. I mean I don't…

Anna Fike: Yeah. I don't foresee it will be like the farms north or generation to generation.

Cynthia Sanchez: Um, and I know you said that your son had purchased… you guys purchased more land correct? Congratulations!

Anna Fike: Yeah, we have a junior, not a junior, but a partnership with the three grandsons, Josh, Daniel, and Matthew. They signed the paper work last week.

Cynthia Sanchez: Congratulations!

Anna Fike: Of course, the many farm would help. They can't afford to buy proper equipment. Tractors cost three hundred thousand dollars and some. They don't have that type of money yet, so but they are going to try to stay with it. We'll see.

Cynthia Sanchez: Um, as new generation continues thriving on the Fike Farm are there any concerns that you might have for the future for them? Any concerns that you think they might…?

Anna Fike: Like I say, our friendly neighborhood government try to split our farm and we've already lost a fight over on 1925. The county was going to try to condemn our property so they can build a road from the south to the north up into the game refuge. Turn east, they would run into county dump, which you can't build a road the over dump you know. It will not work.

Cynthia Sanchez: So that is a done.

Anna Fike: That is a done deal. We couldn't stop it, but we still have the acreage on each side of the road. I don't know where people are going to go on that road because like I said it butts right into the wildlife refuge there, and they don't even allow our tractor to get anywhere near it. They threaten… I shouldn't say that. (laughing)

Cynthia Sanchez: Um, and you… how can you prevent the construction of the highway?

Anna Fike: I don't think we can. All we can do is delay it.

Cynthia Sanchez: Delay it? Does the urbanization of Edinburg hurt the farm?

Anna Fike: Not yet.

Cynthia Sanchez: Not yet?

Anna Fike: We're under their extra territorial jurisdiction and they require building permits all this other stuff, but we are not paying city taxes yet. But I suspect sometime in few years we'll annex. There are too many buildings on the stuff coming down here and they see money, so I suspect that will happen.

Cynthia Sanchez: Um, do you believe the farm will expand to plan to crop new plants in the future?

Anna Fike: They're exploring barley right now. I could tell them it's not gonna work, but they… it tends to history repeats. If you don't learn from history, and we tried wheat.

Didn't work. They had said they had some that they developed for this climate… well maybe, but it won't work. You have to have a good market and there was no market. Or if you grew it, you have to have a place to take it. So you can't grow it and ship it in packages… UPS. You be… as it don't work

Cynthia Sanchez: Other than barley, do you see themselves, um…

Anna Fike: There probably will be other crops to come. We have tried flax, and then there was some kind of seed… I think aging loses mind and train of thought… well anyways, they do try other things. They work with the county agent, Brad Cowan, to learn about new things that will be happening, and we also have the AG station in Weslaco who help, or try to help.

Cynthia Sanchez: What… what companies do you work with?

Anna Fike: Just to sell our products. Our fruit is shipped from Edinburg Citrus. Our corn is ugh, bought and marketed by Garcia Grain in Progresso. Our sorghum sometimes will go to feedlots for the cattle places up north, but mostly Garcia's handles farm output.

Cynthia Sanchez: And are these people since you first started?

Anna Fike: They are new. We had an elevator that would take your grain. We had a cotton gin. We don't grow cotton anymore. Um, the citrus, we are facing Paramount which is a huge corporation from California, and they are buying up the little individual groves, and it is possible that we will not have a market if they get big enough to choke us out. They will give you the opportunity to sell.

Cynthia Sanchez: Is there anyway preventing that?

Anna Fike: I don't think so. Not without being in the court forever and they are big enough. We are a family corporation. We wouldn't have the money to fight with someone big like them.

Cynthia Sanchez: Um. do did you ever have a doubt that the Fike Farm will suffer issues due to the economy?

Anna Fike: No. My family are fighters. If they don't know you are hiding behind the log you can get them. (laughing)

Cynthia Sanchez: (laughing) Do you, um, if the… if they do, for example, the property that you couldn't prevent did they have to buy your land?

Anna Fike: Yes. They had to pay us. Yes we got damages, and they bought a small portion. I think it was four acres on either side of the… so that will not prevent us from farming, but we will have to adapt the irrigation lines that are underground. We have to move that over too because you have to irrigate your crops and that will be on our back. I really didn't think they paid us enough to move it. I thought they should of responsible for moving the line if they are going to tear it up but, ugh, apparently it was on their side not ours. Have your kids come back twenty years from now and see if we are still here.

Cynthia Sanchez: Am pretty sure you will you guys will be here plenty years to come.

Anna Fike: I hope so. With Gods help we will. I am going to be 85 my birthday, so I am seeing the end of the world. (laughing)

Cynthia Sanchez: Um…and for if…um…hopefully it doesn't go through with the expressway that they want to build here, but if that comes…um…if that does happen…it's gonna be the same procedure like they have to buy the property…um

Anna Fike: Mhmm.

Cynthia Sanchez: Uh, of course it's gonna be more… in the future it's gonna be more costly to y'all's pocket.

Anna Fike: Yes, absolutely.

Cynthia Sanchez: Do you…do you feel if…um…in the prolonging of the expressway is gonna affect y'all if it does occur within ten years…five years…or?

Anna Fike: That's hard to say. If they take money away from some of the benefits that are being paid and put it in the roads, which they seem to feel is necessary…it might not be five, ten years…but…they don't have the money right now. That's what they tell us in Austin.

Cynthia Sanchez: Which is… which is good for them, I mean for y'all because if they…

Anna Fike: For right now we'll be able to survive right now.

Cynthia Sanchez: Do you plan…um…with this…with them…um…making comments that 'hey we're gonna be building an expressway' are you planning…um…what's…do you plan to you know what, if this does happen we already have…this is why we're purchasing these new lands…are you purchasing new lands in case that happens?

Anna Fike: Well, like we got this new land north that won't be affected by that highway and we're looking if we can find sufficient acreage elsewhere. We would leave the Valley.

Cynthia Sanchez: So now…um…now not only do you have like the expressway and the other road that is affecting the farm, you also have big companies that are trying to take over the Valley and putting down these smaller businesses- family owned businesses?

Anna Fike: Mhmm.

Cynthia Sanchez: Do you see…um…uh now that it's being more… as you've noticed from before, the Valley is growing…where do you see yourself moving more up north?

Anna Fike: It's like we would have to go north because uh you take a drive down…any of the roads and you see houses rather than crops.

Cynthia Sanchez: When back then it was more crops than houses here in the Valley?

Anna Fike: Yes.

Cynthia Sanchez: Did you ever suffer droughts when you were…um…when you and your husband were trying to…

Anna Fike: Yeah if you've lived in the Valley you've gone through drought.

Cynthia Sanchez: Droughts.

Anna Fike: Yeah. (laughs)

Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)

Cynthia Sanchez: Was that one of…

Anna Fike: But we survived.

Cynthia Sanchez: Ok…um…(prolonged pause)…um…what would you like to leave a message for your family…um…during the transcribing? Would you like to leave a message for your future generation? Would you like to leave a message?

Anna Fike: Don't give up.

Cynthia Sanchez: Don't give up. Um…what were one of your greatest memories while farming? Did they have you out…did your husband have you out there picking or…?

Anna Fike: No no. I went to work in town to pay for the farm to…to exist because there's an area. You plant a crop in the spring and you harvest it in late summer. You plant a crop in the summer, you harvest it before it freezes in the spring…and…it's a…it's just uh…the way farming is down here.

Cynthia Sanchez: What would be your greatest memory?

Anna Fike: Of farming?

Cynthia Sanchez: Mhmm…is it while you saw your boys taking over…or…?

Anna Fike: You know, we don't grow cotton anymore, but I loved to see cotton fields when the bolls would open. It looked to me like clouds had come down and got on the plants. It was beautiful. And I liked to see the citrus because you…in the spring, you have the aroma coming off of the groves and it's just wonderful…like a wedding going on down there.

Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)

Anna Fike: And then that you pick the fruit and it's…so pretty. We grow navel oranges…and red grapefruit, yellow grapefruit, and then the early oranges that are the little ones that make the best juice. It's- I like farming.

Cynthia Sanchez: When-when you compare before…um…when you guys first started and you compare your farmland now, everything that you've accomplished…um…what would you say was the hardest point of that? Of you guys rising…uh what would-what was the hardest point?

Anna Fike: Well you're talking about an obstacle to our farming?

Cynthia Sanchez: Exactly, exactly.

Anna Fike: Many of the government regulations…to protect the individual…who I don't know…but they…we're so regulated in using chemicals…to survive because…um…you have to poison insects. I'm sorry, but they will eat everything up and they won't leave anything for people to eat. And don't believe organic farming too well. But they use…not chemicals but probably soap. I know there's a safer soap that you can use on your houseplants. And they do try to control insects. In the beginning, before we had all these chemicals, they would hire crews to go and pick the worms off the corn or the vegetables that were growing and kill them that way. Very expensive now, but then they paid twenty-five cents an hour or something. The people that didn't have anything in Mexico and would come across and children did work too. I pulled cotton. I tried to pick cotton but twenty-five scents a sack was not enough to…

Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)

Anna Fike: … interest me for very long (laughs)…but uh…I…I wouldn't change my life…at all.

Cynthia Sanchez: Now-now your boys took over the farm, and then their generation- I mean them- that must make you a very proud grandma, mother…you know, **G**randma.

Anna Fike: You betcha.

Cynthia Sanchez: To see your…

Anna Fike: I'm very proud of them. I have a grandson that has his two degrees…and he was offered three jobs when he graduated from A&M and he said "I'm gonna farm" and came home. I have a grandson that uh…went to technical school. He can build anything. He can weld anything. He's…he's got that knowledge, you know…and they offered him a job, it paid fifteen dollars an hour and this was way back…to go to Dallas, and he told them no and he stayed. They love the farm.

Cynthia Sanchez: And…um…importantly, they still got their education and still focused on…

Anna Fike: I call it insurance.

Cynthia Sanchez: (laughs)

Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)

Anna Fike: (laughing) If everything goes south they probably can go get a job somewhere.

Cynthia Sanchez: Um, are any of your granddaughters or…um…interested or…um…

Anna Fike: My granddaughter has a master's degree in dietetics and diabetes, and she's working for the college out there as a professor. And she- no she's not farming, except her garden…and she has a beautiful garden. Raises her own greens, and tomatoes and stuff. There's right over there.
Cynthia Sanchez: So she does her farming at her house?
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: Ohhh nice, nice…ok…she just doesn't see it doing it full time but…
Anna Fike: Yeah.
Cynthia Sanchez: At least- at least she's eating healthy at her house.
Anna Fike: You bet.
Cynthia Sanchez: Oh that's-
Anna Fike: If you go over there get set to eat some strange things. (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: We had sorghum grain one time and she ground it to make a flour out of it…uhh… it was different.
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: Oh nice. Now did she learn that from here or…?
Anna Fike: Well we knew about it. I mean that's-that was an Indian staple, you know making grain into a meal so they could make…whatever they made…bread… something else. Her husband is a doc-has a doctorate in pharmacy, so he works for Walgreens so…together they're making a good living
Cynthia Sanchez: That's good.
Anna Fike: But they wanted to come back here…so I gave them- my husband and I gave them ten acres to build their house.
Cynthia Sanchez: That is nice…um…(unintelligible noise)…any…um...Well those are my-my uhh…questions that I have…anything else Roxanne?
Roxanne Recinos: Um…just a little bit. Before Ohio, your family had come from New York, right? The Fike family…before Ohio?
Anna Fike: Well they immigrated from…Alsace-Lorraine-
Roxanne Recinos: (repeats) Alsace.
Anna Fike: In Europe…which was French one year and German the next, and I think Grandfather Michael got tired of being German one year and then French the next and also…there was…I think…this is my- just my…from reading what little bit I have…I think that his son, Steven, was killed in a clash between the German and French and he decided to come where we weren't fighting…and he came to Ohio and bought a farm.
Roxanne Recinos: Hmm.
Cynthia Sanchez: And why Ohio? Do you know? Do you-
Anna Fike: It's a good country up there.
Cynthia Sanchez: Really? Oh ok.
Anna Fike: Beautiful country and the ground is fertile and you have annual rainfall that you don't have to worry about…you know, uh getting water out of the lake…a hundred miles up the stream. I think there were German communities there also already that-that attracted him to come there. Again that's not in history that's just from being around the old people up there when we would go and visit…that you pick up those ideas. I wouldn't want to swear to it in court. (laughs)

Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: (laughing) But you know, when you hear, uh, about somebody leaving a home that they had for years…you try to find reasons.
Cynthia Sanchez: Yeah.
Anna Fike: And to me that makes sense. If my son got killed in a skirmish between German and French, I'd leave too…to protect my children. I really would. (long pause) And that may not be so but anyway. It's a…what do they call it…a theory.
Roxanne Recinos: Yeah. (laughs)
Anna Fike: (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: Soun-It sounds…I mean…you…um…to believe it, you know…
Roxanne Recinos: Yeah…did you have any stories or did you hear any stories from…I guess Alsace-Lorraine or anything? Or-or I guess not that far back…but do you have any fond stories from Ohio…or?
Anna Fike: Um…we used to go up there every two years. My husband wanted to go what he called "home"-
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: -and uhh…to me it wa-what was very interesting there's a-a religious group up there called the Amish.
Roxanne Recinos: Uh huh.
Anna Fike: Now they-they would be a good story if y'all were-
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: - (laughs) were living up there. They-they're totally farmers.
Roxanne Recinos: Mhmm.
Anna Fike: And woodworkers. And uh…we-we would go and visit the people he knew when he was younger…you know…it-they were Amish…and actually we went to Ohio and stayed a month with an Amish family.
Roxanne Recinos: Wow.
Anna Fike: That was an experience. (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs) I bet.
Anna Fike: (laughing) Yeah.
Cynthia Sanchez: Do you have pictures? (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: No I don't…uh…they're-they're very uh…
Cynthia Sanchez: No.
Anna Fike: They don't have radios…except uh…secretly.
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: The lady we stayed with listened to Billy Graham. (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: And I thought oooohh (laughs) I didn't tell on her. (laughs).
Cynthia Sanchez: (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: But they're-they're a good people…and…I think Willard really would have gone back. We were offered an opportunity when the old home place, the picture over there on the wall, came up. They would've given it to Willard. That-the old two aunts that owned it…if he would've come back, but we were established here and he-he told them "I just…can't do it" (long pause). I wouldn't have wanted to go either.
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)

Anna Fike: (laughs) My life has been here since I was four years old…so…I wasn't ready to go anywhere. (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: Yeah…but you gotta be really…ready to change 'cause they can change quickly (long pause). You've got white flies again because of the cotton, people planting cotton this year because the market was (???) and they use insecticides that a farmer wouldn't use to spray in these things fly over your house and over the cotton fields. And what they do is, they turn the white part loose that gets on what…whatever you're trying to grow, especially garden…vegetable type things. We used to grow carrots. We had onions, cabbage, tomatoes. We don't do any vegetable for (???) anymore.
Cynthia Sanchez: Is it because um…it's harder…um…
Anna Fike: Yeah, that and the problems with, uh, keeping records…you know…for the TDA, The Department of Agriculture. They require us to keep chemical records for twenty-five years.
Roxanne Recinos: Wow.
Anna Fike: It's a lot. They don't ever tell us. And I bet two-thirds of them wouldn't know a farm or a bug if they came in contact with it.
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Anna Fike: You know? (laughs). But that's life. (long pause). Am I talking too much? Sometimes I-
Cynthia Sanchez: No, no, no.
Roxanne Recinos: No, it's perfect. (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: Yeah. (laughs)
Anna Fike: (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: Before settling here in Edinburg, you guys had umm…a farm in Donna I believe? Was that right? I think-
Anna Fike: What? Where did we have a farm?
Roxanne Recinos: Did you have property in Donna? I think…um
Anna Fike: My, uh, father-in-law did.
Roxanne Recinos: (repeats) Father-in-law, ok.
Anna Fike: He-he only had ten acres of trees, citrus trees…uh…and we moved- after they got sick, both of them, we moved them up to this house on an old hill…until…we took care of them until they passed.
Cynthia Sanchez: And you guys…they sold that? They sold it?
Anna Fike: They sold it to a Japanese man…Happy Kiriyama (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: (laughs) Is-did…um…
Anna Fike: I think he still owns it. I haven't been back down to the place since…it's not ours and nobody lives there that we know.
Cynthia Sanchez: Oh ok. (Long pause)
Anna Fike: Yeah, Donna…I'm glad we moved to Edinburg. (laughs)
Roxanne Recinos: (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: Yeah.
Anna Fike: Welcome to Edinburg. (laughs)
Cynthia Sanchez: Did you guys chose this land because um…you got a good deal or was it more fertile, more-

Anna Fike: No, no. We didn't have- when we got married, uh, I had seventy-five dollars in war bonds, and he had a little. He had made some on the cotton crop up there on the east highway, so…this was offered to us by a man who admired my husband. He said, 'I will finance the farm…you-you pay me what you can when you can,' and then started with this ten acres right here. And then Judge Baird got to know Willard, and he owned the ten acres over here and, uh, he thought he was a good man and a hard worker and so he gave us the same deal. Pay me what you can, little bit, you-you do what you can do, I'll work with you. So now we've got twenty acres.

Roxanne Recinos: Hmm.

Anna Fike: And then a man named…used to be mayor of Edinburg, Joe Davis, got to visiting and working with Willard and he had seven hundred acres in this area…all of these farms here and, uh…same deal. He said if you want it, we'll work out a deal and deal we did. The next piece was this piece right in front…Herb Folmar, neighbor down here, wanted to get out of farming…same, same. I mean we-we…it's a blessing. I mean most people have to pay whatever, whatever…you know, it's this much and y-you better make it or I'm going to take it back and so it- in the end- but all of the people that we worked with were good people…good, good people. 'Cause there were times when you didn't have…hardly enough to…feed the kids, you know, and you couldn't make the payment and they all worked with us.

Roxanne Recinos: Wow.

Anna Fike: Now that's God's work, it's got to be because that's not…business as usual.

Roxanne Recinos: Mhmm.

Cynthia Sanchez: And also um…that they knew your husband that- was the type of man that he was because like…not anybody just…like you say…oh uh you know, I have this land and-

Anna Fike: Oh, that reminds me…uh…tell Roseann that George Carpenter said that he would be delighted to talk about Willard to her…uh…she called…yesterday, the day before yesterday and wanted to talk to somebody that knew him when he was working as president. He-he was president of the board of the water district, and she thought it ought to be mentioned in the family history.

Cynthia Sanchez: Oh ok…and what's his name again?

Anna Fike: George Carpenter.

Cynthia Sanchez: Ok.

Anna Fike: And I can give you the number or whatever…'cause he said he would be delighted to talk to you guys.

Cynthia Sanchez: Oh, ok um…

Anna Fike: Whomever-

Roxanne Recinos: I can write it down.

Anna Fike: He's a honeybun. You will enjoy talking to him…whoever talks and gets it.

Interviewee: Sam Fike
Interviewers: Ulysses Garcia and Jose Montoya
Location: Fike Farm office, 1601 N. Sharp Road, Edinburg, Texas
Date: November 3, 2017, 2:30 pm

This is an oral history interview with Sam Fike on wildlife.

Ulysses Garcia: Hello my name is Ulysses Garcia and I'll be interviewing Sam Fike.
Sam Fike: Sam Fike.
Ulysses Garcia: Ok. Uh, have you or your family members have seen an ocelot, Jaguarondi, or jaguar in the area or maybe your parents?
Sam Fike: No, no.
Ulysses Garcia: Have you heard from any friends?
Sam Fike: Now, what is a jaguar? What is a jaguar? What are you talking about a jaguar?
Ulysses Garcia: It's like a large striped cat.
Sam Fike: Not a panther?
Ulysses Garcia: Not a panther.
Jose Montoya: They come here, RGV.
Sam Fike: Back in the '80's I heard a panther right out here, the baby crying That's a panther walking by ya.
Ulysses Garcia: Ok, have you seen any reptiles like rattlesnake, horned lizards, or tortoises in the area?
Sam Fike: In my lifetime, (laughs) yeah I've seen all of them not… not many around here.
Ulysses Garcia: Not recently?
Sam Fike: No there's too many people for rattlesnakes.
Ulysses Garcia: How many like about ten years ago? Maybe?
Sam Fike: Yeah.
Ulysses Garcia: Were they more abundant?
Sam Fike: Oh yeah, before all the colonials moved in.
Jose Montoya: You mind jumping on one real quick have ya'll had any bad experiences like with rattlesnake or stories?
Sam Fike: When my dad had a guy hoeing the cotton field, there was like an eight or six- foot rattlesnake, and he didn't have nothing but a machete, so he took the machete and cut a sunflower and beat that snake with a sunflower. He was a handy old man. (laughs)
Ulysses Garcia: (laughs)
Jose Montoya: Those are good stories to put in.
Ulysses Garcia: Ok thanks.
Ulysses Garcia: Uh, do you guys have any problems with the local wildlife damaging crops?

Sam Fike: Just our little red wing, ring friends. Yeah, the little black bird with a red dot on them. They destroy our crops.
Ulysses Garcia: Do you have problems with feral hogs or cotton rats?
Sam Fike: Nope they're… again, too many people around here. You can't get a hold of nothing around here. (laughs)
Jose Montoya: You were just mentioning earlier about the, which worm was it that eats the grass?
Sam Fike: Oh the army worms, army worms came in a couple weeks ago and ate my grass.
Ulysses Garcia: Ok, I've noticed peacocks on the farm. Is 'cause you guys have a peacock farm or do you guys keep them for…
Sam Fike: Just for looks. Mom likes them. We can't do nothing to 'em.
Sam Fike: Probly 30 or 40 of 'em. I mean, we have ate them before. They taste like pheasant.
Ulysses Garcia: Oh ok.
Sam Fike: (laughs)
Ulysses Garcia: Do you guys uhh harvest pecans? Because I saw pecan trees.
Sam Fike: We pick them up, but we usually eat them for ourselves. We didn't have any on our crop this year.
Ulysses Garcia: Uhh, do you guys use native plants as home remedies or use them in dishes?
Sam Fike: I do. My brothers don't, but I do.
Ulysses Garcia: Do you have any names?
Sam Fike: I use it on the skin. I had a burn one time… burned it down to my bone, put that aloe vera on there. The next morning grew skin on it.
Ulysses Garcia: Ok remedy.
Sam Fike: Yeah.
Jose Montoya: Yeah, aloe vera is good for all medical.
Ulysses Garcia: Uhh, do you like hunting?
Sam Fike: Yup.
Ulysses Garcia: What do you guys usually hunt?
Sam Fike: Deer, whatever is there?
Ulysses Garcia: In this area? Edinburg area?
Sam Fike: The Rio Grande Valley.
Ulysses Garcia: Is there like an abundance of deer?
Sam Fike: Not where I'm at. (laughs)
Sam Fike: Not on the farm.
Sam Fike: Yeah there's nothing around here. (laughs) When there's hogs we tell the neighbors to come and get them. It's over with.
Ulysses Garcia: When you guys are hunting what other wildlife have you seen or recognize? Like let's say javalinas?
Sam Fike: Javalinas, yeah. I don't shoot them because I don't want to clean them.
Jose Montoya: Another question to jump on this one…do y'all get an abundance of the ring neck doves, right?
Sam Fike: Oh yeah, there's an abundance here.
Jose Montoya: Have y'all seen those I know they aren't a native species their an exotics, have y'all seen… was there a time when y'all didn't see any of them and

all of sudden y'all started seeing an abundance of them or…?
Sam Fike: This year was kinda strange there weren't hardly any then all of a sudden they moved in.
Jose Montoya: Because that's an exotic species.
Sam Fike: Ten years ago there wasn't any around down here.
Ulysses Garcia: It's an invasive species.
Sam Fike: But it ain't like the game warden said.
Jose Montoya: Hey, I'm going for game warden.
Sam Fike: (laughs) All right, remember when you see me in a boat out their you got to see me go.
Jose Montoya: I've gotten away with so much stuff I can't even be mean to people. (laughs)
Ulysses Garcia: Ok, uhh the deer meat how do you guys prepare that? As in dish or barbe cue?
Sam Fike: Make it into sausage or hamburger meat.
Ulysses Garcia: Ok thank you.

I (Jose Montoya) interviewed Mr. Sam Fike after he was interviewed by Ulysses. Questions were asked regarding their farming technique and how they maintenance the field, but also general history of the farm, the crops they harvest and the importance of irrigation. Sam gave some great feedback on how they care for the farm but also gave us a very good inside perspective of the daily life on the farm. We were also joined by Daniel Fike for a short while and he took the liberty of chiming in and also clarifying some info as well as adding some great information himself.

Jose Montoya: Mine is pretty much on agriculture
Sam Fike: I have nothing to say to you…
(both Sam and Daniel laugh jokingly, Daniel then walks out)
Jose Montoya: ok uhm, biggest question, my topic is over the field management. How do y'all manage to keep your land fertile? Do yall fertilize or crop rotation?
Sam Fike: Yeah, we will put cow manure down and this time of the year and in the regular crop we will put N32 down.
Jose Montoya: Is that yearly or do y'all do that bi-yearly?
Sam Fike: The cow manure is every three years and then the fertilizer is every year.
Jose Montoya: What about…
Sam Fike: It's straight nitrogen that's what it is, N32.
Jose Montoya: On each field do y'all plant, because y'all main thing is sorghum and corn right? Those are y'alls main two?
Sam Fike: That's our two main crops.
Jose Montoya: Um, do y'all plant, do y'all also have certain field that y'all do only corn and only sorghum, or do y'all manage to rotate them?
(at this point Daniel comes back into the office to join us on his free time)
Sam Fike: We will rotate them.
Jose Montoya: Is that to keep the land fertile or is that just what y'all like to do?
Sam Fike: Well, we really don't have much else to grow really well for the prices you know.

Jose Montoya: I also remember y'all speaking about how y'all used to do potatoes right? Back in the day, that y'all used to do potatoes?
Sam Fike: I never did.
Jose Montoya: Did y'all ever do potatoes here?
Daniel Fike: Not when I was around, that may have been further back then even then him.
Jose Montoya: Because I know they said that in the very beginning they did some sort of potatoes but that with the regulations y'all kind of stepped away from it.
Daniel Fike: We did vegetables.
Sam Fike: We did vegetables.
Jose Montoya: Oh ok, vegetables.
Daniel Fike: And then the regulations got too much for that.
Jose Montoya: Do yall know about more or less what time frame or what year it was when y'all stopped?
Sam Fike: In the 90s.
Jose Montoya: And it was basically just 'cause regulations just got too high? It was a liability?
Sam Fike: Yeah, if a coyotes goes out and poops in your field they got to go out and block out and area and you cant harvest that. But they don't mention nothin' about all the birds that fly over and crap on your vegetables.
Jose Montoya: So it was a liability to y'all and y'all could also have a loss?
Sam FIke: So then nobody could harvest anything if they went by that goofy rule they have. (Sam chuckles)
Jose Montoya: Do y'all remember what year it was y'all got irrigation here?
Sam Fike: I don't, it was before my time. My dad was on the board and, uh it was after the dams were built that they started to do the… ehh, they made have had canals for that too. I don't know.
Jose Montoya: Oh, ok so it was way before you. You wouldn't happen to know of if there's been a huge in production in y'alls crops if you compare before irrigation to after irrigation would you?
Sam Fike: Yeah I can tell you, yeah, if you dry land you don't make it, and if you have irrigation you do make it. Until a natural disaster comes blows it all down or whatever you know?
Jose Montoya: Did the bringing in of irrigation change a lot of what they decided to start growing here?
Sam Fike: Oh yeah, there's a lot of things you can't grow on dry land.
Jose Montoya: So what was the main focus before irrigation more or less? What crops?
Sam Fike: Grain.
Jose Montoya: Just grain?
Sam Fike: Sorghum, grain sorghum.
Jose Montoya: So after that, after the introduction of irrigation is when y'all brought in the orchards?
Sam Fike: Yeah.
Jose Montoya: Y'all brought in corn and everything else?
Daniel Fike: No we didn't necessarily do that, the water district was set up way before we were here I think.
Sam Fike: Yeah, probably in the 1920s, I really don't know.
Daniel Fike: Because when grandpa got down here there was already irrigation.
Sam Fike: Yeah.

Daniel Fike: They wouldn't have had citrus here if there wasn't irrigation.

Jose Montoya: Also um, what farm equipment do y'all use right now? I know you said y'all own everything right? Y'all own all y'all's tractors?

Sam Fike: Us and the bank own them. (all laugh) Mainly the bank.

Jose Montoya: Do you mind listing some of y'all's main equipment?

Sam Fike: John Deere and Case IH.

Jose Montoya: Is there a reason why yall don't use any other models or brands?

Sam Fike: John Deere has one of the best air conditioner. When it gets to 110 outside all the other ones don't work. That's a big factor for me to sit in a tractor all day long and sweat and pay that much for a junk tractor. Messy Ferguson they can't put no, we got a brand new messy ferguson, tried it their air conditioner went out the first day. Case can't even compare to John Deere. John Deere just cools down so much better, but power wise they are about the same.

Jose Montoya: Do yall have any crazy stories of anything happening with any equipment? Any accidents?

Sam Fike: Daniel's got a good story, tell'em when you sunk the grain cart (Daniel laughs) that one's a good story.

Daniel Fike: Yeah, I was in the field and filled up my grain cart too much and it sank probably 5 feet, 6 feet in the ground.

Sam Fike: The tire as big as you and you can see it down at your boots and we got it out.

Daniel Fike: We unloaded it with the front end of a back hoe we went under the auger and- dumped out five yards in and went dumped it on a truck and come back. We unloaded 50 thousand pounds like that.

Jose Montoya: The beginning of last year I got

(Daniel brings out a picture of the Grain Cart)

Sam Fike: Oh you got that picture.

Daniel Fike: Well, it's a picture of the…

Sam Fike: Oh, of the size of the grain cart.

Daniel Fike: That tire is this tall. (brings his hand up to his chest)

Jose Montoya: Do you mind if I take a picture of it?

Daniel Fike: Yeah, you can take a picture of that. But that was under the ground, and I got a picture of it under the ground.

(customer steps into the office)

Sam Fike: Uh oh, you got to go load corn. How you doing?

Customer: Pretty good… yall?

Sam Fike: Alright, I think. Daniel will take care of you. I'm in an interview right now.

Customer: Oh, ok. (Sam laughs)

Daniel Fike: How many you need?

Customer: Just one pallet.

Daniel Fike: Oh one pallet. Ok. I'll find you a picture of that in a minute.

Jose Montoya: Who is usually the one that when equipment goes out, who do y'all go to for maintenance? I know most of y'all work on it, but who's the one that you know…?

Sam Fike: Well, Josh, Josh is the one that took diesel mechanics. Then when he can't figure it out we get this old man that was here, Uh Moon Mullens.

Jose Montoya: What was his name?

Sam Fike: Moon Mullens.

Jose Montoya: And the other gentleman was Josh?

Sam Fike: Josh Fike.

Jose Montoya: Oh ok, so those are the two main ones that work on it.
Sam Fike: Yeah, Moon's in his 60s and he knows just about anything on the mechanic part of it.
Jose Montoya: Have y'all had any years that yall have just had a terrible production?
Sam Fike: Oh yeah.

Jose Montoya: What were those due to?
Sam Fike: Oh, just disasters you know… hail storms, uh you name it… wind storms, flooding, it's all a gamble.
Jose Montoya: Man what was I going to say? I just lost it right now.
Sam Fike: (laughs) Calm down. (laughs)
Jose Montoya: Hey, I'm trying to get it done quick because I know you want to get going.
Sam Fike: Oh no, it's alright. It don't get dark till 7:30, 8:00. I'm not going hunting with that boy down there anyways. They were gonna take him huntin'.
Jose Montoya: And um. Let's see, I just lost it too. What did I just ask right now?
Sam Fike: Crops, weather disaster.
Jose Montoya: Oh yeah, here we go. So y'all have awards in your sorghum, right?
Sam Fike: Yeah.
Jose Montoya: Um, what years was that in? Has it been an on and off thing?
Sam Fike: Well there's 2014, '15 whenever old Danny Gonzalez got in with Montano he entered us into those contests and we started winnin'.
Jose Montoya: Is it just…
Sam Fike: Well I don't know… yeah, we've won in sorghum and then, uh yeah, that's right. It's the one in sorghum we win in. And corn sometimes… it's hard to beat them guys that do 500 bushels. We can't do that down here.
Jose Montoya: And is there something that y'all do that makes y'alls' sorghum so much better then everybody elses? Or is it just the land here that just produces a great…
Sam Fike: Well, we built the land up. We got some pieces of ground that they said, "Oh you can't grow nothing on it because it is too salty," and we get ahold of it and you just start working it, fertilizing it and throw the cow manure on there, and all of a sudden it starts making good. Lots of sulfur.
Jose Montoya: That brings up another one of my questions, I know at one point y'all leveled out a big section of y'alls' property. Was that to just pretty much just open up more area to grow and to start working it?
Sam Fike: Well, you know if I get a six-inch rain I used to have, I put six-inch borders around 'em. We level our ground flat cross a 40, a 40 is 1330 feet. So from one end to another it's the same. It's flat so if you get a six-inch rain, you can hold six inches of water that won't flood on somebody else. And that just takes that salt down when you get a good rain like that. But if you have crops in there you might have problems.
Jose Montoya: So pretty much it is just to keep your water instead of losing it as run off?
Sam Fike: You see with the hills, if you get a six-inch rain, tomorrow the top of the hill is dry but down at the bottom it drowned all your crops off.
Jose Montoya: How often do y'all irrigate?
Sam Fike: On the citrus, when it's up over a hundred, it is every two weeks. You got to water it every two weeks. Because by the time you get done watering the ground is dry already in 100 degree weather. On the crops during the summer it's about every three weeks, during the growing time. When we are making a head on the sorghum, sorghum it is just one time, but on the corn it'll run into like three times sometimes.

Jose Montoya: My last question, is there anything that yall do that you would say is different then what anybody else in this areas does when it comes to the way yall harvest or prepare your crops or fertilize or anything like that?

Sam Fike: I guess we do it different then a lot of people. A lot of people don't put the fertilizer that we do, we have always learned back in the 80s that the… uhh what do you call them guys… the county ag guy he comes out and he will always come out and tell us that "we got to grow more on less because you are getting less property to grow on with all the colonials coming in." So that's what we keep doing every year, trying to make more on less and less.

Jose Montoya: So you are just trying to push everything together trying to get everything as tight as possible?

Sam Fike: Yeah.

Jose Montoya: Last question, I promise you.

Sam Fike: Oh that's alright,

Jose Montoya: Man, I just lost it again.

Sam Fike: (laughs)

Sam Fike: And on our irrigated ground that we own, we've put pipelines in, 15-inch pipelines and then we have gates and we just go out there and open the gates. Turn the valve on open the gate and let a great big ol pan, like 10 acres of water at one time. Usually runs through, if its slick in about 6 or 8 hours but when it's been plowed take like 12 hours. But that's right in line with the water district.

Jose Montoya: Ok, I remember now, this is the last question and one of the most important ones. Y'alls' grain and yalls corn and most of yalls produce are yall contracted with somebody that y'all send it off to? I know y'all sell your corn here.

Sam Fike: The grain and corn we do.

Jose Montoya: Who do y'all sell to?

Sam Fike: Garcia Grain down in Progresso.

Jose Montoya: And what about your…

Sam Fike: But the price has to be right before we will do a contract with them.

Jose Montoya: And what about your citrus?

Sam Fike: Citrus all goes into the citrus association here in Edinburg.

Jose Montoya: And do y'all ever hold off on those?

Sam Fike: No, we can't. We are in an association, it is like a co-op. The guys that harvest first get the same amount of money as the guys that harvest last. The only way you make more money on this is on how much tonnage you make, so you have to keep fertilizing and keep your groves good and fruit clean and pretty.

Jose Montoya: So the only one you will hold onto then is the grain because of course that is the only one that can fluctuate in price and that they could offer you more on?

Sam Fike: That is correct.

Interviewee: George Adam Fike, Jr.
Interviewers: Eric Acosta, Alvino Flores, and Juan Matta
Location: 30344 Kamien Road, Edinburg, Texas
Date: Tuesday, November 7, 2017, 5:50 pm

Eric Acosta: My name is Eric Acosta. I am a journalism major. With me we have…
Alvino Flores: Alvino Flores, Masters, History major.
Juan Matta: Juan Matta, Anthropology.
Eric Acosta: Alright, and with us we also have our interviewees.
George Adam Fike: George Adam Fike Jr.
Eric Acosta: And for the record, we are interviewing the Fike family for their history. First and foremost is there anything you'd like to start by saying about us, about your family's history? Where they came from? It's kind of a … question. As far as stories you've heard told to you.
George Adam Fike: Well, my grandpa grew up in Ohio, and moved down here here to the valley and tried to grow, well started growing citrus and vegetables and grow crops. And uh, we just started taking over from there. I've gone off on my own with my wife and started farming in McCook. Uh, dry land farming.
Eric Acosta: Alright, as far as coming down from Ohio… you said your grandfather came all the way from Ohio?
George Adam Fike: Yes.
Eric Acosta: Uh, what brought him down here to the Valley?
George Adam Fike: Well, Mr. Bensen was spreading rumors in Ohio area. Well this is what I've heard that uh, you can grow anything down here in the Valley and that is what they wanted to take advantage of.
Eric Acosta: Right.
George Adam Fike: So…
Eric Acosta: Uh, is it, uh, what I've heard… these are just rumors of course, but uh, one of the reasons they call it the "Magic Valley" was because you can pretty much grow down anything. Or that is where a lot of the "Magic Valley", you know, name comes from.
George Adam Fike: Yep.
Eric Acosta: And uh, as far as farming… I'm guessing that it is not true that you can pretty much grow anything down here?
George Adam Fike: Ah, if the weather cooperates you can. (laughing) You can grow just about anything.
Eric Acosta: Alright.
George Adam Fike: With exceptions.
Eric Acosta: What about the soil? I mean I've kinda heard, I mean, plainly being a native of the Valley, you kind of see a lot of the brushland is very harsh… is very prickly. So like, does that have anything to do with the soil, or is that more of a weather thing?
George Adam Fike: I think it's just the type of brush that is scattered through here with that… animals, you know.

Eric Acosta: Alright. Good to know.
George Adam Fike: Uh, they eat one type of brush somewhere and they wonder around and plant it somewhere else.
Eric Acosta: Alright. Good to know.
George Adam Fike: The soil is just, I mean, there is every kind of soil you can think of down here in the Valley. I have fields that have four or five different types of soils in them, you know, in the same field.
Eric Acosta: Really and uh, types of soils, I mean, like for somebody who doesn't know anything or much about soils, I mean, what are we talking about here, as far as?
George Adam Fike: Sand, red sand, there's different names for them. You can pick a certain field and take the names of them like Herbonville loam, fine sandy loam, and there is black buck shot ground.
Eric Acosta: Alright. And I'm guessing certain soils are just better for growing than other soils?
George Adam Fike: Yes.
Eric Acosta: Some may be tougher than others.
George Adam Fike: Yeah. Depending on the rainfall and weather climate.
Eric Acosta: And your, uh, growing practices as far as what do you guys normally grow? Is it like one crop like almost like a year round basis or is it like, you know, mixing it up?
George Adam Fike: Are you talking about my farm or my family's farm?
Eric Acosta: Uh, I guess both. Personally.
George Adam Fike: Uh, well I grew up in my family's farm it was all, uh, 100 percent irrigated and we grew mostly corn. We used to grow some cotton. We got away from that. And then uh, corn and milo. We grew a lot of vegetables for a long time. And then we got away from that with the labor force being the way that it is. It's hard to get labor.
Eric Acosta: Right.
George Adam Fike: Then I married my wife and moved to McCook, and started farming dryland with her and her family. We are actually on our own, but her dad helped me get started out here.
Eric Acosta: Good to know.
George Adam Fike: I depend 100 percent on the rainfall to grow my crops.
Eric Acosta: Oh I see. So obviously, I guess, being out here it is very hard to get like irrigation.
George Adam Fike: There is no irrigation out here. (laughing)
Eric Acosta: Really. So what I'm…
George Adam Fike: South of here a little ways there is, but I don't farm any of that land.
Eric Acosta: Pretty much the way I'm guessing is pretty much the rain…
George Adam Fike: Mercy of Mother Nature. Yes.
Eric Acosta: Wow. That's kind of crazy.
George Adam Fike: Yeah.
Eric Acosta: How do you normally see that? Obviously, I'm guessing irrigation has a bigger advantages because the readiness of the water.
George Adam Fike: Yes.
Eric Acosta: Do you still do very well with Mother Nature's help?

George Adam Fike: Not every year. (laughs)

George Adam Fike: But yes, when we have water we do okay.

Eric Acosta: Speaking in terms of the family,what else have you… I'm guessing you grew up in a farming family. Is it something that you've always wanted to do or is it something you fell into or…?

George Adam Fike: I've always wanted to farm. I've always wanted to do something with agriculture.

Eric Acosta: Good to go.

George Adam Fike: Right before I got married I worked for the …… for a year. Harvesting vegetables. It was Pic Sweet in Monte Alto.

Eric Acosta: Yeah, I know where it is. Alright. Good to go. I was gonna ask is that the because I have noticed some of the family has been drifting away that they didn't really want to do that. You… I'm pretty sure that you grew up, you… Now, at what age did you start with agriculture?

George Adam Fike: When I was old enough to walk. (laughing)

Eric Acosta: Really?

George Adam Fike: Yes. We were always with Dad and uncles just doing something on the farm.

Eric Acosta: Good to know. As far as the rest of the family, is it like frowned upon or is it something like, hey, you know, that you guys love? We see it like…

George Adam Fike: We love to do it, and that's just how it is. Most of my family, my brothers and my cousins are all involved in the farm. I have one cousin, my cousin Rachael, she actually teaches at UTRGV. Out of our generation that's pretty much the only one who is not involved in farming. And she's involved. She lives on the farm there. She just doesn't do the everyday chores like my brothers and cousins do.

Eric Acosta: I definitely understand that. What about history? What made your family pretty much stay here in the Valley? Like I'm talking about pretty sure once they came from Ohio, coming to the Valley, I'm pretty sure around that time, it was very, very harsh to start off on their own farm. What actually kept them going? To be like, 'hey we are here, might as well stay here'?

George Adam Fike: I couldn't tell you that. For my grandpa, it probably was that he married my grandma when he got down here. (laughing) That probably had a lot to do with it. Nah, his dad stayed down here and he had a little diary operation, but my grandpa did not want to have anything to do with dairy so he started farming.

Eric Acosta: Alright. Good to know. So it was pretty much ranching and farming. But it was pretty much…moved away from that?

George Adam Fike: Yes. Yeah. My grandpa's generation on down its been all mostly farming. I think they had, when my dad and uncles were young, they had a few hogs and stuff like that but they didn't stay around a long time, I don't think.

Eric Acosta: Right right.

George Adam Fike: They were more grow crop and citrus.

Eric Acosta: Alright. Good to know. What about, I guess the business side of the farm ing? I know sometimes especially being down here in the Valley you know it's farm as far as the eye can see. I guess talking about it in a business sense is it pretty much competition with other farms or do you guys do not really

have as much competition as far as, you know, how can I say this guy is producing the same type of crops I am. Do you understand what I mean? Is it…

George Adam Fike: Yeah.

Eric Acosta: Or is it pretty much general understanding like I do my own business, I don't really bother with them, type of deal.

George Adam Fike: Most of it everyone keeps to themselves. You produce as much as you can and take it to the elevators or markets and try to get as much as you can for it. It's all depending on the market price and what is driving the market at that time.

Juan Matta: Can I piggyback a question?

Eric Acosta: Yeah, go ahead.

Juan Matta: Like during the winter, we know like up north they have really severe tough winters…

George Adam Fike: Yeah.

Juan Matta: A lot of snow, a lot of cold, probably would kill the majority of crops. Now during that time down here, we do get some cold, but nowhere near like what we get up north…

George Adam Fike: Yeah.

Juan Matta: Do you guys tend to produce more stuff during the… like from November to March? Or is it more spring to summer?

George Adam Fike: We do grow fall crops here in the Valley. Dry land farm or where I farm, we don't try to grow fall crops because we use all our moisture for the spring. The crops take the moisture out of the soil and we do not get enough rainfall to grow two crops. Irrigated land, they can grow, they can double crop, but most, ahh, majority of the crops are grown from late January, and harvested June and July time.

Eric Acosta: You said that your family has their own farm and you started your own farm. Size difference… how big is their farm compared to yours?

George Adam Fike: They're farming around 1,500 acres, I think. I'm pretty sure that's what it is, and I farm around 6,000 acres. But they probably work just as hard as I do because it's a lot more labor intensive on irrigation and manual labor. All my stuff is done with a tractor.

Eric Acosta: Ahh, let me see what else. So sticking around in the Valley, only because it is more of a Valley-oriented interview, ahh, any chance like ahh for, like kinda expanding later on? You know adding more land if you're able to? Or do you just want to stay with the land you have, especially because you are pretty much work on the dry farming?

George Adam Fike: If I can handle it, I'll take more, but right now I'm pretty much maxed out in what I can handle with the 6,000 acres. But there's always, I'm always trying to grow. If you are not trying to improve and move up then you shouldn't be doing what you are doing. That's how I see it.

Eric Acosta: Ahh, what about the future of farming? I mean, where you see yourself? I understand you're pretty much involved. Do you have other workers that come and help especially or maybe family that you want to get them involved as well?

George Adam Fike: I have my own farm and I have my own workers that work for me. I have two employees who work full-time and a couple of part-time guys, seasonal guys that drive tractors and do whatever.

Eric Acosta: At this time do you want to ask any questions…

Alvino Flores: Yeah. As far as methods when your, your grandpa and grandma came down, how did they start as far as plowing the fields?

George Adam Fike: Well, I wasn't around back then, but I would imagine conventional tillage, plowing, and discing, and seeding like that.

Alvino Flores: At that point… I would imagine they would be using like animals and ox to help them?

George Adam Fike: If you ask my grandpa he would have told you yes. (laughing) I think they bought a tractor pretty early when they were available and, uhh started like that.

Alvino Flores: You do hire laborers outside of the family?

George Adam Fike: I do. Yes. On my farm.

Alvino Flores: And how about at your grandparents?

George Adam Fike: They have a few laborers, but they are… all the family works there.

Alvino Flores: The produce that you have, how do you take it, do you sell it yourself to a market or how does that work?

George Adam Fike: I'm a, when you say produce, you mean grains…

Alvino Flores: Yes, grains or crops

George Adam Fike: Yes, I sell it to a… either a local elevator or a…some of or stuff gets shipped to Corpus and goes towards China on boats and different countries. We sell it to wherever we can make the most money is what it is. It's all a marketing deal.

Alvino Flores: As far as one of the questions that uhh, comments, I believe your brother made was about regulations. Do you have a lot of problems with state or federal regulations? That, uhh, affect you financially and at your farm?

George Adam Fike: I wouldn't say on the farm here. Moving our crops is a, some of the regulations, like there is a big deal with NAFTA right now whether Trump is gonna let it, well not Trump, but his organization is gonna let it go pass or stay the same. It's not going to stay the same. They are trying to improve it for everyone. I don't know how that is going to affect the farmers, but uhh, definitely we need to trade with Mexico and other countries. We grow a lot of food and grains and different things, and we need somewhere to sell them. U.S. can not use all the food that we grow.

Juan Matta: Can I add something?

George Adam Fike: The regulations though, we just need to be able to move them out of here and make money in doing it.

Juan Matta: You said that uhh, sometimes some of your grain gets taken to Corpus Christi and sold over there. Now to transport the grain over there, do you have to transport it yourself and take all the cost up front or does the…?

George Adam Fike: The elevator transports it, but the farmer takes the brunt of the cost. He has to pay for it. Nobody is gonna…(laughing)

Juan Matta: Haul it for you?

George Adam Fike: Yeah. It's all, anything you see involving farming, the farmer has to pay for it. Ain't nobody gonna step in and pay for it. (laughing)

Alvino Flores: New equipment and technology, uhh, I was doing some research and saw some videos that these tractors now drive themselves. Is that where you are at right now with that?

George Adam Fike: Yes. All of my equipment has auto steer.

Alvino Flores: Has it improved the production or the…

George Adam Fike: Yes. Not the production of the actual crop, but it improves my production of time in the field and labor cost. We can get done with a field faster. Let's say for instance a guy is driving a tractor. He doesn't have to stop for lunch. The tractor is driving itself. He can keep on going for those thirty minutes or whatever. You know, and the overlap. No matter how good of a tractor driver you are, you are not as good as that auto steering system. (laughing)

Eric Acosta: What is one of the biggest challenges you have overcome at this point in farming or the industry?

George Adam Fike: The drought! Weather!

Eric Acosta: Weather? How did that impact you? Did it shake your confidence?

George Adam Fike: Yes, somewhat. Tthe first year I started farming…I got married in 2005. That was in the fall. We started farming, me and my wife on our own in 2006. There was zero rainfall for about...for like... sixteen months! I don't remember, don't quote me exactly for…(unintelligible)... We were planting into dry dirt and nothing came up! We had absolutely zero crop! Not a single plant on our farm! The first year I ever farmed was proba bly the toughest. A friend of her family, besides my family, who helped me start farming out here, said " You can only go up from here. It's not gonna get any worse than this!"

Eric Acosta: You count on the rain with dry farming. What is dry farming specifically? What is that?

George Adam Fike: We have no capabilities of watering the crops. We are at the mercy of Mother Nature!

Eric Acosta: So, if it does not rain your crops don't grow?

George Adam Fike: And if it rains too much...well just like anywhere… if it rains too much it hurts your crop also.

Eric Acosta: And at your grandparent's farm they do what type of irrigation?

George Adam Fike: Flood irrigation.

Eric Acosta: And they have access to water districts?

George Adam Fike: Yes,....yeah the water districts deliver the water to them and then they put it in the field. I have brothers, cousins, family....they irrigate. They put the water that needs to be out for the…

Juan Matta: You said you count on the rain, and when it does rain… do you have any reservoirs where do you store water?

George Adam Fike: We uh….our rainy times are normally September and October. So the sooner we get done harvesting, we start doing tillage work behind the combines and ...uh we try to open up this ground with chisel plows. There is different tools and methods but we try to break the top open and getting it when it rains.

George Adam Fike: The water will go in and not run off and we try to keep...and we have a clay base here under the sand and if we can get that water down to that clay base, it holds that water. You know, then you've got to do your due

diligence to keep the weeds off of it and different things. You don't want weeds and different things taking your moisture...not during the winter. So we're actually…..that's kind of our reservoir… the land itself! We try to hold all the water it can and not let it run off and then keep it as best we can.

Eric Acosta: Did your grandfather and father teach things?

George Adam Fike: Work hard!

Eric Acosta: Work hard?

George Adam Fike: Yes!

George Adam Fike: When things get you down, you just gotta work hard! When things aren't going your way, you gotta work harder…it's just…Stay at it!

Eric Acosta: Any crops that produce or cost less?

George Adam Fike: No, not really. I wouldn't think so. Everything got its own way!

Juan Matta: Is there an easier way?

George Adam Fike: If there was, I shouldn't be farming. "The easy life", right!

Eric Acosta: Machinery… it's very expensive?

George Adam Fike: Very expensive! Shoot! It just depends on what you want to buy there's… I don't know there is stuff that goes 600,000 or 700,000 dollars! These new cotton pickers are ridiculous! I'm glad I don't grow cotton. My tractor…I have never bought a new tractor or combine, it's always second hand. That's the only way I can afford it.

Eric Acosta: And uh… The financing for that… how do you do the financing? Like is it like a car?

George Adam Fike: Yes, several years financing. You try to put as much as you can down and then finance the rest and hope you make it!

Juan Matta: I have a question on the machinery. Is the machinery pretty reliable?

George Adam Fike: Yes, if you keep your maintenance up, it's pretty reliable.

Eric Acosta: Do you know how your grandparents got their machinery? Was it always financed as well?

George Adam Fike: Mostly, yes. Uh, Grandpa may have paid cash for some stuff but that was back when...you know when cars were...when the cars you buy now are probably more expensive than some of the machinery that they bought! But that's, you know, it was a different time, it was probably relevant….it was probably impossible for him to think about buying a new tractor at say 20,000 dollars back then and now we have 200,000 and 300,000-dollar tractors and we're thinking how we ever gonna pay for this stuff.

Juan Matta: And the NAFTA trade agreement? Does that really affect?

George Adam Fike: Yes, it does a lot!

Juan Matta: Is it more because of the…?

George Adam Fike: No, not only the Valley, it's Arizona...uh California, it's every body that's on the border! All these...fresh produce goes..it goes that way as much at comes this way!

Juan Matta: Is that because of the price... or?

George Adam Fike: It's because they can grow certain stuff at certain times we can't, and we can grow stuff when they can't. It's just the way the world works. We have to have trade with Mexico and Canada! There are other factors in volved. We just...it has to happen! It ...uh...I think...I don't want to get into politics with you. I'm all for Donald Trump making a better deal… I just hope he doesn't…(unintelligible). And in my opinion, we have to have more

trade surplus whether across vast oaceans or twenty minutes from here! It has to happen, man! We...we the United States grows more food than anyone in the world! And we can't eat it all. So I think…(unintelligible). What we can not use for ourselves we have to pass it on to all our farmers.

Alvino Flores: With the uh, the natural disasters, I know we haven't had too many, thank God… but any natural disasters that have impacted you or your family that you know of?

George Adam Fike: Just…

Alvino Flores: I know there is Hurricane Beulah.

George Adam Fike: That was way before my time, uh. I don't know how much it impacted them. They got flooded a lot, I know there was uh…dad and uh…grandpa would show us marks on houses and low spots that where the water was when Beulah came over the windows…uh, natural disasters, I don't know, I've…

Eric Acosta: What about Dolly? I believe it was in 2008?

George Adam Fike: I think they lost a little bit of fruit. Uh, it was after all the main crops so, it wasn't that big a deal and I already lived out here at that time in McCook, and we had some wind and trees broken, but it, it wasn't nothing. It was no problem for us. We…We liked the rain. We had, I don't remember how much rain we had, but as far as being a dry land farmer we, we could've took another one three months later. (chuckling) But, you know I was kinda disappointed that Harvey didn't come over here.

Eric Acosta: Yeah.

George Adam Fike: You know so, I know it probably would've been bad for the cities and towns, but we would've sure took some rain out of that thing.

Juan Matta: I was going to ask, uh, your grandmother when she came to UTRGV, said that uh, that a lot of her crops, like her produce or vegetables, uh the government puts a lot of restrictions on them. There's a lot of…I guess…

Eric Acosta: Bureaucracy.

Juan Matta: Bureaucracy.

George Adam Fike: Yes.

Juan Matta: I guess a lot of paperwork and paper trails that need to be…

George Adam Fike: Well, it..uh, I can understand why, why they do that. I mean they're trying to be food safety. You know, that's, people are handling or handling people's food they're gonna eat. But you know some people get a little carried away with it. (chuckles)

Juan Matta: That's what I was gonna ask you. Would that be something that you would ever be interested in, in the future to produce food crops?

Geroge Adam Fike: Uh

Juan Matta: Or just, would you just…?

George Adam Fike: Grains and…

Juan Matta: Just stay away from that because it's just, it's just too…

George Adam Fike: I…I mean we grew vegetables. We grew leafy vegetables and all different sorts of fresh market stuff and I really enjoyed doing it. It's just, I mean…nothing there. My farm won't…wouldn't uh…

Juan Matta: Did you have negative consequences?

George Adam Fike: Well, I don't have irrigation, that's the main thing. But yeah, I…I

really did enjoy doing that. I'll never do it, probably never do it again. Not as a dryland farmer.

Eric Acosta: Uh, what about like uh, middleman. Like, I actually have a couple of friends that worked for uh…I forget the, the name, I wanna say like uh, Obee's? They're pretty much a transport, like a company that works with growers from like Mexico to here in the Valley, and they pretty much do a lot of the uh…the transport for farmers. Now, is that like maybe a growing business that you see like coming up? Other trucking businesses for farmers?

George Adam Fike: Uh…

Eric Acosta: Where they feel like maybe they incur some cost in transporting for you guys?

George Adam Fike: Well, there's, there's a bunch of uh…there's uh…transportation guys like they own their own trucks. I have a handful of truckers that haul all of my stuff, but they're not gonna incur any of the costs 'cause that's their business. They wanna make money, you know.

Eric Acosta: Right.

George Adam Fike: It's just a part of the cost of farming. It's the transportation. And I, I'm spread out pretty good, so I have a pretty good, uh, my farm, uh, about 40 miles west of here, so I'm spread out 40 miles.

Eric Acosta: I see. I think uh, from a historical or even anthropological standpoint, one of the big things that they've been talking about in our classes is that, nobody knows the land like the Valley more than a farmer does. Umm…you guys pretty much like work on these fields, like you know, like pretty much year round. So you know this land better than anyone. Anything that you've come across or seen like you know while working on the fields that might've been a little bit unusual or something that kinda stuck out to you? Umm…as far as like anything that was like 'whoa', maybe like an arrowhead or…?

George Adam Fike: Yeah.

Eric Acosta: Something that was, 'Hey, that's kinda crazy'?

George Adam Fike: I have a farm, uh, north of Rio Grande City and uh, we find arrow-heads out there quite often. Yeah, different types. One of my drivers found a uh…it was actually a spearhead and it would…he had it in his hand and it was hanging off both sides of his hand.

Juan Matta: What uh, what about animals? Do you have deer getting into your crops?

George Adam Fike: Yes, we have uh…I have a huge deer problem on some of the farms. Some of my rented farms that I rent, you know. I lost…I had a hundred- and fifty-acre farm that I lost half of it last year to deer.

Eric Acosta: Is that uh, your main pest or is it bugs or…?

George Adam Fike: Bugs are really the main pest for different things, yes. We have a real problem in the last few years with sugar cane aphid getting into our milo and…but they are…we are getting varieties that are resistant to them or…not resistant to'em, but uh, they tolerate'em a lot more. The sugar cane aphid don't like'em, so they don't get into that specific…right. So, we try to plant those and then there's also chemicals and insecticides that we can put on there. It's pretty safe for…but uh, it'll take care of those sugar cane aphids.

Eric Acosta: Right.

Juan Matta: Now, uh just one more question on uh…you said like some of that grain that you said some of it goes to Corpus Christi and you said some of it goes to China. Do you what they use it for in China or…?

George Adam Fike: I was told they feed ducks with it (laughs). So, I don't know, I guess they eat a lot of ducks in China, but it goes for feed, animal feed. Yes.

Juan Matta: But, is…is milo…is it good for human consumption or…?

George Adam Fike: Uh…there's a food grade milo that they use to make flour out of and you can…

Juan Matta: Oh…okay.

George Adam Fike: You'll see it in grocery stores. There's some bread and stuff like that, that are made out of sorghum. But uh, the stuff we grow is not food. It's…you can eat it and it ain't gonna hurt you any, I mean, but it's not actually for food…food grade consumption. It's animal feed.

Alvino Flores: How…how 'bout anything that you wanna say just to make sure we get it on the record for…like your farm here or your grandparents farm.

George Adam Fike: Just…I don't know just…uh, urban sprawl has taken over and there being less…less and less farm lands. We just have to grow more food with the land we have, you know to…to the more people, the more mouths to feed.

Eric Acosta: Uh, piggybacking on that. Umm, I know uh…I think they pretty much said it in class that we are kinda seeing a decline in farmers. Is there something that you wanna say to like maybe like people out there like who… Maybe "Hey, you know what, we do need more farmers." Like you know, we need, or is that something that like, "Hey, we already have as much food as we can handle here in the U.S?"

George Adam Fike: No, we have to have to have more farmers. I don't know the statistics, y'all can probably look it up, but…

Eric Acosta: Right.

George Adam Fike: The average age of the farmer is…is old, you know, if you took all the farmers in the United States and took an average, it…I don't know where it would be…

Eric Acosta: Yeah, probably older.

George Adam Fike: Yeah, it be over fifty, sixty years old I'd imagine.

Eric Acosta: Really?

George Adam Fike: There's not that many young farmers. I know here in the Valley, a handful of young farmers like myself that are gonna take over the family farm, but…

Eric Acosta: Right.

George Adam Fike: Uh, I know more old farmers that are going out that don't have anybody standing in line to uh…to take over.

Juan Matta: So…So like those old farmers would they…

George Adam Fike: They just…

Juan Matta: Try…try to sell off their land to other farmers or they just end up like selling it to like an investor and just making money off of it in the process or…?

George Adam Fike: Uh…most farms don't own all of their land. They own a…a majority of it probably, but uh, they'll lease it out. The family or kids will either lease it out to other farmers or…or uh sell it and then who knows it might go into subdivisions or another farmer might pick it up, who…but uh, the handful of young farmers that are coming up are gonna have to farm the whole Valley pretty soon. (chuckles) So there's gonna be less of us farmers, but there…the farms are gonna get bigger and bigger and…and it's kinda scary cause the bigger farm you have, the more money you put into it. If you have a disaster,

you're gonna get in a hole. You might…could get into a…into debt more than you can crawl out of, you know, but…it's just…that's all management practices there, just try not to spend more than you gonna, (chuckles) you…you know, than you can handle.

Eric Acosta: Alright, umm…I'm pretty much uh…got no more questions um…Uh one last thing, as far as like the history… anything that uh, you know uh, the family has pretty much uh, kinda of uh, carried on as tradition from back then that you guys still follow to this day?

George Adam Fike: I'm sure there is, but if I…I'm just, you put me on the spot like that uh…

Eric Acosta: Oh no, I do apologize, it's just that…

George Adam Fike: (laughs)

Eric Acosta: You know there's things like uh, you know, I know, like uh some families can be "Hey, you know what my mom's sweet bread has been like..."

George Adam Fike: Oh, okay.

Eric Acosta: A family hand-me-down, or maybe a certain like uh, little uh like celebrations that you guys do, like uh…it's always kinda been passed down.

Geroge Adam Fike: I uh…

Eric Acosta: I mean from a historical standpoint, like we care a lot about your family, like uh, where you guys come from? Like everything we're trying to find out anything that we can to add value that, you know, you guys are really gonna stand out.

George Adam Fike: Something that I don't know that they consider it a tradition, but…I can almost call it one. Bird season, all of our family gets together and whitewing season in September, go bird hunting and have big parties and hang out, visit.

Eric Acosta: Yeah.

George Adam Fike: It…it's kinda turned into a tradition, but nobody ever acknowledged it as being a tradition (laughs).

Eric Acosta: Oh, I see. So is that what uh…a lot of the family kinda meant, "Hey, we work hard, but we also play hard," and uh…

George Adam Fike: Oh yeah. Everybody, I think, would agree to that.

Juan Matta: Oh… (chuckles)

Eric Acosta: Alright, great. Umm…Alright, I think at this time um, that's all the questions that we do have. We do appreciate it and thank you so much for your time. I understand uh… you are a very busy man and we do appreciate it. Thank you so much and if there's anything you need from us, we'll leave you our contact information.

George Adam Fike: Okay.

Eric Acosta: Um…any other information that you wanna pass our way or any questions that we might wanna clarify, uh and you will be getting a copy of everything that was pretty much, you know, talked about here.

George Adam Fike: Okay.

Eric Acosta: So it can pretty much, you know, uhh continue and approve it individually.

Adam Fike: Alright.

Eric Acosta: Thank you so much.

Appendix I

Interviewee: Joshua Fike
Interviewers: Benito Contreras, David Hernandez, and Osiel Uribe
Location: Joshua Fike's residence, Edinburg, Texas
Date: November 6, 2017, 5:19 pm

Osiel Uribe: Alright, it started…alright so, you want to go ahead and start?
Benito Contreras: Yeah…okay, Benito Contreras. Today's date is three November.
David Hernandez: November sixth.
Benito Contreras: Oh, I'm sorry. Six November 2017. We're currently at Mr. Joshua Fike's house. Time now is seventeen-nineteen.
Osiel Uribe: Second interviewer. My name is Osiel Uribe.
David Hernandez: Third interviewer, David Hernandez.
Osiel Uribe: And we're are interviewing…
Joshua Fike: Josh Fike.
Osiel Uribe: Want to start?
Benito Contreras: Yeah, I'll start…okay sir, good afternoon. I sent you a list of questions, asking you to review them that way you can get an idea what we are going to be asking. First question is: what kind of produce did your family start selling at the beginning of the family business?
Joshua Fike: Really couldn't tell you what. I know they got down here because of…'cause they could grow citrus down here. But it was uh…kind of a lie as I understood it. They really couldn't grow stuff as good as they thought. Only until after they got irrigation. I don't know what citrus they tried to grow back then. The varieties have changed so much.
Benito Contreras: Do you know what they did start growing?
Joshua Fike: I don't know when they started growing citrus, but I know we've had it since…the…I couldn't, I know personally that I saw it in the '80s and '83 [1983] freeze and we had to dig up a whole bunch of it out because they died. That is one of your um…first memories. I would have to say it was the freeze of '83 and losing so much citrus.
Osiel Uribe: So you would sometime uh…before '83 that you guys had already started growing or you have recount memory of it.
Joshua Fike: My memories, we had citrus as long as I can remember.
Osiel Uribe: It's safe to say it was before?
Joshua Fike: Oh, it was way before that. I know we had some avocado trees that were planted in the '60s and they died…ten years ago. And they were huge avocado trees. It was probably sixty feet tall, if that answers your question, sorry.
Benito Contreras: Yeah, it does.
Benito Contreras: I do remember that freeze. I was just six or seven years old when that happened. Yeah, it took a big hit on the citrus and the community. Okay, question number two, sir… has it changed over the years and why?
Joshua Fike: Well, as everything does, technology changes, the seed that you plant changes. They have a variety that you like, and they have for about maybe ten, eleven years. And then they phase that out. They have new varieties that

do this better or do that better. The tractors have changed. I remember pick ing cotton on an open-cabbed cotton picker, two rows at a time. And I thought that was just horrible! My grandpa telling me stories, picking cotton by hand. "Well, you got a two-row machine, I remember picking it by hand when was a kid so…" (laughs) Well, I guess you win that argument. (laughs)

Benito Contreras: I'll go straight to question number three: Do you foresee a change in produce your family is farming now? Or growing something in profit in the near future?

Joshua Fike: Well, it all depends. You got to find yourself a niche. Like we grow really good corn and grain and citrus. Off to our farmland, we can grow top quality. We have got awards nationwide for…uh, production and this is our niche. Like, if there was something else that would make it more profitable and easier, I'm sure we would try, but we know how to do this. Some people can't grow corn or grain, but we can…and citrus.

Osiel Uribe: It's not something easy to do.

Joshua Fike: It's not easy, but once you get to where you know how to handle it, which you never do, but its simple. Everybody likes… they have their pet project. Like my grandpa, he loved cotton. He loved growing cotton. It about bankrupted us three or four times, but he loved growing cotton! (laughs)

Osiel Uribe: He just stick to it.

Joshua Fike: Yeah, like, "I didn't make any money this year or last year, but maybe next year." (laughs) We got to do something else! So, I don't know. You never know. We were thinking if there was a market down here for uh…not really looking into, but a friend of ours has a brewery. He makes what are those kind…craft beer, and he was talking about if he could get all the ingredients grown locally. So, we are trying to look into like growing barley. We don't know if we can, or if there's… They have varieties down here that they used for wine brewing, but they never make a head or anything. And if you can't…some plants take cold weather to make them produce what they want, like citrus. You never have good citrus down here until the first cold front when it's below fifty degrees. I don't know what it is, but if they pick fruit before it gets cold, I mean just a couple of nights at fifty degrees, you get really good citrus. I guess if one day something comes along that's more fun, I'll try it. We used to grow vegetables, but we don't do that any more. Government regulations and such made us quit.

Benito Contreras: Okay, straight to question number four: has your family ever worked in raising/selling animals? For example, poultry, cows, for consumption throughout your family's history?

Joshua Fike: I do not remember them doing it, but my dad says when he was a kid they used to grow pigs. And they had hog pens, and I don't know how many they had, but they had automatic feeding systems that would feed all of them at one time.

Osiel Uribe: Do you know how much they were selling it for?

Joshua Fike: I do not have a clue. I just heard stories from when I was a kid. My dad telling me about my grandpa and stuff like that. I know as a kid we used to play in the hog pens. My dad and his brothers would be working on stuff, and we would just be piddling with old farm equipment that was stacked in the pig pens. Because it was covered up, stuff wouldn't rot out quick 'cause it was covered. We didn't have any pigs in them, it was just a fun place to play as a kid.

Benito Contreras: Okay, thank you sir. Lets go to question five: is it of interest to you or any of your family to make that change? Like do you see yourself in the future saying: "You know what? Let's stop farming, let's go into ranching."

Joshua Fike: As long as farming is fun, I'd love to do it. 'Cause I've done it. I remember farming since I was a little kid, and I'd love to do more. Except hunting and fishing, I love doing that too. I don't like people. I don't like big groups of people. I despise it.

Benito Contreras: You got something for example like the King Ranch. They have cat tle, and that's all they deal with. You don't foresee yourself ever doing that?

Joshua Fike: My uncle got into some cattle, and I see it's a money-losing endeavor, unless you're on a big scale. To each their own. If he has fun doing it, then I enjoy doing my farming. I love to plant the crops and watch them grow.

Osiel Uribe: It's a good feeling to see something that you grew, seeing it rise up.

Benito Contreras: This sort of leads towards the history of this area. What was the area called when land was acquired? This area, do you know?

Joshua Fike: Well, when my grandpa moved down here, it was called the Magic Valley. 'Cause they were trying to peddle it to people who had never seen this area down here. And they had…they would make it look like it was so wonderful. And then, "Okay, here's your ground over here," (laughs) but no water going to it. You know our subtropical climate.

Benito Contreras: Okay, let's go straight to question number eight: Were there any physical landmarks to help you stake the boundaries, do you remember any boundaries that were either man made, or was it natural?

Joshua Fike: Far back as I can remember there was roads, and the roads were the boundaries. And in the fifties to help get crops to the town, they made this a checkerboard of roads to make it easier to get the farmers' crops to the… to the market, as well as easier to irrigate cause its kind of hard to push water further than a forty-acre block. You know. So, all of our fields are right at twelve hundred or so feet long in the rows because if it's much longer than that if you don't level your ground to have a slight tilt 'cause we laser level all of our ground around here. Makes it a lot easier to irrigate.

Benito Contreras: Yeah well, I mean instead of having uh, I know that in my family's area there's uh, natural ditches so they water it, all the water goes downhill. So now they started doing that.

Joshua Fike: All this stuff around here. We spend hours and hours leveling it.

Osiel Uribe: Pretty much so, what you guys leveled, did you guys have to add to it or lower it?

Joshua Fike: Well you take the, if its unleveled you take the dirt from the high side and you put it on the low side. You don't have to add dirt. You just take it from the high point and put it in the low point, and you can really screw up your land 'cause the top soil is always the fertilist and so if you just cover up all your top soil with the fill dirt that you, like you go down three feet you're in crap ground. Nothing will grow in that and if you, we, this one field we leveled, I remember looking at it as we were leveling it. There's uh, there's a uh, what do you call, a barbwire fence, and we were building the ground up as high as that barbwire fence on the guy next to us property because the field was so unleveled. And it was like, the guy went from having a fence in a hole to having a fence and a hill right next to his property. (laughs) We got

towhere we take the topsoil off, I know this has nothing to do with what you are saying, but you take the topsoil off, level the ground, and then put the topsoil back on, and you don't see that you messed with the ground as much, because if you cover up all your good topsoil, you got to put all kinds of organic matter and, you have to have things grow on it to make organic matter, you know what I mean. Or put cow manure, but it's never as good as just the topsoil. Anyway, sorry I went off on a tangent on that.(laughs)

Benito Contreras: Just elaborating on the farming business…do you know what state/ condition the property was at the time of acquisition?

Joshua Fike: Well, some properties we've got, they had trees that would just overgrown, but in this area down here you let a piece of ground go ten years you're going to have mesquite trees bigger than that one. It'll be three times that big. That one's just three years old. I mean, you could leave this land alone and you would have a forest there in five years guaranteed. Ask anybody that mows their freaking grass, "Son of a… gotta mow that crap again." (laughs)

Osiel Uribe: How about um, like um, ranches or homes or anything that were abandoned that you had to tear them down or stuff like that?

Joshua Fike: Well, this one piece of property we have, that we don't own, we rent it, but we cleaned up a whole bunch of trees off of it. That it was farmland at one point in time, and that we found a house and a tractor at the back of this area. And it was an old thirties model tractor, and I believe it's sitting behind our farm 'cause we picked it up. But somebody burnt that house down in the middle of the night, when we got all the trees out from around there. There's still, the only thing that's left is an old cis tern, which is just a concrete hole in the ground. And I didn't know that there was ever any houses built or anything on this property across the road from my house, but we hit a piece of concrete under the ground and really tore up one of our pieces of equipment. And so I got the back hoe, "I'm gonna find out what the heck caused that." It takes a lot to break off one of those pieces of equipment, and it's a chisel head that's mounted on an inch thick piece of steel. I mean it takes a lot, and I found a cistern with old tires from an old… it looked like a spoke. Old tires from a uh, I don't know… in the bottom of the cistern. And I just grabbed the sides and crushed them all in on themselves and covered up with dirt, and I didn't even know that there was ever a house there. But I found that, and I was like, "I got to cover that shit up." And my grandpa, at one point was like, "Yeah there used to be a house over there." Shows what I know. I only came along in the early eighties.

Benito Contreras: Do you know what the first piece of land that Mr. Fike purchased in the U.S. [was]?

Joshua Fike: I couldn't tell you, but I would think, um… I know he owned some land down at Red Gate, but I couldn't tell you where, and then there's a piece of property that's on Alamo, not Alamo road, is it Doolittle? North Alamo water supply is on it so maybe it is on Doolittle.

Osiel Uribe: Yeah, it's Doolittle. It's Alamo, yeah.

Joshua Fike: Yeah, we used to own the corner property on 107 and Doolittle.

Osiel Uribe: Oh, for reals, like right on the corner?

Joshua Fike: Right on the corner. We used to own a forty-acre lot, and my grandpa bought that in the fifties I know that. If we would have kept it a little bit longer, we would have been honored. In the nineties when we sold it. If we would have had for like ten more years it would have been fifty years so, or sixty years, something like that but,

we got in a bind and that was the farthest piece of property from our farm. And you know, if you want to keep doing it, sell off the stuff that's far away and consolidate in the one spot. We sold the back property, and then left the front five acres of highway frontage, and the highway frontage made the us more for the first five acres than the whole thirty-five acres at the back, just because it was highway frontage. And we didn't want to sell it all together 'cause we could double up on the money. If you sold it all together everybody was like, "Well it's the whole thing," so you got to. But we sold the back half and then we said, "Well, this is highway frontage." And then we sold it.

Osiel Uribe: It's worth a lot more like that.

Joshua Fike: That was the year that the government and the cotton screwed us, 'cause they… there was a thing called the Boll Weevil Eradication thing, and that's the reason we don't grow cotton anymore. They say for every acre you put in the ground, you owe the government to grow that cotton, and they're supposed to spray it and take care of it. Do you know what a cotton…? Your dad works for Dickerson over there, you know what a cotton stalk looks like.

Osiel Uribe: Mhmm.

Joshua Fike: We had people that were spraying the soybean fields from the boll weevil eradication place. They were like, "Oh, this place is riddled with boll weevils." We just looked at each other and said, "You're spraying soybeans. Soybeans don't get boll weevils" (laughs)

Benito Contreras: It's the cotton.

Joshua Fike: Yeah, and so we quit growing cotton after that. In '95 we quit when they about bankrupted us, and then we sold that piece of land, that oldest piece of property that we had. Then we started growing cotton again when they got rid of that program, and then the dumbass cotton farmers down here voted it back in, so now they have it. We quit growing cotton.

Benito Contreras: Just gave up on it?

Joshua Fike: Well, its, everybody says, "Oh, look at the money you get. You get paid by the pound." Yeah, but your inputs are three times as high.

Osiel Uribe: The money you put into it.

Joshua Fike: Yeah, you make more money, but you put more money into it. Everything is relative.

Osiel Uribe: Simply having to spray it?

Joshua Fike: Do you want your bank account to show you spent a million dollars last year taking care of this crap, or do you want it so show you spent three hundred thousand? 'Cause if you pay the million to take care of it, you might make a million and a half back. But if you grow it for three hundred bucks, and you might make five hundred bucks off the crop. That's like corn. You know, cotton is awful, cottons is just… and you can be picking three bales to the acre, rains on it, you're picking up a bale and a half the next day, I think they should charge more for it its preshrunk cotton, but nobody ever takes my ideas seriously. (laughs) It's been rained on. It's preshrunk. You got to pay twice as much for it.

Benito Contreras: Let's go to number ten: Has the Fike family been influenced by how the farm was bought and kept throughout the years? Like was there any outside influ ence by how… as far as how your grandpa or your uncles?

Joshua Fike: I don't know who influenced my grandpa, but that was one of the hardest working men I've ever seen. He… everything was to the farm. He never took, as far

as I could see, he never took anything for himself. Everything was put back into the farm to grow it, and as I could see… I don't believe in white privilege, but if there is close to it without being the privilege part, yes I've had all not given to me. I've worked my ass off for all of this, as far as I… As long as I could remember I've… I'd start driving the tractor when I was ten, open cab, and I still don't see why people say there is white privilege. Yeah everybody thinks I've been handed everything be cause my family has a big farm, and they have this and they have that. I pay bills too. I… and if we wouldn't have worked on it this would have been gone.

Joshua Fike: Sometimes working until three o' clock in the morning trying to get stuff done. You say its gonna rain the next day, and you're like, "I can save twenty thousand dollars if all of our ground is done like this by this day." You work your ass off!

Osiel Uribe: The day comes and it doesn't rain, but it was worth it.

Joshua Fike: Yeah! I got all that work done if it would of rained! My God, it would have been great! (all laugh)

Osiel Uribe: Yup, it happens.

Benito Contreras: Uh, going up to uh, has the family ever had to defend the land rights? Or ownership of the farm?

Joshua Fike: Not that I know of. We have to defend our rights as human beings from peo ple stealing from us. You know, "five-finger blights" is how we like to jokingly put it. We had somebody go to one of our fields… feed corn you let it dry, you grind it, you make it into masa, you make it into corn chips. It's not for eating raw. Unless you catch it when it's at one stage and at this weather down here, you got like two days to get it. When it's just… I mean, its just a little button on the side of that ear. That's when it's the best, but people come and steal it. And then they realize it's not what they wanted. They just go throw it on the freakin' ground on the side of the field. (Josh coughs) Did I answer your question?

Benito Contreras: Yeah, you did. Uh, does the family still have any of the original documents regarding land ownership?

Joshua Fike: I'm sure, I don't know. The original documents that we had when we bought the land, I'm pretty sure. But the original documents stating that this land was here, no. I don't think so, you know. Most of the stuff we have in the late, as of late, was farmed by somebody else. The government has this CRP land.

Benito Contreras: What is that?

Joshua Fike: I really don't know what it stands for, but the government pays you every year to put land in CRP. Which is, don't do anything to it. It's supposed to be refuge for animals and trees and stuff like that. And so, people have it in that, and they sign a contract with the government to pay them every year for this land as long as nobody does anything. We've picked up a couple of pieces of land because they get out of the CRP and all of sudden the government is taxing them. Um, or the county is taxing them. Um, commercial property. And so, they've got to prove that its not commercial property. And if it's not in farmland then it is commercial property. And so, we find people telling us, "You clean it for us and you can farm it." Just get it in ag use because it's pennies to the dollar compared to paying commercial taxes. Like my little three acres I have inside my fence is more than the ten acres I own down the street every year on taxes. Down the street, I think it's like ninety bucks for that ten acres that I have down there. And this is almost in two thousand dollars just for the taxes. And I only have is as a half-acre for the house and the rest is in farm use

because we have citrus trees, and chickens, and sugar cane.

Benito Contreras: What type of rights do they have over, or any other land? Like do you have any rights over…?

Joshua Fike: We own some of the mineral rights to the land, but not all of it. We own the surface rights. We don't own the air rights. Until that becomes a thing and then we will own the air rights down here. Because that's how it works like in New York. It's not only you're buying the land. Here you can own the land. Up there you can own the air above that land, so nobody can build a tall building next to your property. But they're beginning those rights right now because of the wind farms. People saying, "Well, you can't be getting electricity of that guy's land if I'm not making any money." The wind is coming over my property, then the fan.

Benito Contreras: Really?

Joshua Fike: Yeah, that's a big legal thing that's gonna happen pretty quick!

Benito Contreras: I don't know who benefits from the electricity being generated there. Those wind farms like those over at Lyford. Uh, how much did they pay for the land at the time they settled it?

Joshua Fike: It depends. Land that was purchased recently, or land that was purchased years ago?

Benito Contreras: From the beginning.

Joshua Fike: I couldn't… I know he bought…They bought some land for four hundred something dollars. But I couldn't tell you which land. I just know in conversations when I was a kid, that they were talking about, "I can't believe I paid four hundred dollars for acre of land." Which now that is nothing. If I can get land for four hundred dollars an acre, I'd buy every acre I could. 'Cause right here in this area, anything that is on 107 right now, that's 25,000 an acre. And the uh, highway they want to put in there… I know I'm jumping subjects but think about it. Is highway and frontage more money? In tax? So automatically with them putting that highway there, automatically all the taxes go up around it 'cause it's highway frontage.

Benito Contreras: And everything around it goes commercial.

Joshua Fike: Yup, even though it's farmland. But it's highway frontage that you are paying taxes on.

Benito Contreras: What does the term "Magic Valley" mean to you?

Joshua Fike: It means the electricity company that supplies electricity down the road. (laughs) I don't get it here I'm too much in the city. You believe that!

Osiel Uribe: The Magic Valley.

Joshua Fike: Yeah, that's how they got everybody down here. They advertised it… "the magic valley of farming." You can grow anything down here if you have water, but they never said that. (laughs)

Benito Contreras: They forgot to mention that part. Uh, these are some questions I don't think you may know, 'cause you weren't here when they bought it. Do you know who owned the land prior to the purchase?

Joshua Fike: Some land yes, but some land no. I know some names. There was a guy named down here. We got some land from a guy named Folmer.

Osiel Uribe: Folmer? Can you spell that?

Joshua Fike: F-O-L-M-E-R, I don't know. Folmer.

Osiel Uribe: Folmer.

Joshua Fike: And then Goodmenfeller (?). That's another fellow we bought some land from. Herdon Aderhold, we've bought land from him. Anthony. But other than that, just names off the top of my head that I remember hearing as a kid.

Benito Contreras: Do you remember who told your grandpa to move down here?

Joshua Fike: One of the Bentsens.

Benito Contreras: They're from Mission, right?

Joshua Fike: Yeah.

Benito Contreras: Were any Tejanos living on the land prior to the purchase?

Joshua Fike: Couldn't tell ya.

Benito Contreras: Do you ever meet any your neighbors or other land owners of the land near you? How do you interact with them?

Joshua Fike: Well, this guy right here on the other side of here. I, we own the property right next to this. It's a bunch of… where our cemetery is right there. And then it's our family park. On the other side of that, it's just seven acres of trees and little log cabin in it. Barbecue in there, have family gatherings like that. That was what my grandpa did to help uh, make my grandma happy. I shouldn't say that. (laughs) Like, we will farm everything except that. The trees leave it nice and pristine for grandma. (laughs) But the guy on the other side over there… I used to jog up and down this road, and he said, "Can you believe them people put a cemetery on this road? Them crazy peo ple!"

Osiel Uribe: Oh wow.

Joshua Fike: And I was like, "I is them crazy people!" and he started running faster and run away. (laughs) That's my uncle out there! (laughs) Yeah, I didn't talk to him no more and they moved. (laughs)

Benito Contreras: Were you given a copy of the land grant title, and did it give you the dimensions?

Joshua Fike: The land that I own, yes. But, I'm pretty sure everything else we have if free and clear and legal. With all the dimensions and everything. Usually when we buy a land, we have it surveyed so we know exactly how many acres it is. Minus the roads 'cause they always go from the roads, and you pay taxes on your half of the road.

Benito Contreras: You never lived in Donna, right? Or was it just your…

Joshua Fike: No. I remember stories them having a dairy down in Donna, but I was never a part of that.

Osiel Uribe: Do you know where was that and all that?

Joshua Fike: Yeah. One of the houses, not the one that they…you…how do I say this? The main house where the farm is, that one was there. The house that is directly to the south of it, it's red, was on highway 107 and Doolittle, and they moved up here for my grandparent's parents to live there next to them.

Osiel Uribe: Okay.

Benito Contreras: When did, uh okay. This part is not even a question for you, 'cause you never lived in Red Gate, right?

Joshua Fike: No, I never lived in Red Gate.

Osiel Uribe: You never knew exactly?

Joshua Fike: I never knew where it was. I just know one of these days I'd like to ask my grandma where was their house on Red Gate.

Benito Contreras: What is your fondest memory as a child living on the farm?

Joshua Fike: Working summers with my dad. Riding in the tractor with him. Watching the combine run. Watching all the equipment running. I remember my dad babysat me in the tractor.

Benito Contreras: We could go straight to uh…what could you say was the worst hurricane that hit your property?

Joshua Fike: Well, my memory or memories of other people telling me?

Benito Contreras: Your memory.

Joshua Fike: Well uh, the first memory I have of a hurricane was Hurricane Gilbert in…'88? Yeah. But to hear people talking about…Beulah was um, a massive storm that would compete with Harvey for more rain sprayed in one area. But just the way it came through, and then went south, and then went back north, and then went out that way. Like that's the only reason why Harvey rained so much, because it met up with a storm that kept it in one spot raining or four days. And then it backed up and went over the ocean, and then went into Beaumont. Well that's how Beulah did. It came up here and went north, and then it went south, and then it came back north, made a circle, and then it did all kinds of shit down here.

Benito Contreras: Has water ever been a problem here?

Joshua Fike: Not enough of it most of the time. It won't rain, so we got to irrigate. Here, no. This is a high point. There is a low hole right over there, which if you stand up and look down my driveway, you can see the top of palm trees. And in Dolly, in 2008…uh…they were using boats to pull people out of their houses over there 'cause all you could see was the roofs of the houses. But, this here, I'm twenty feet higher than that is right there.

Benito Contreras: Has the farm ever had any issues/disputes with Hidalgo County officials?

Joshua Fike: Yeah. (laughs) Yeah…

Osiel Uribe: You can tell us, if you don't… You don't have to.

Joshua Fike: Well, they told us because of all that rain that they had to buy this property, and whether we did it or not, they were gonna condemn the property, so we could agree on a price. So we're like, "We'll… we'll help you out." They say that all that hole over there they wanted to build a lake to drain the water on to our property in stead of over houses. Which they would have to pump it because the houses are lower that our property. So, that was a big deal. They should've bought all those houses out and put a lake there where the houses were and drained all of San Carlos and La Blanca into that spot. But instead of that, they bought farmland and said they were gonna build a lake, but they did not build this lake that was gonna be a to save all those people from floods. We got four years away from Dolly and everyone for got that it gets wet. And then the uh…county commissioner got not elected again, and the new commissioner said, "What are we gonna do with this land we have out here? Well we are gonna build a park. We're gonna build it up ten feet." And build a park on…it is called Sunflower Memorial Park up over there.

Benito Contreras: Oh, I've never even heard of that one.

Osiel Uribe: Is it the one on 107?

Joshua Fike: Yeah right there on 107! They built up that land.

Osiel Uribe: Yeah, yeah…

Joshua Fike: That was supposed to be a holding pond for all the water.

Osiel Uribe: So that's where they were gonna do it.

Joshua Fike: Yeah! And, uh they bought fifty-five of our acres to do that.

Osiel Uribe: Oh wow!
Joshua Fike: And they never did it.
Osiel Uribe: So that is almost reaching to three years, right?
Joshua Fike: Yeah. It goes up all the way to that shopping center. It goes to Sunflower Road. Yeah, it's between Sunflower and Holmes road.
Osiel Uribe: Oh okay.
Joshua Fike: Yeah. And uh…its just…it was supposed to be a hole in the ground where they would pump water to, and instead it turned into a park.
Osiel Uribe: A park they haven't yet finished.
Joshua Fike: Yeah. It's been worked on for five years. They acquired that land in 2009, or 2010. And it was supposed to be a lake, but then now it's a park which they had toys out there that kids that could've played on them. When they put there are probably in high school now.
Osiel Uribe: It's been more than two to three years since they started that park.
Joshua Fike: Yeah. And the funny thing was that was biggest…you can see driving around here how wasteful the county is with money. They built a lake over there when they bought all the land that they bought, like seventy something acres somewhere else. And they brought that dirt over here and dumped it in this spot where they were gonna build the lake. They said, "Oh, we're just doing that for right now, because right now we need to get rid of the dirt quickly to get the lake built." Okay, so they started building it there. And then they were loading in trucks with excavators and hauling it to the other side of the property and dumping it… restacking it with excavators. That is what they did for three years. And then, just this side of the club house that they have over there, they dug that ground up, moved it, hauled in more dirt, put it there, dug that up, hauled it to the other side of the place, put it there, and then hauled it back and made it a mound. I've seen them move that dirt there four times.
Osiel Uribe: Is all that dirt moving related to the canal that they're widening?
Joshua Fike: No…
Osiel Uribe: It has nothing to do? I don't know if you have seen it.
Joshua Fike: The canal that is gonna go out this way?
Osiel Uribe: No, it's the other one on the south of 107, like um…let's says like half a mile from 107, a little less…
Joshua Fike: Hmm…
Osiel Uribe: It's a canal they are widening…
Joshua Fike: Ohh! The drainage ditch they are widening over there? No…
Osiel Uribe: I thought it had to do with it.
Joshua Fike: 'Cause they built a lake, they built a pond over there, and they hauled the dirt and put it over here where it needed…they should of just bought those people out 'cause every time FEMA money comes, those people got new four-wheelers to run over our crops. You live in a fucking box! And you have a four-wheeler that's a fourteen-thousand-dollar four-wheeler?! How does this happen! FEMA money! (laughs)
Benito Contreras: Unfortunately, that's true. Which leads into this other question: Has there been any problems with trespassers on your property or farmlands?
Joshua Fike: Always! Always driving around…like let's get in that truck and let's go fuck up some farmland and do circles on your corn.
Osiel Uribe: And you wake up in the morning…

Joshua Fike: And you're like, what the…! (laughs) I ain't hurt nobody! Why are these people doing this? Just to be mean.

Benito Contreras: Yeah, I don't understand that. I see it on Facebook all the time. People mudding, they go on to properties and they freaking start making donuts like…they tried doing that shit at my parent's house. Took out the shotgun and started shooting. We didn't shoot at them but up into the sky.

Joshua Fike: Yeah.

Benito Contreras: But just get them out of here. They have no business there, man.

Joshua Fike: People think that they can just…nobody has private property rights like they used to. Because people…this mentality…or I don't know what it is. It's not only the millennials, its everybody that has this mentality that I am entitled. Because you have it, I should have it. Even though you didn't…you worked for it and I didn't. But…and people say well you have…like when we catch them stealing. Well you have so much. Yeah! But none of it is yours! I bust my ass for this stuff. You haven't done nothing but stop here and steal it. But it's just a little… well I'm sure Walmart will care if you walk out the store with a freaking CD. (laughs) It's the same thing! But I don't have a guard at the front door blocking ya.

Osiel Uribe: Yup…

Joshua Fike: When we used to have vegetables, they would get in there and steal vegetables, steal citrus a lot. We were…this is legal battle from years ago, but we had a guy sue us because he fell out of our avocado tree on our property stealing. And we didn't have a fence up, and it was something like uh…well you didn't tell him not to go in there, so it's your fault.

Benito Contreras: Really? The fucking gate that's there that's closed, that's locked?

Joshua Fike: No, I didn't have a fence…we don't a fence around it but still!

David Hernandez: It's common sense.

Joshua Fike: Yeah!

Osiel Uribe: I hope he lost…

Joshua Fike: Oh yeah, he lost. (laughs) But still! We had one person stealing corn and my grandpa caught her and her kids. All of her kids were in the car and she was just out in the field stealing corn with buckets. And he went to her car, saw the keys in it, took the keys out, got back in his tractor and kept working. And then she was throwing stuff at his tractor and he opened the door and is like, "What?" "Well you took my keys!" "Well, you're stealing my corn. It's the same thing. The keys were just there so I took them. Just like you're taking the corn. Its mine now. This is my keys. If you can take my corn, I can take your keys." Oh well, and then my grandpa was kind of crippled, he couldn't pick his foot up that far, but she was suing us because he kicked her. He was in his seventies, almost eighties, in the chest and neck, which caused her to have breast and neck cancer. And she was suing us.

Osiel Uribe: Wow!

Joshua Fike: My grandpa couldn't even pick up his foot to getting in a freaking bath tub, what are you talking about! (laughs) He can pick his foot up just high enough to get on the steps of the tractor and pull himself up, that's it.

Osiel Uribe: Have you all had…given the chance, um like relatives, friends of the family and stuff to go into the fields and pick let's say, corn? Stuff like that?

Joshua Fike: Oh! Anybody that just outright asks, we'll give it to them!

Osiel Uribe: Yeah.

Joshua Fike: You know, if you're willing to ask somebody, I'm willing to give it to you. But for people to just steal because, oh well you have so much, I'm entitled to it. It's everybody's perception of life.
Benito Contreras: Yeah.
Joshua Fike: And that is just wrong.
Benito Contreras: It is…alright this is number twenty-nine: What could you say is the most typical/common food in the Fike family?
Joshua Fike: Barbecue. Fajitas. There's this place in Edinburg…
Osiel Uribe: Vera's?
Benito Contreras: Is that something your grandpa, or like…
Joshua Fike: Oh no…I don't, I can't remember…
David Hernandez: Vera's, I go there.
Osiel Uribe: Vera's.
Joshua Fike: No not Vera's… Aguilar.
David Hernandez: Aguilar!
Joshua Fike: You go to Aguilar and get them marinated fajitas they got there. It doesn't matter if you're a shitty cook, you can make them delicious.
Osiel Uribe: Wow, I've never tried it there.
David Hernandez: You've never tried Aguilar?
Osiel Uribe: No, I go to Vera's.
Joshua Fike: If you have a fire, get them marinated that come in a vacuum pack, throw them on the fire, I mean flames tickling the hell out of them. Smoking! Cut them, sear them to where they're almost black on both sides. Then cut them up with the…against the grain to when they're real tender, and then put them in a pan and let them sit about thirty minutes in the pan. Mmmm, damn! (laughs)
Benito Contreras: Getting hungry.
David Hernandez: Yup.
Osiel Uribe: Yup…
Benito Contreras: How often does your family get together?
Joshua Fike: Christmas. Thanksgiving. You know, stuff like that. Well like I said, I have a ranch that we deer hunt at. My dad goes up there with me almost every weekend. Even though he's had a stroke. He's not at his best anymore, but I like to take him out there. My brother goes up there, wife, and we got cousins come up there.
Benito Contrereas: For Thanksgiving, do you all go to your mom's house?
Joshua Fike: Yeah, we'll go to my mom's house. Sometimes we'll go to my wife's…uh cousins, or wife's aunt's house. Got to take turns… my family and her family.
Benito Contreras: And your wife is from where?
Joshua Fike: Edinburg. She grew up on the same road as I did. Both grew up on Sharpe Road.
Benito Contreras: No shit?
Joshua Fike: Yeah.
Benito Contreras: Okay, cool!
Joshua Fike: We didn't meet until we were…I was already graduating from high school. But we grew up down the road from each other.
Benito Contreras: What year did you graduate from high school?
Joshua Fike: 2000.
Benito Contreras: 2000, okay. That's all the questions for me.
Osiel Uribe: You want to go ahead and start with yours?

David Hernandez: Alright. Question number one, can you tell me about Mr. Fike's time as president of the water district?

Joshua Fike: Well, he was by the book and he made sure things got done. It was run like a well-oiled machine with him at the helm. I mean things were… I don't know if it was just looking back as your grandpa on this board or… or that just you know how sometimes you look back at things and you're like that was great and everybody tells you know that sucked ass? (laughs) Well, as a kid it was great. Well, anyway, I'm a farmer now and seeing how the water district is run now, it was much better under his management… much better.

David Hernandez: What water district was he president of, and how many years was he president?

Joshua Fike: Hidalgo County Irrigation District Number (?), and I think it was just shy of thirty years, if not just a little over.

Osiel Uribe: Oh wow, how does that work? Does he get elected or...

Joshua Fike: Yeah, you got to be elected.

Osiel Uribe: Runs for reelection and stuff like that? So, he got reelected?

Joshua Fike: Yeah.

Joshua Fike: 'Cause he run it so good and so open. That, that was the main thing. He was like, "I'm showing everybody everything…every expenditure, every everything," and he run it very good. He was a very "by the book" type of person. With a sixth-grade education.

Osiel Uribe: Wow!

Joshua Fike: Yeah, turned a sixth-grade education into a multimillion-dollar farm. (laughs)

David Hernandez: Do you know of any challenges Mr. Fike's faced during the time he was president of the water district?

Joshua Fike: Opponents in the election. (laughs) That's, and droughts. You got a big problem with droughts 'cause when you're the one president of the water board and everybody wants water at the same time. There is a lot of people yelling at you.

Benito Contreras: Do you remember the...? Ever heard of stories of when there was the hardest of all the years a drought?

Joshua Fike: Mid to late nineties.

Benito Contreras: Oh ok…

Joshua Fike: It was bad. I remember Falcon and Amistad, down well below like twenty percent, twenty-five percent of capacity. Into the teens even.

Benito Contreras: How did your dad manage that?

Joshua Fike: We were set to a water allotment. You only got so much water, and spillage was a bad thing. Like... you got fined for spilling water. If you over-watered, I mean they had meters on every irrigation valve, so they knew how much water was coming out of it.

David Hernandez: How many acres does your family own? Rough estimate.

Joshua Fike: Own…hmm… fifteen hundred. Farm's close to two thousand and… well with this new endeavor that we got, we got another six hundred, so twenty-four to twenty-six hundred right now.

David Hernandez: What kind of crops do you farm?

Joshua Fike: Corn, and grain, and citrus.

David Hernandez: What crops has your family farmed in the past?

Joshua Fike: Oh, what haven't we grown? Uh… cantaloupe, watermelon, onions, beets, uh... swiss chard. Uh... all kinds of herbs. Ses... not sesame, we didn't grow sesame,

but spinach, collard greens, mustard greens, cabbage, pickles. You name it, we've tried it, and we have tried. We have made money in some, some sort of beans. We've grown black-eyed peas. I've harvested purple holes before.

Benito Contreras: Which one has been the most uh... the one that's made the most money for you?

Joshua Fike: Well you could, anything can make money at a given time, if it's just the right time for you to grow it. Couple of years ago, corn was fourteen dollars a hundred. I mean you can make a ton of money when corn's fourteen dollars a hundred. You can make money at seven. If it's below seven its kinda like, "We gotta skimp on the inputs 'cause we ain't gonna get as much back." But I gotta say…

Benito Contreras: Who determines that price?

Joshua Fike: The market, if you look in. Like, I watch the stock markets for price increases and price. Like, I get it on my phone three times a day what the corn market is. Its been running right around three-fifty a bushel, and three-fifty a bushel is… eehh, just under seven. But we can contract for some stuff for eight-fifty right now for next year, but right now you can get but just under seven for it. Did that answer your question, or did I go off on a tangent?

David Hernandez: What were some of the best years for the family business?

Joshua Fike: Monetarily? Or best years just being a good family? Every year is wonderful! I love working with my family! I love that everybody has the same… we can do this, we can scrimp, we can pull together, we can get this done. That's the best part of all.

Benito Contreras: Staying focused, same goal?

David Hernandez: How do you promote your business?

Joshua Fike: We don't. We used to sell fruit to winter Texans online, 'cause if you go look up Fike farms you can save pick your own fruit. We don't know how to get that shit off the internet. We can't sell it no more because of government regulations, 'cause its gotta go through a freaking packing shed before you can sell.

Osiel Uribe: So, you're still getting contacted?

Joshua Fike: Yeah, winter Texans, "Yeah, I've been coming down here for the last thirty-five years." Apparently you ain't been here in ten because (laughter)… 'cause of the darn government we can't sell it to you no more. And some of them winter Texans are the funniest darn people. [They say,] "I just want one bag", and you send them to the orchard and they are like, "fill up the trunk. I got one bag." (laughter)

David Hernandez: What year did your great-grandfather move to the Rio Grande Valley and why?

Joshua Fike: Well, my great-grandfather moved down here 'cause his son moved down here. My grandpa moved down here first to break out, 'cause they had a dairy up in Ohio, and my grandpa moved down here, he used to ride a motorcycle, and he was, he rode a motorcycle from Ohio to come visit where they said that they were adver tising that they can get land in the Magic Valley. But like I said, they didn't tell no body, "Well there is no water here and if you don't have water you can't grow shit," But he bought, he come down here because of that, and then he brought his dad down here later on in life. I think my grandpa's dad moved down here in the early sixties, and my grandpa moved down here in the late forties. Maybe that's wrong… maybe he come down here in the fifties, I really don't know. But I know my grandpa come down here first and brought his dad down here.

Osiel Uribe: And what happened to the dairy? He sold it?

Joshua Fike: Yeah, they sold everything up there and moved down here.

Benito Contreras: Where is there?

Joshua Fike: Ohio. My grandpa went to school with the Smuckers Jelly… the old man that used to advertise for Smuckers Jelly. My grandpa's like, "I went to school with that guy."

David Hernandez: Do you know of any challenges your great-grandfather might have faced during the move to the valley?

Joshua Fike: Not having a windshield on his motorcycle and taking bugs in the face. (laughs) He used to ride… he'd go to Charro Days down in Brownsville. He had a motorcycle gang. My grandma has a picture of him with fifty other people on Indian and Harley Davidson motorcycles from the twenties and thirties.

David Hernandez: Do you still have that bike?

Joshua Fike: Oh no. I wish my grandpa would have kept that Indian. That Indian would have been worth freaking boatloads of money.

Osiel Uribe: What happened to it?

Joshua Fike: He sold it. He got married, had kids, said, "I'm selling the bike. Done with that." He was a biker. He rode all kinds of places.

David Hernandez: What role does each family member have in the business?

Joshua Fike: Well, everybody has their niche. My cousin Mat sprays everything with our big, uh… it's uh, it's called a high cycle. It spreads ninety feet wide, and can spray chemical fertilizer, bug deterrent, and stuff like that. And then I drive the harvester. My… me and my brother drive the planters, and, uh fertilizer rig, and the rowers, make the rows and paratill. Me, and my brother, and cousin do a whole bunch. My uncle George, he does a lot of the citrus, and my uncle Sam, he does his hay, so we got our fingers in a.. Sam does hay. George does citrus. Me, and my brother, and cousin do all the corn and cotton, but my uncle George is more… Him and my dad used to run it all together, but now that my dad had a stroke a year and a half ago, or something like that, he can't talk no more, and my uncle is running everything. So I feel there's a lot… a great deal more on his shoulders because he's got three young people- me, my brother, and my cousin. Like we've been doing this our whole lives, but now he's like, "You need to help us." He's like, "What do I need to do? It's not just me and your dad making decisions for everybody anymore. Its… ya'll need to put, input in this now."

Osiel Uribe: So, putting you guys more into the leading role and stuff like that

Joshua Fike: Yeah. Which I hate for the day that that happens 'cause I love my job. I love… I don't deal with the money. I don't deal with nothing. Tractor breaks, I work on it. Equipment breaks, I weld it. Paycheck comes I cash it. You know, that's how… I don't want to run anything. I just want to be an intricate cog to keep everything running.

David Hernandez: Have you ever been on television or newspaper for any accomplishments?

Joshua Fike: Well, I complained about that road and got the news media out here and talked to them about how horrible they are trying to run a veteran or two veterans out of their house. And that's about it. I ain't been on TV for any other reasons.

David Hernandez: Have you ever had any competitors throughout the years?

Joshua Fike: Competitors? Like uh, yeah, every year we enter into a contest nationwide. We got competitors all over the United States. That… if you enter into the contest you win a prize, and you win this trip, and it's very nice. Two years ago, we won

first place in the United States on green uh, double crop, minimum till, grain production. They sent us to Arizona.

Joshua's son: Are ya'll almost done out here?

Joshua Fike: In a little bit. Ok.

Benito Contreras: You forgot your root beer. Here you go.

Joshua Fike: We, we went to the Arizona Grand Resort. They put us up for four days of uh, award ceremony here, award ceremony here, two different country music concerts, gambling night… I mean every party is like, "Woah!" The drinks, you have to pay for them, unless you have this band that goes on your wrist. There you go have a fun time.

David Hernandez: Do you plan on having more land? I mean do you plan on buying more land?

Joshua Fike: I'll buy every piece of land that I can get my grubby, dirty fingers on. I ain't got no money to buy no land, but if I could get it I'll get it.

David Hernandez: What is the family planting now?

Joshua Fike: Well, right now we have fall corn in the ground and….

Osiel Uribe: By when is that going to be harvested?

Joshua Fike: Late December, early January, and then we'll have the next crop put in by February.

Osiel Uribe: Does that get affected by the freezes and stuff like that?

Joshua Fike: No, because by the time this… If it frosts after two weeks from now that corn is made, and it won't affect it a bit. If you plant it later… we planted this in August. If you plant it in September, or November, or September, or October, you might run into some problems with that. But if you plant it early enough, you don't have no problems like that.

David Hernandez: Is the family planning on entering any other upcoming competitions in the near future?

Joshua Fike: Uh yeah. Every year we enter into our competition for our grain harvest.

David Hernandez: Can you give me a rundown of the seasons for crops, and what the family focuses on farming with the changing seasons?

Joshua Fike: Well, we're growing corn right now. We used to grow vegetables during the winter, but because of government regulations and nonsense like that…We don't like to have people telling what to do in our property. That's the whole thing. So, and then we'll harvest this corn that we have right now in December and January. Get it all worked up. We have to pre-irrigate it, to rot the trash up, then have another crop put in around February. We usually start about the tenth, or maybe January the twenty-ninth… somewhere in that window we like to start, depending on… If it's been cold, and cold, and cold week after week, we'll probably wait later, but if it's starting to get warm and it seems like if it's not going to get frost, then we… The sooner you get it in, the sooner you get it out. And that's the name of the game in farming, because if it's out there it has a chance of being lost.

David Hernandez: How has farming in the area changed since you started?

Joshua Fike: There is more houses because people can sell land more for houses than farm land. 'Cause with commodity prices so low, you can't very well say, "I'm gonna buy some land that's thirty thousand dollars an acre, and I'm going to make a thousand dollars an acre every year to pay for it." It ain't gonna work. You got to sell it by the hundred and fifty by hundred lot for uh, like fifty thousand dollars, and that's what people are doing. And they know that they can sell it for that if they just put in the

time and money to put it into a subdivision, and then lot it out, and then they can sell it for a lot more. But not everybody can walk in and buy a fifty-acre lot. But the person that bought that can slather it out, or slice it up to where you can buy your little bit of heaven and grow houses.

Osiel Uribe: Have you guys ever been approached by, um the subdivision people?

Joshua Fike: Oh yes. I was at a meeting one time, and this guy walked up to me, and he handed me his card and he's like, "Hi! I'm so and so from bullshit realty agency. If you ever decide that you want to get out of all these problems with farming, you just give me a call." I wadded it his card up and threw it at his feet and said, "I don't want your business." (laughs)

David Hernandez: How do you distribute your crops?

Joshua Fike: Distribute? As in where do they go?

David Hernandez: Yes.

Joshua Fike: Ok, uh, well we have a uh… there's grain elevators down here, and you don't know what the price is when you plant it. You kinda have an idea. Or you could buy your uh, you can watch the markets and say I want to sell right now because I can get eight dollars for it. And so you can call the grain elevator… some people call them a grainery, and you just tell them, "I'd like to sell my crop. I want to sell twenty cars at this price right now." You know what a car is right? Ok, a carload is a train carload, which is a hundred thousand pounds. So you can say, "I want to sell ten cars, or twenty cars, or a hundred cars," and that's just how you do it. And you don't want to sell too much, because what if you don't make that much. If it's a great price and you're like, "Yay, it's great! I can make all these kinds of money," and then you only make… Say you sell twenty, and you only make seventeen, and the price you were buying it for. Or that you were selling it for two dollars cheaper than you can get it now. So now you got to buy grain from somebody else at a higher price to fill your contract at a lower price, 'cause once you contracted, that's your name. You owe that grain elevator that much money because they have worked that into their, uh how they're selling it. And how, knowing how much they have, and how much they can sell, and all things like that. Going back to another question that you had asked earlier about the markets and how they work… I forgot where I was going with that. (laughs) Oh, now I know… the markets. Like corn prices… everybody says if you have a forty day outlook on corn, the price is going to stay steady. If it drops below forty because, uh, the outlook is how much supply they have… They like to keep the corn price at a certain, what am I trying to say… if they have forty days of use of corn… if it goes under forty the price goes up, if you over sixty days of use the price goes down, so you can pretty much gage what the markets gonna do by how many days' supply the US says it has, you know what I mean? You can say the price is going down because it went above sixty days. It's eighty-nine days now, so they… nobody's buying, and so the price starts going lower until people start buying again. And it always stays between… last (inaudible) five years ago it dropped down to twenty days, and that's when the price went up to fourteen dollars. Had we been smart that year, we wouldn't have sold anything before season, because if you uh, if you say I'm gonna make this much and then you contract it, then you don't make it.

David Hernandez: That was the last question. Thank you so much.

Osiel Uribe: Alright. So do you guys have any more questions?

Benito Contreras: I don't have any more questions.

Joshua Fike: We got more beer, so we can keep doing that. (laughs)

Benito Contreras: See that bug?
Joshua Fike: We're out in the country. There's lots of bugs.
Benito Contreras: Your cat has one of those bloodsuckers on his ear.
Osiel Uribe: Alright, so this concludes the interview. We have finished at 6:29pm.

Interviewee: Sue Rork Everett
Interviewers: Mayela Cavazos, Jordon Kennedy-Reyes, and Gabriela Chapa
Location: Interview via telephone

Sue Rork Everett: Hello?
Mayela Cavazos: Uh, hello. Uh, this is, uh, Mayela Cavazos calling again. Um, from the CHAPS program at UTRGV.
Sue Rork Everett: Oh okay.
Mayela Cavazos: Yeah, I'm calling with my group this time, uh, for the interview.
Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: I'm Jordan.
Gabriela Chapa: And I'm Gabriela.
Sue Rork Everett: Hi!
All: Hello, hi.
Mayela Cavazos: Alright, so we were just gonna go ahead and, uh, ask you the questions. Some of the questions that I had sent you ahead of time.
Sue Rork Everett: Okay.
Mayela Cavazos: Alright. Uh, so the first question was, um, if you could go ahead and tell us a little about your childhood and your background?
Sue Rork Everett: You wanna know about my childhood?
Mayela Cavazos: Uh, yes.
Sue Rork Everett: Is that what you said?
Mayela Cavazos: Yes, sorry.
Sue Rork Everett: I don't know… I hear an echo in the phone.
Mayela Cavazos: Yeah, it's sort of on speaker phone.
Sue Rork Everett: Oh, okay. Uh, I had a *very* great childhood. I had great parents. Uh, we grew up on the farm there, in Edinburg, and I had three brothers and a sister. And I was the second to the youngest and, um, we really had a great childhood. Our parents were great. No, you know, we didn't go hungry. We got- we had what we needed to live on. We weren't rich by any means, but we didn't really go without, so it was pretty…pretty neat. Not like some of them nowadays, you know? And uh, I got married when I was 19 and moved away so other than… Then, uh, well, I lived in the Valley for a little while, and then we moved away. But, I really don't know that much about the farm itself. I know what my dad did and I know when my sister married Willard Fike and they started working together. My dad and him and, uh, that's about the only thing I know about the farm. (laughs) I don't know what else I could tell you!
Mayela Cavazos: Um, we also wanted to know, like uh, generally what your perspective is on farming? Like, I know you mentioned right now that you sort of grew up on the farm and everything, and then you moved away. So generally, what your perspective is on farming and like the way of life and things like that?
Sue Rork Everett: Oh, I think it's a great way of life! I'm not sure if I would like it but I have, you know, my sister, and brother, the brother that passed away… both loved it, so I don't know what I can say. And my dad and Willard and all of them seem to

enjoy what they do. Even though they work long hours. But sometimes they didn't, depending on the season. But my dad worked another job. Williard never did, but my dad did. He, uh, was a bus driver for Valley Transit Bus Lines (laughs) and, uh, that's the way we really survived more so than the farm. The farm brought in some money, but not a lot in the beginning. At least that's the way I remember it.

Mayela Cavazos: Um, so then why, uh, did you move?

Sue Rork Everett: Why did I move? Uh, because I got married. (laughs) I married, and moved away, and my husband worked construction. He didn't work the farm.

Gabriela Chapa: Okay, so we have a couple questions that we're trying to brainstorm how to structure. Um, I want to know if you recall the process of your family beginning the farm, or is that something that when you were born it was already, uh, established?

Sue Rork Everett: Uh, yeah, I really don't know that much about that. My sister probably would be the one to ask about all of that.

Gabriela Chapa: Okay, do you mind giving, like a small family tree, just so we can kind of draw it out?

Sue Rork Everett: I'm sorry? What was it?

Gabriela Chapa: Do you mind giving us a small little family tree so we can draw it out?

Sue Rork Everett: A family tree?

Gabriela Chapa: Yes. Just like your siblings, and your names, and your parents?

Sue Rork Everett: Oh, okay. That's fine! Where do you want me to start? With my parents or before that, or..?

Gabriela Chapa: Uh, as far back as you can go?

Sue Rork Everett: Uhh, well I can go back to- well… (laughs) I don't have it in front of me but, well, my brother Frank… I think you talked to him? He's got an outline from all the way back to Ireland. But I don't have all of that, I mean, in my head. So he can tell you.

Gabriela Chapa: Does he have a physical copy?

Sue Rork Everett: Yeah, the Rork part. Now, the Fikes, you would have to get that from my sister Annie.

Gabriela Chapa: What was your brother's name again?

Sue Rork Everett: Frank.

Gabriela Chapa: Frank, okay.

Sue Rork Everett: Yeah, he said he had talked to you guys, er, I think.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: So, did you notice any changes in the weather while you were around here? Small.

Sue Rork Everett: I'm-I'm sorry, what?

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Uh, did you notice small changes in the weather when you were down here?

Sue Rork Everett: The weather?

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Yes ma'am.

Sue Rork Everett: Uh, well, we had a couple of hurricanes that I remember when we were, uh, let's see. Beulah, I was there for Beulah when it flooded. And my parents were flooded in, and so was Annie and Willard. And then I was there for the freeze in ‘51, but I was young. I don't really remember much. But I do remember a lot of the citrus trees and everything were killed, and they had to replant a lot of those. Uh, I'm trying to think of anything else, but really nothing else that I remember that was substantial.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: That's pretty good.

Mayela: And from those disaster- those natural disasters that you mentioned, like Hurricane Beulah and the freeze, uh, do you recall any of those… the way they altered the natural environment or the agriculture?

Sue: Uh, it-it flooded the ground so bad that my parents were without electricity or tele phone for- uh… I lived in Harlingen at that time and we had a pick-up truck, one that has big wheels on it. And we had to take them food and water, you know, so that we went and check on them, because nobody could hear from them. No phone, no nothing. And, uh, we took the truck, and took food and water to them and see what they needed. And then we went to the store and came back, and brought them whatever else they needed. And that lasted about a month. It was pretty hard on my parents.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Was there any hobbies that you enjoyed as a kid?

Sue Rork Everett: I'm sorry?

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Uh, any hobbies? That you enjoyed as a kid?

Sue Rork Everett: Oh yeah!

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Uh, what were they, and where did you hang out and enjoy them?

Sue Rork Everett: Uh, (laughs) I'm trying to remember! (Short pause) Mostly around Edinburg and I.. just really don't remember that.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Okay.

Sue Rork Everett: (laughs)

Gabriela Chapa: Okay, so currently, Edinburg has evolved a bunch and it's super urbanized. Um, was there, throughout your life, living in Edinburg was there a huge development as well?

Sue Rork Everett: The way I developed when I was living on the farm?

Gabriela Chapa: No, the city.

Sue Rork Everett: Oh, in the city? Oh. Well. I had a bunch of kids! (laughs) I have a lot of kids, so that took up most of my time, and, um, I like living in the city. I miss the openness of the farm, but living in the city was fine for me, and I lived in the city since then. I mean, since I was nineteen, so… I would prefer that my kids had grown up on the farm, but they didn't and they survived! (laughs) They're all very well adjusted, and all married and have their own children now.

Gabriela Chapa: Is there a reason why you would prefer they grew up on the farm?

Sue Rork Everett: Just, that it was more… Farm people are very trusting. I'm not sure that it's the same as it was when we were children, but they're still…I see my cousins, and nieces, and nephews, and all that, and they're still trusting. And in the city, you learn to not be quite as trusting of your neighbor, you know? Unless you get to know that neighbor, but if it's somebody that just lives in your neighborhood, you really don't know them it's like, ehh… stand-offish. We knew everybody that lived around us. We played with all of them, you know? We had a black family that lived down the road from us and-and I didn't think anything. I mean, they were black and I- I liked them. (laughs) They were very nice people so, you know, you just- you grow up however you grow up. That's the way you think. (Small pause) And I think living in the country taught us to be more open to people. Until they wrong you, and then you don't.

All: (laughs)

Sue Rork Everett: But it was-it was great growing up on the farm. It really was. And I'm sure there are other people that don't agree with me, but not in my family anyway.

Gabriela Chapa: What year were you growing up around, uh, on the farm?

Sue Rork Everett: I'm sorry?
Gabriela Chapa: Uh, essentially what year were you born? If you don't mind me asking.
Sue: Oh, I was born in '41.
Gabriela: '41, okay. Okay, thank you!
Jordan: I heard you mention a trucking company? I was wondering how long that lasted and how good it was?
Sue Rork Everett: Uh, construction. It was building whatever, wherever, um, it was Eunice Parker Construction in Harlingen, and, uh, then he and I divorced when we've been married for ten years. And now remarried, and my husband now is, or was, store manager for Michael's Arts and Crafts. And he retired from that, and now we're in retirement!
Gabriela Chapa: Okay, so your retirement is where you currently reside?
Sue Rork Everett: Yeah, we were in San Antonio, and he retired. And we had previously lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and we moved to Mississippi because the kids are close around. I have six kids. I have one in Dallas, one in Michigan, and then the others are in Slidell, Louisiana. So we got close to them, but not so close that they're right on top of us. (laughs) That way we can spend time with them and go home! (laughs)
Sue Rork Everett: Oh goodness. Trying to think of anything else that you might be inter ested in but…
Gabriela Chapa: We are interested in anything you have to share.
Group: (laughs)
Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Pretty much.
Sue Rork Everett: (laughs)
Gabriela Chapa: Like, for retirement, I know a lot of people prefer to come down here to the Valley, and the fact that you stay over there is shocking.
Sue Rork Everett: Oh, yeah. Well, we thought we would move here so that we can see our grandchildren grow up a little. And now I have ten great-grandchildren, so I got kids running out my ears!
Gabriela Chapa: (chuckles)
Sue Rork Everett: Anyway. Anyway, anyway. Uh, that's a really- I mean, I can't think of anything else. Unless you have some other questions for me?
Mayela Cavazos: Uh, what about any other, uh like family traditions, um that either your family or, you know, the Fike family, um that have? Or that merged throughout the years?
Sue Rork Everett: I'm sorry, I didn't get the gist of that question. Go over it again for me?
Mayela Cavazos: Yeah, that, like any family traditions basically that your family, like the Rork family, um has had throughout the years that you know of? Or that you know of maybe the Fike family has had? Or that they've, like combined, or merged or anything like that?
Sue Rork Everett: Uh, not really. We, we do the traditional, you know. Thanksgiving and then Christmas, of course and w-uh birth…everybody's birthday. We have a barbecue. (laughs) When I lived in the Valley anyway. Here, we do the same thing, only we have crab boils here instead of barbecues. (laughs) Uh, anyway, but other than, no not really, anything spectacular, just the regular things that peop-, that families do. We have no, that is the one thing I would like to specify… none of us fight. We don't carry grudges against each other. If somebody wrongs somebody, we

talk it out, and it's always been that way. Nobody stays mad at anybody. Now that is a tradition. (laughs)

Sue Rork Everett: Okay, I can't… I really can't think of anything else.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Um, we're looking over it…

Gabriela Chapa: Still on tradition, is there anything you kind of miss since moving away from your family that still lives over here?

Sue Rork Everett: Oh, from living in Mississippi? Well, I would've if I didn't have family around, but I have enough of my own family. When we get together at Thanksgiving there's like between forty and fifty people at my house for Thanksgiving. So it's about the same as it was in the Valley. So yeah, we all get together for Thanksgiving, that's basically our family reunion, and, uh I think the Valley does the same thing. My sister and her family all get together at Thanksgiving, so. (pause) Usually at Christmas most of us stay at our houses at Christmas, and then we get together, you know, a little bit on and off all day and go to different people's houses, so… But Thanksgiving's the big holiday for us. At least for us here.

Mayela Cavazos: Um, and then another question that we had is, what you would think, uh has been the Fike or the Rork family's way of surviving through periods of adversity through time?

Sue Rork Everett: Not really.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: They had no secret to surviving any hardships?

Mayela Cavazos: Um, well like, like the, like how have they survi-like through periods of adversity?

Sue Rork Everett: Like what?

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Hardships. Hardships.

Mayela Cavazos: Like, like…

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: How did your family survive any hard times like Hurricane Beulah or…

Mayela/Jordan: Great Depression.

Sue Rork Everett: Oh, I-I don't think that we did anything that anybody else didn't do. We just survived, during those… you know. We tried to keep in touch with all the family and people that we knew that were on their own, or whatever, and, you know, didn't have the help that we could provide. So we did, we helped other people, and we helped each other. (Pause) The main thing I remember about Beulah is walking out side during the eye of the hurricane, and looking at palm trees and seeing one side covered with tarantulas and the other side was clear. (laughs) That's my big image of it. Now I went through Katrin-We went through Katrina here and that was, that was ooh, so much worse than Beulah. Mmmm, it was awful! Yeah, we had three trees fall on the house, and we had twenty-one trees in our yard fall, uh and big trees! (laughs) Yeah, it was, it was, man… Beulah. And Beulah lasted uh, maybe five or six hours. This one, K-Katrina started at five in the morning and lasted 'til six o'clock that night. Did not, I mean stopped during the eye, that was it, for about thirty minutes, and then it was just awful, awful, awful. We were without power, and water, and it was, it was just awful. You couldn't get out, you couldn't. There was no gas to buy. There was, you know, even if you got out you couldn't buy anything. There were no stores open. So we had to live on what we had. Thank goodness we had generators and stuff to keep us going, but a lot of people didn't. And I had a daughter that lived at that time in Atlanta and they brought us gas. They brought fifty-five-gallon drums of gas for us so that we could run the generators, otherwise I don't know what we'd

of done. But it was, it was awful. I could tell you about Katrina. (laughs) But really Beulah, I don't know. The main thing I remember is I was pregnant with my third child and he was… Beulah was due the day he was due, and I had a highway patrolman that lived next door and he told me, "Come to me if you get-go into labor 'cause I will get you to the hospital somehow." (laughs) And that was, Beulah, was my recollection.

Sue Rork Everett: Ok guys, anything else?

Gabriela Chapa: Um, one of the questions is what is the Fike's family's secret to withstanding the test of time? If you know?

Sue Rork Everett: I really don't know. I-I'd, you know, I was, I was only ten when she married Willard, so I was gone by the time all the buying and merging and all of that kind of stuff went on, so I don't know that much about any of that. (Pause) He was just a very good man. He was a very smart man, I will say for him. He didn't have much education, but he was super smart. I, even at ten years old, I knew that. (laughs) Uh, anyway, (pause) but I really don't know about the expanding of the farm or or any of… I know that he bought land when he could, and that my sister worked all the time, and she provided a lot of the money for the expansion of the farm, and uh she helped. She helped a lot. I don't think he'd of made it if he hadn't had Annie as his wife. But, I could be wrong. (laughs)

Mayela Cavazos: Um, we were also wondering if you, uh, going to your family's history, um, how the transition to the United States was for the Rork family, uh from Ireland?

Sue Rork Everett: Yeah, our family came over uh, my great-great-grand…great- grandfa ther? Uh, to Ellis Island, and I actually went to Ellis Island. I could not find his, his uh, name in the book, so ah, we were always told that's where he came, but he must have snuck onboard or something (laughing) 'cause he wasn't listed. But ah, he came over and they settled in oh, Pennsylvania and then they moved to, uh his kids married and they moved to Nebraska, and that was my grandfather. And then my dad married my mom and they moved to the Valley. (pause) And had a bunch of kids. (pause) But back then, there was, uh, my grandparents had 12 children. Back then they had a lot of kids. (laughs) And my mom's family had-ah my grandmother on my mother's family died when she…when my mother was three, and she was raised by an aunt or something that wasn't very nice to her. So I'm sure that's part of the reason my mother was always so sweet to all of us. She was an angel, and uh, but she died when she was three, and they lived in Arkansas. And I don't know how mom and dad met. Dad must have been there. I don't know how they met, but they ended up get ting married and moving down to South Texas. But, anyways, uh, I was trying to tell you about my grandparents, wasn't I? Uh, my grandpa, had uh, they had nine children, before, my mom was the second to the end, she was the eighth child, and uh…But he-he raised them all, I mean what he could, you know. Some of them were older and uh, and he, he, uh they, they tried to take care of the little ones. But he had to farm them out for a little while and then he got em back, but, but until they were big enough to, to basically take care of themselves. My mom said she was with her aunt for a couple of years I think, so, but it was a rough life for her. Now my other grandparents… my grandpa was a, Grandpa Rork, was a, uh, he was the president of the bank in Mena, Arkansas. And they brought, sorry, they moved from (laughs) Nebraska to Arkansas, and they hired him as the president of the bank and of course they're the ones that had twelve kids, so they took care of their kids. So it was a little different for him than it was her.

Mayela Cavazos: I-Do you know, uh the specifics about why, um your family moved to the Valley specifically?

Sue Rork Everett: Uh, they moved to the Valley when my first brother, Bobby, was, had just been born, so he was what? One or… one, I guess, when they moved down there which would, let's see… Brother-I was trying to think how much older he is than me. Uh, he's like five, five years older? I think he's five years older than I am, so that would make him born in '34? And that's when they would have moved. They lived in a tent, believe it or not, until daddy bought the house and had it moved in. It was-

[Call dropped, Recording Paused]

Sue Rork Everett: Hello?

Mayela Cavazos: Hello?

Sue Rork Everett: Hello?

Mayela Cavazos: Hello? Yeah, sorry, I apologize, the call dropped.

Sue Rork Everett: Yeah, we got cut off somehow. (laughs)

Mayela Cavazos: Yeah, I think, I think the, the call dropped somehow, I apologize.

Sue Rork Everett: Oh, anyway, was there anything else you wanted to ask?

Mayela Cavazos: Uh we, you sort of cut off. I think you had just mentioned that the family had been living in a tent, and then it sort of just cut off right there, so I don't know if you were saying anything else.

Sue Rork Everett: Oh, that's where it cut off?

Mayela Cavazos: Yeah.

Sue: Rork Everett: Oh, I just said I don't know how mom managed to keep, you know, two babies, 'cause my sister was only four, so it was uh, a little fun I'm sure. (laughs) Being in a tent, trying to take care of two babies, and, uh cook and clean, and whatever? But she did it until dad moved a house in and then, then we moved into-or they moved into a house. That's all hearsay, I-I mean, you know, and my sister knows more about that than I do. But anyway, anything else?

Mayela Cavazos: Um, we were also just wondering if there was any like religious traditions that your family has, um either kept or lost throughout your family's history?

Sue Rork Everett: Uh, actually, uh my dad was Catholic. We were not raised Catholic. When mom went to the priest after, after my sister was born and asked if they could do their marriage in the church and they-she, they told her yes, but her daughter would be a bastard no matter what, and she said forget it. And she went to the Baptist church, so we were all Baptist. And then when my sister married. She and family are Lutheran, and I think the rest of the family is Baptist. Now, I do have a daughter who married a Catholic and they, they converted to Catholicism. So, but the rest of us are all Baptist. But, now as far as anything like that, no not really.

Gabriela Cavazos: Ah, we also are wondering, um if the merging between the Fike and Rork changed any sort of engagement within the community?

Sue Rork Everett: No, I don't think so, no.

Gabriela Cavazos: Do you think it made any effect on the agriculture?

Sue Rork Everett: No, no. No, I'm sure they had arguments about what they were gonna plant and all that but, I mean, you know… But words, not arguments, 'cause my dad was really stubborn and Willard was too, so… and my brother. (small pause) But they managed to do it.

Gabriela Chapa: Do you know what they were planning at the time? Oh, planting?!

Sue Rork Everett: Uh, they planted a lot of cotton, and, um and vegetables. I know they planted, uh, um onions. And I remember one time, I don't know, ha carrots, that

kinda stuff. You know, vegetables. Oh, corn. They always planted corn. The main crop was cotton back then. Cotton was the one you made the most money with, so now you don't make money on it, so...

Sue Rork Everett: The government's got their hands in it, pretty much. (laughs) Anyways, this is being recorded. I better hush up. **(**all laugh)

Sue Rork Everett: Oh goodness! I'm sure they heard me complain about that a lot of times. (all laugh) Uhh...

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: So what did you guys barbeque? (small pause)

Sue Rork Everett: What did we barbeque?

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Yes ma'am.

Sue Rork Everett: Do what? Oh, ok, uh… we did a lot of ribs, and 'course hamburgers, and doe… deer if we had it. We even did a goat one time, and rabbits, we did rabbits. (pause) Whatever we had, basically.

Gabriela Chapa: Wait, rabbit?

Sue Rork Everett: Yep, we did rabbits. I used to go rabbit hunting, when I was young. I sat on the back of a fender of an old Ford pickup, with my gun and my flashlight and I would shine it and the rabbit would staying there. While it was looking at the flashlight, and I shot him. Then we took him home and eat him.

Gabriela Chapa: Ok, so you hunted?

Sue Rork Everett: Yeah, I did that. I did, we did that, we all hunted back then, ya know. My brothers and I would go hunting, and I was the best shot, and they let me shoot. Uh anyways, anyways, anyway, they can out fish me, but they couldn't out hunt me. (laughs) Oh goodness, like I said we had a great childhood. We really did. What people would consider dangerous today, you know riding on a pickup fender. I wouldn't let my kids do it, but I did. But it wasn't just me. There was another person on the other fender, so we could of shot each other, I guess, I don't know. Uh, we were probably fourteen,fifteen, but I was a big tomboy, so yeah, we didn't know that. (pause) Uh, anyway anyway, anyway. (pause)

Mayela Cavazos: We were wondering if you have any, I guess, opinion on how regulations affected farming and how like any effects it has had on the crops or agriculture?

Sue Rork Everett: (laughs) The regulations? They had about regulated them out of business! They're ridiculous. Every time I talk to my sister, I hear about something else the government wants them to do. (laughs) Ridiculous. It's ridiculous, and I'm sorry, but back when we were young, we used DDT to kill bugs and it didn't kill any of us. And you knew, you knew you had to wash everything before you used it. It was just ridiculous. But some of it was just stupid. (pause)

Gabriela Chapa: Do you and your sister talk about the…?

Sue Rork Everett: Don't get us started. Annie and I are both the same way, and I call her every morning to see how she's doing, and we get on Trump or anything that hap pens you know. With what you see on the news, and boy, we just rake 'em over the coals. And we always say one of these days they are going to come to our door. Come and get us. (laughs) I don't know if you can't laugh about, you might as well just… you don't want to cry, or stop. You all are growing up in a (pause) crazy world. Anyway, that's all we thought we were down to. You hate to say that because, I mean, I had an uncle, that told me one time back when I was in grade school, "They are messing over there with Cuba, so you better bend over. If you hear anything they tell during these drills, then you better just bend over and kiss your ass goodbye." And I said, "What?!" And was like, I don't know I was ten or twelve years old, and I

said, "Oh my goodness!" So 'course we were worried about them bombs growing up. We all thought we were gonna have an atom bomb dropped on us so, who knows what will happen, who knows, who knows. Anyway, I got off on the wrong subject sorry. (everyone laughs)

Sue Rork Everett: Anyway, anyway, alright y'all got any more questions?

Gabriela Chapa: We're wondering if you know, if Anna has an opinion about… highway that's supposed to be built though the farm?

Sue Rork Everett: Oh, I think that is the stupidest thing I've ever heard in life, and I don't even live down there. But to me it sounds stupid. All they're doing is fixing it up, so the guys from Mexico haul their drugs up there real fast. I know, I just I don't know. I don't know. I hope they don't do it. But who knows. (pauses) That's more, what do I say, uh, people with their hands in somebody else's pockets.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Hmm.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Do you know anything about thieves on the farm, um, people that would steal?

Gabriela Chapa: Thieves.

Sue Rork Everett: Did what on the farm!? No.

Gabriela Chapa: Do you know the farm equipment, um, your family used back in the day?

Sue Rork Everett: The only thing I really remember is uh, um, the planters that my dad used, and a disc, and our Ford tractor, because we used to play on the Ford tractor. After they quit using that, and they got the John Deeres. But uh, that's the only ones I remember. (pause) And I'm not, I'm not, I'm not sure how old I was when they got the John Deeres, but I think I was probably around fixin' to get married, or about to, you know, to start college or whatever anyway. Anyway, anyway! I'm sorry, I couldn't tell you more about the farmin', but I really don't know, that much about it. That's why I wasn't sure why Annie wanted me to be in the interview.

Mayela Cavazos: Um, we were also wondering if you could tell us anything about maybe, what separates, the success that your family, the Rork family, and now the Fike family has had on the south Texas region, um, compared to other families in the region, nearby, or in the regions?

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Do you have anything to say about that?

Sue Rork Everett: Uh, like I said, I was a kid most of the time, so, I really… I know that, that, my dad only, mostly, farmed part-time, until he quit his job. But um, we knew the neighbors but, I did never heard them talking you know, about crops or anything like that. So, I really didn't know much about what was going on with them either, unless the kids told me something and I just don't remember, but there were a lot of kids, a lot of kids are around. (pauses)

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: I have a random question. Did you catch bugs when you were younger?

Sue Rork Everett: Do we catch bugs?

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: Yep.

Sue Kennedy-Reyes: Yeah, lightning bugs. I used to catch those all the time, kept them in a jar. We also caught, uh lizards, and frogs, and whatever we could. We had a big canal right in front of the house, and we used to go swimming in it, and it, uh was really nice back then. I mean, it was a big canal, so, we caught all kinds of stuff. We actually got a few fish in that canal too so… Not very often, but once in a while.

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: That's all.

Gabriela Chapa: Do you think your family will continue farming for many, many, many years, or you think it'll come to an end?

Sue Rork Everett: Oh no. I think, I think, my nephews, and my, oh great-nephews, or whatever you call them, my nephews' kids are already farming. And there's already a junior, a junior bunch of them. So no. There's several of them that will keep it going, no matter what. (pause)They all love farming, so I mean it's something that you grow up doing and you love it. I didn't do it, so I don't have any desire to do any of it. But I had an older brother that did, and I had a brother that was a banker, so… He didn't, he didn't go into farming, and neither did my younger brother. (pause)

Jordan Kennedy-Reyes: So, since you said your brother was in banking, were they involved in any way with the farm and banking?

Sue Rork Everett: No. No, he actually… they actually bank with the other bank in town because of that. Because he was uh, uh at First National, and they banked with the First State Bank then. I do remember that our family, the Rork family, had their accounts and stuff at his bank, but, the Fikes and the farm and everything were in First State. You know, the farm loans, and all that kinda stuff, all came from First State. I don't know what they are called now. None of them are the same names. (chuckle)

Gabriela Chapa: Is there any specific reason you never got into farming?

Sue Rork Everett: I'm sorry?

Gabriela Chapa: Is there any specific reason you never got into farming?

Sue Rork Everett: Me? Ah, I have no desire to work out… I don't do yard work, that's what my husband says. You could come out and help. and I say no, I can't, there are kids. I have mowed the grass in San Antonio, or a couple of times. Then I hired somebody else to do it. It was like, "No! It's too hot! I can't do this." I mowed backyard and jumped in the pool, like uh, it ain't even happening. I jumped in the pool with my shoes. I mean my tennis shoes, and my clothes, and everything else I had out there. No way I'm doing this again. And actually, had a little boy come up and ask me, "Would you like me to mow your grass? I'll do it for $35." Yes! (chuckles) But anyways, back in the old days…

Mayela Cavazos: Alright, I think that's all the questions we have for now.

Sue Rork Everett: Alright, if you think of anything else, I'll be here all day.

Mayela Cavazos: Alright, thank you very much! Thank you very much for your time.

Sue Rork Everett: You can call me any time. Ok, thank you hun. Bye bye.

Mayela and Gabriela: Bye.

12270 CONTRACT

C. S. RAMBO TO F. M. REYNOLDS ET AL

State of Texas)
)
County of Rusk)

THIS CONTRACT of bargain and sale made and entered into this the first day of January A. D. 1936 by and between C. S. Rambo, hereinafter called vendor, and F. M. Reynolds and Bill Rork, hereinafter called vendees, all parties of Overton, Rusk County, Texas,-

W I T T N E S S E T H :

1. That the Vendor has this day bargained and sold, and by these presents does hereby bargain, sell and obligate himself to convey or cause to be conveyed in manner as hereinafter stated unto the said Vendees, all and singular, the following described property, to-wit:

"All of Lots O and P and the West part of Lot Q belonging to Vendor out of the Santa Cruz Ranch Subdivision located North and East of Edinburg, Hidalgo County, Texas, said Subdivision being out of the San Salvador Del Tule Grant and containing 291 acres of land, more or less, being the identical lands covered by contract between Vendor and Alfonso Alamia Et. Al. dated October 1935 reserving unto vendor the East 41 acres of that part of Lot Q as above described and conveying to Vendees and covering by this contract only All of Lots O and P and enough of the West part of Lot Q as will in the aggregate make and comprise 250 acres it being intended that the part of Lot Q here conveyed shall be defined by striking a line North and South through said Lot Q and paralel with its West Line and striking off sufficient acerage as will when added to said Lots O and P. comprise and embrace 250 acres, but reserving unto the Vendor as undivided one sixteenth (1/16) of all of the oil, gas and other minerals in, under or that may be produced from the said 250 acres herein conveyed."

2. The consideration paid and to be paid to Vendor, herein, by said Vendees for the property above described is the agreed sum of Four Thousand One Hundred Twenty-five & 00/100 ($4125.00) Dollars, to be paid as follows, -- One thousand 00/100 Dollars on or before January 1st, A. D. 1937; One thousand 00/100 Dollars on or before January 1st, A. D. 1938 and Two thousand One Hundred Twenty-five & 00/100 Dollars on or before January 1st, A. D. 1939--- with interest thereon provided and graduated as follows, to-wit: interest on $4125.00 for one year from January 1st, 1936, to January 1st, 1937 at the rate of ten per cent per annum payable on the first day of each month commencing February 1st, 1936 in monthly instalments of $34.37 per month; interest on $3125.00 for one year from January 1st, 1937 to January 1st 1938 at the rate of eight per cent per annum payable on the first of each month commencing February 1st, 1937 in monthly instalments of $20.83 per month; and interest on the sum of $2125.00 for one year from January 1st 1938 until January 1st, 1939, at the rate of seven per cent per annum in monthly instalments of $12.40 per month commencing on February 1st, 1938; it being the intent and purpose that the first One Thousand Dollars shall draw interest at the rate of 10%, the second Thousand Dollars to draw interest at 8% and the last $2125.00 to draw interest at the rate of 7% but intending that if more than the contemplated amount of principal be paid in any one year interest on same shall thereupon cease and the foregoing contemplated monthly payment interest instalments shall be thereby correspondingly decreased.

3. This contract is conditioned that Vendor will procure and deliver to Vendees no abstract of title but the vendees are buying the said land upon their own invest-

Land title contract #12270 Bill Rork and F.M. Reynolds purchased land from C.S. Rambo in 1934, p. 635

Contract 12270, page 635

igation and are to take the title as it is received by Vendor to the land in question Vendor to deliver only the title he receives in his purchase and warranting only against any lien, flaw or incumbrance he has put against the title to the said land while he holds such title, and if there be any flaws or defects in said title the Vendees shall cure same at their own expense.

4. No money is changing hands at the execution of this instrument but the mutual promises of the parties and the effort and expense already put out by the parties is deemed by them and here now agreed to be sufficient consideration for the validating of this contract.

5. It is understood and agreed that upon the execution of this contract the said Vendees shall come into immediate possession of the said lands so purchased and shall thereafter have such possession so long as the terms and conditions of this contract be fully met but that in event of the failure of Vendees to perform the conditions of this contract or their failure to make any of the payments herein required to be made at the time and amount as herein stated then and in that event the Vendor shall recover possession of said lands so sold and Vendees or their successors in interest shall surrender to Vendor such possession without any action or proceeding at law and without resort to any action, proceeding or process and Vendor shall not be liable for any damage to Vendees in taking back the possession of said lands for such default.

6. In the event of any default by the Vendees in performing as provided in this contract and it becomes necessary for the Vendor to reassume possession of the lands in question and he does so then and in that eventaany and all payments theretofore made by the Vendees is to be considered as rental of the property and any and all such money allready paid by the Vendees to Vendor shall not be repaid by the said Vendor but shall be kept and held by him as rental of the said lands.

7. It is further stipulated and agreed that the Vendees may sell all of any portion of the lands covered by this contract but only for a price of not less than $16.50 per acre and further provided that the said purchase price shall be applied upon the payment of the amount due and owing from Vendees to Vendor on this purchase contract or so much as will complete the amount due under this contract and upon any such sale and arrangements being made for this Vendor to receive said money he binds himself to forthwith make, execute and deliver to Vendees or the purchaser designated by them a deed to the whole or part of the lands so sold.

8. It is further stipulated and agreed that Vendees may lease the lands covered by this contract for oil, gas or other minerals and Vendor hereby empowers Vendees to made and execute such lease but it is expressly agreed that any rental money received from such lease is to be paid over to the Vendor so long as there remains due him any money under this purchase contract and if itsbe deemed necessary Vendor agrees to sign and execute any such oil and gas or mineral lease.

9. Vendees bind themselves to pay all taxes on the lands covered by this contract from date hereof forward.

10. Upon the payment of the purchase price of $4125.00 together with the interest thereon as herein provided Vendor agrees and binds himself to make, execute and deliver unto the Vendees or their successors his deed to the foregoing described lands.

11. This contract shall extend to and be binding upon the heirs, executors, administrators of the parties hereto.

12. The indebtedness of $4125.00 as the purchase price of the above described land is evidenced by a note in said amount executed by Vendees in favor of the Vendor this

Land title contract #12270 Bill Rork and F.M. Reynolds purchased land from C.S. Rambo in 1934, p. 636

day and additional security is given to secure the said payment but it is understood that all of the papers cover and have reference to the same sum.

13. Any improvements now on said land or any improvements placed thereon hereafter shall remain on said land and not removed unless and until the purchase price mentioned herein and accrued interest thereon shall have been fully paid.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties hereto have set their respective names hereto in duplicate originals each party taking copy this 28 day of December A. D. 1935

C. S. Rambo
Vendor.

F. M. Reynolds

Bill Rork
Vendees.

State of Texas)
)
County of Rusk)

Before me the undersigned authority on this day personally appeared C. S. Rambo, F. M. Reynolds and Bill Rork known to me to be the persons whose names are subscribed to the foregoing instrument and acknowledged to me that they executed the same for the purposes and consideration therein expressed. Given under my official hand and seal of office this 28 day of December 1935.

(SEAL)

Don L Wakeman

Notary Public Rusk County, Texas.

FILED for record this 1st day of February, A.D. 1936 at 1:25 o'clock P. M.

J. L. STONE, County Clerk, Hidalgo County, Texas.

By H. C. Little Deputy.

RECORDED this 3rd day of February, A. D. 1936 at 3:40 o'clock P. M.

SEAL

J. L. STONE, County Clerk,

By Deputy.

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Land title contract #12270 Bill Rork and F.M. Reynolds purchased land from C.S. Rambo in 1934, p. 63.

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Front row sitting: Hunter Fike, Hannis Fike, Woodrow Villarreal, Warren Villarreal, Kale Miller, Harper Fike

Middle row: Cooper fike, George Fike, Teddy Fike, Beverlybelle Fike, Michael Fike, Betsyanna Fike, Karen Fike, Anna Fike, and Sam Fike

Back row: Adam Fike, Kim R. Fike, Wendy Fike, Matthew Fike, Leslie Fike, Daniel Fike, Shelly Fike, Athena Fike Joshua Fike, Raychel Fike Villarreal, and D.J. Villarreal (missing: Taylor Miller)

All at a Fike Family gathering – November 2017 – Edinburg, TX

Mrs. Fike loves peacocks and there are several of them on her property.

The males often be heard crying out for the females throughout the day.

George and Wendy Fike, Michael and Karen Fike, Anna (Mrs. Willard) Fike, and Sam Fike with Miss T

George Fike, Michael Fike, Karen Fike, Anna Fike, Raychel Fike Villarreal, Sam Fike, and Miss T

Adam Fike, Wendy Fike, Matthew Fike, Daniel Fike and Joshua Fike.

Seated front row: Cooper Fike, George Fike, Wendy Fike, and Teddy Fike

Standing back row: Hunter Fike, Kim Respondek Fike, Matthew Fike, Leslie Fike and Kale Miller (Missing: Taylor Miller)

Matthew & Leslie Fike with sons Harper Fike and Kale Miller (Missing: Taylor Miller)

Adam and Kim Fike with sons Teddy and Cooper

Front Row: Beverlybelle Fike, Betsyanna Fike, Michael Fike, Harper Fike, Anna Fike and Raychel Villarreal

Second Row Standing: Hannis Fike, Woodrow Villarreal, Daniel & Shelly Fike, Joshua & Athena Fike, Karen Fike, Warren Villarreal and D.J. Villarreal

Joshua & Athena Fike with sons Hannis & Harper

Daniel & Shelly Fike with daughters Beverlybelle and Betsyanna

Raychel & D.J. Villarreal and sons Warren & Woodrow

Raychel Fike Villarreal with Anna Rork Fike

Michael Fike with his mother Anna Rork Fike

Anna Rork Fike with son Sam Fike