

Citrus Hall of Fame Oral History Interview

Florida Southern College

Interviewee:	George Austin
Interviewer:	Richard Soash
Date:	February 2, 2010
Camera Tech:	LuAnn Mims, College Archivist
Others present:	Eugene Charlie Fanning
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Transcription:	Megan Crouch, July 2010

Soash: *Hi my name is Richard Soash, today is February 9, 2010. We will be interviewing George Austin for the Florida Citrus Hall of Fame. We are currently at the Archives Center at the Florida Southern College and people present include myself, our camera technician and college archivist LuAnn Mims, and my fellow student Hall of Fame fellow Charlie Fanning.*

Soash: *Hi, would you please tell us your full name?*

Austin: My name is George Austin, A-U-S-T-I-N.

Soash: *Okay, could you tell us the year you were born and your hometown growing up?*

Austin: I was born in 1936 and my hometown was a little town called Alva, Florida and it's located just east of Fort Meyers.

Soash: *Okay, I understand your family was involved with the citrus industry, how did they get established and what all did they do?*

Austin: My father, I guess, he was originally from Alabama and he came down to the area with a railroad. I think he worked as a telegraph or tele ... whatever, operator and he later, I don't quite know what the circumstances were, but he later became the manager of the citrus packing house called Owanita Citrus Growers Association, which was located in Alva.

Soash: *Were you involved as a young man growing up in the citrus industry?*

Austin: Oh yeah, he figured out a way to keep me busy, you know, doing things in the packing house on the weekends and after school, that sort of thing. Pasting labels, making brace boxes. You know, during Christmas we went out and clipped cumquats, put the cellophane, you know, on the Christmas packages, that sort of thing.

Soash: *I read in your biography that you are the oldest of your siblings and you have some younger sisters.*

Austin: I have two younger sisters, yes.

Soash: *Were they involved with all of the citrus?*

Austin: Not really, not really. They did, I guess it was probably more of a man thing back then. You know, this was back in the ... in the '40s, that sort of thing.

Soash: *Would you tell us a little bit about your higher education?*

Austin: Yes, I ... I have a bachelors degree from the University of Florida and although I've spent most of my career in the citrus business, my degree is in building construction which is part of the College of Architecture back then ... it's ... they've renamed it to the College of Design, Planning and Construction; Design, Construction, and Planning.

Soash: *You spent 1954-1959 at the University of Florida, correct?*

Austin: Yeah, that's correct.

Soash: *What did you do upon graduation from ... ?*

Austin: I went to work with a national steel company, actually a steel products company. We did a lot of ... we had steel forms for concrete work. We also did steel windows, steel doors, barred doors, structural ... you know, structural products and reinforcing bars for concrete. So I worked and actually went through a training program in Atlanta, at their office in Atlanta, and then I got transferred to Birmingham and later to Miami and so probably worked for them about six or seven years.

Soash: *You also served in the Army Reserve for about eight years?*

Austin: That's correct

Soash: *Or seven, okay.*

Soash: *How did you move from construction to citrus?*

Austin: My father passed away and, you know, in the mean time the packing house ended up being ... it's ... we had a shift from fresh fruit, to process, to FCOJ back then and the packing business wasn't near as lucrative ... and they ended up ... it was a, you know, association membership. So they elected to close the packing house and you know, he still maintained some groves and boxing fruit from ... you know ... from local people and I guess I thought I wanted to try the citrus business.

Soash: *What was your early career like in the citrus business?*

Austin: You mean after I came back after the 60?

Soash: *Yes, sir.*

Austin: After my father died? You know I inherited a really small operation and I was fortunate that I could you know ... it grew over the years, but it was kind of a one-man show and I kind of did everything ...

Soash: *Wow.*

Austin: ... from ... you know, we primarily bought and sold fruit, harvested fruit, hauled fruit, that sort of thing and ... so you know I'd ... I had to be involved in everything.

I had to be involved in the planning, the harvesting, the hauling, and even drove trucks at night. [laughter] So it was a ... it was a, you know ... probably you wouldn't have ... I was probably not very smart at the time. [laughter] It was a tough deal back then.

Soash: *I have read that you are a great advocate for small citrus growers. So that's something I would like to cover later on ...*

Austin: Okay.

Soash: *... in the interview.*

Austin: Okay, great.

Soash: *I know you were a one-man show, but was there anyone you looked up to during the course of your career?*

Austin: Yes, you know I don't know that I had ... you know ... specific mentors per se, but there was a lot of influential people in my career. Hugh English, who we talked about earlier, was one of them. Later on after we formed the Gulf Citrus Growers Association our executive director, Ron Hamel was another very influential person in my ... in my career and I'm sure there are numerous others that I'm forgetting to mention.

Soash: *What were some of the major changes you've witnessed over your time in the citrus industry?*

Austin: Well of course like I've mentioned before, if you go back to you know actually before I was ... when I was growing up in the industry, it was primarily a packing house industry and it shifted to process and then ... there was ... actually process in which was primarily frozen concentrate and then the market, you know, moved from frozen concentrate to not-from-concentrate product.

Brazil became a major player in the market, certainly after the '62 freeze, which was a big influence on ... you know where the ... will happen ... what's continued to happen to the citrus industry. It's probably a number of other things that I can't think of right off hand [flipping through papers]. Well I don't see it right now, in a bit ... anyway.

Soash: *That's fine, you're doing great. Let's talk about some of the work you've done on behalf of small growers, what does that encompass? What motivated you to become their advocate so to speak?*

Austin: [laughs] Well I guess to some degree that it's by chance. Like I said earlier I inherited a small customer base from my father ... or a small customer ... small growers from my father and the ... you know, it became evident that ... that that was going to be, you know working with small growers was going to be one of the better ways to expand the business I was in ... it ... I guess you might say it ... it became obvious to me that you know, that the small growers were going to be loyal as long and they were primarily looking for, you know, honest treatment and you know fair price for their fruit, somebody that they felt reasonably sure would harvest their fruit every year.

That sort of thing ... and ... I'm not sure how, you know, I got that designation, but ... and then later on, you know, when I served on various boards. Like the Florida Citrus Commission Mutual, even Mutual, and Gulf Citrus I was ... you know I was ... probably the person that was closely associated with the smaller growers of the state.

Soash: *That makes a lot of sense. Let's elaborate on the Gulf Citrus Growers Association, of course out of west Florida. You started in 1986? Or you were a part of ...*

Austin: Yeah, I was one of the, I guess if you want to say, founding [laughter] ... founding members of that and it started about 1986 ... '85, '86 so and it was ... it was ... it was originally started as a grapefruit mar— ... well ... the main focus of the organization was originally the grapefruit market and it was patterned somewhat after the Indian Citrus River League. There again to promote grapefruit, or what we call, Gulf grapefruit or grapefruit grown in southwest Florida.

It ... there again it was a big ... there was somewhat of a shift over a period of time and the fact that ... you know ... we fairly soon realized that you know, we needed ... there was a lot of other issues out there beyond marketing that we ... that we needed to spend some time on. You know, for example, water issues. We're in an area where ... you know ... there's a lot of critical water issues. Usage issues, quality issues, that sort of thing. Labor became ... labor became a big issue that the organization

developed and in addition to that our executive director, which we ... Ron Hamel, which we were fortunate enough to hire from the milk industry.

He served in Washington DC as a lobbyist for the milk industry and we were fortunate that he was looking to ... to get out of Washington to come back to Florida, sort of thing. And ... he felt very strongly about the fact that the organizations should be involved in ... in community relations, do a better job with working with urban communities because it was becoming obvious that they were influencing in our industry with their regulatory and the growth issues, that sort of thing. So ... so actually the organization as it exists today really doesn't do much grapefruit marketing, so to speak. It's shifted more into these other areas.

Soash: *Are you still involved with the Association?*

Austin: Yes, I didn't really plan on hanging around [laughter] forever there, but Ron and I, our executive director, have remained good friends, his personal friend. So he keeps trying ... he keeps me involved, I guess and I'm the chairman, currently the chairman of the long range planning committee of Gulf Citrus.

Soash: *And you were president of three terms of ...*

Austin: Right, not consecutively, but over a period of time.

Soash: *What were your responsibilities as president of the Association?*

Austin: That's a good question that I didn't anticipate ...

Soash: *Sorry about that.*

Austin: Well, of course, needless to say, the mechanics of running the meetings and that sort of thing, and working with the various committee chairmen. In general, you know, having the presence in the various places where we wanted to be seen and heard.

Soash: *Can we go back and talk a little bit about some of the issues that the Citrus Growers Association had to deal with such as labor or water control? I think you get into a little more depth as to why problems existed and how the Association went about trying to find solutions.*

Austin: Yeah, the ... most of the southwest Florida ... or most of southern Florida actually, is ... water is influenced by the south ... southwest Florida ... South Florida Water Management District, which ... which covers a great deal of, you know, Lake Okeechobee is involved there, everglades and runs through there, St. Lucie, Loxahatchee, that sort of thing. And ... water issues, there's supply and demand, especially quality became, you know, as time went on became a real big issue.

Not only for the, you know, urban communities and here again, another good reason why Gulf got, you know, wanted the relationship with the urban communities, but ... but also for agriculture and also for environmentally, which became ... you know, a major competitor for, you know, water usage and that sort of thing.

Soash: *How did the Gulf Citrus Growers deal with the shortages in water? What were some of the solutions they tried to ...*

Austin: Well one thing we did, of course the water management meetings were all public and we ... we always had a particular ... our executive director was always there. Always had ... you know available and whenever there is an issue the board of directors would go [inaudible] ... took a position you know, if it was appropriate. Took a position on it and Ron you know, made sure that that position was known to the ... to either the ... well we weren't still involved with the core, but it was mostly water management.

Soash: *That makes sense. What were some of the labor issues that the Association tried to deal with?*

Austin: Well I think probably the, at least in recent years it's been the ... the H2A program and ... and how we ... how we handle ... in trying to accomplish some method of having, what do I want to say ... I guess ... temporary worker status, you know, and then ... and then there's always the illegal issues, compliance issues, you know, what do we do as an organization to ... to enhance our compliance with the requirements, you know, the labor requirements.

How do we work with the regulatory authorities? You know that sort of thing. And ... and the organization was successful in starting some programs that ... we had plenty of speakers over the years from ... from labor enforcement and that sort of thing ... and we just primarily, you know, trying to figure out how to ... how to work within the system as far as the regulatory requirements.

Soash: *Could you explain a little bit what the H2A program is? I'm not familiar with it.*

Austin: Well, it's a program ... it's a federal government program that allows offshore workers from [inaudible] to work harvesting citrus if the employer meets certain requirements. And over the years those requirements have been fairly strenuous as far as housing ... and ... and pay scales and such as it is. And we ... a lot of us ... the industry, one of the goals you know ... one of the issues I guess I should say, was they would like to use more legal offshore labor that you know, would probably qualify them for the H2A program, but also the regulatory requirements were such that ... that made it very difficult and so you know, there was always ... we always tried to figure out ways to simplify that process if possible.

Soash: *Do you remember anything about the typical demographics of your employees, especially as you went from a smaller grower to a larger producer, grower?*

Austin: The employees per se?

Soash: *Just the demographics.*

Austin: What ... I guess I'm a little confused. I know what demographics is, but I don't know how it relates to employees I guess is what I ...

Soash: *Like the number of employees that your company employed.*

Austin: Okay, okay.

Soash: *Race, gender that kind of thing.*

Austin: Okay, you know, we ... even when we became you know, a little large, we didn't have ... there was basically only like a three person staff as far as the office is concerned. We did additional truck drivers, that sort of thing. We ended up mostly sub-contracting our harvesting later on. So we were never a large employer per se.

Soash: *Okay. Would you elaborate some on your 1993 appointment to the Florida Citrus Commission? I believe you were appointed by Governor Lawton Chiles?*

Austin: That's right, yeah. I'm a Republican appointed by a Democrat. [laughter]

Soash: *It happens sometimes.* [laughter]

Austin: But I, you know, I had some support from some of the Democratic community and particularly Gerald Davis, for an example, who was on the Commission supporting my appointment and ... and at that time I was becoming a little more politically involved through Gulf Citrus so you know ... we had some political people who endorsed me to run so ... but kind of the bottom line is I don't know exactly [laughter while talking] why I was appointed. I was ... I was honored, but I don't know ... [fades off to low inaudible talking]

Soash: [Over Austin's low talking] *Clearly they thought you were qualified. You served two terms on the food service committee?*

Austin: That's right.

Soash: *What did your work there entail?*

Austin: Well, it was ... actually [clears throat] excuse me. At the time it was food service and school marketing and so it was ... it was mostly ... monitoring as I should say more than anything else, what the food service people and the school lunch room program was doing within the Department of Citrus ... and you know, they were needless to say, part of the budget ... and they had a lot of ... a lot of different programs going on and you know, the presenting of those programs to the entire Commission you know, for approval and that sort of thing.

Soash: *So you ...*

Austin: And you know, going ... we went to long national food shows and that sort of thing.

Soash: *Did you ever work with the federal government or have to present to the federal government?*

Austin: Well, we didn't per se as a ... as ... as a, I don't think ... probably didn't come through the food service. Certainly through the school marketing program we made requests for product for the schools and for the government to purchase, you know, products for distribution within the school system ... and ... but ... most of ... I wasn't ... most of my, you know, time I spent in Washington was more of a, you know, in other area on tariff and that sort of thing.

Soash: *And we'll be getting to that later on in the interview towards the end. What were some of the issues that the Florida Citrus Commission dealt with in the mid '90s?*

Austin: Well, you know, we always dealt with quality issues and you know, product. We ... I was ... I was trying to think ... we, in the mid '90s we also, you know, started having the challenges of ... of what to do when harvesting fruit. In other words, we realized that we couldn't continue to harvest fruit by hand if we were going to remain competitive and so we got into the chemical assisted mechanical harvesting was one thing that I recall and ... and a fair amount of work done in ... back in ... even back in the '90s.

Soash: *That's interesting. Could you elaborate on the harvesting? How the process changed. How you go about it, even if you get a little bit into the nitty-gritty details. We don't mind.*

Austin: Okay. Well ... the difficult thing and I think even today after 20 years or whatever of looking at ... it still, you know, it's somewhat obvious that there's no one system that's going to ... fit all, sort of thing ... and over the years we've had these, you know, very difficult times with labor, sometimes we have an abundance of labor, but generally speaking the cost of labor has been on the increase for a number of years and so the industry started looking at various methods.

We used, even back then we had, you know, trunk shakers, we looked at solution materials to loosen the fruit on the trees. We even used wind machines to try to blow it off. We used vacuum machines to try to deliver it from either the ground or some kind of a ... a central point to, you know, to a ... to a holding area. So, and you know that work's still going on today and ... you know even though we have some ... some commercial harvesting methods available, mostly being ... mostly being some kind of a shaking system with a catch system. [shrugging his shoulders] We still have challenges in that area.

Soash: *What would you say is the most effective way of harvesting is in today?*

Austin: Well I think the industry feels like that ... that one of the things that ... that they need to ... that they're trying to develop and trying to get FDA approval on is some kind of material that loosens the fruit prior to harvest so that whatever system it is, whether it be a foliage shaker or a trunk shaker or

whatever kind of system is being used, the removal's a lot easier. In other words, rather than having 10 or 12 pounds of pull required to remove an orange, you have half that [motioning his hands to represent a portion cutting in half].

And ... so that material is still being tested in the industry and ... and it still seems to be something that the industry would like to ... would like to incorporate in ... in any kind of harvesting system that might be used. And actually there's some ... there's some work being done in robotic harvesting. Now this is ... this hasn't been out ... this is ... this is actually been, not been funded by the industry, but ... but actually ironically most of it's being funded by you know, federal programs such as NASA or you know people like that that are you know, looking for improved robotics.

Soash: *I'm going to switch gears on you a little bit ...*

Austin: Sure

Soash: *... and ask you about some of the trips to Europe that you've been on. I read that in your biography from the meeting this last year when they spoke to everyone. What were your responsibilities while in Europe? What were you looking for? That kind of thing.*

Austin: I was trying to think. You know most of my European trips were ... were associated with ... with marketing, which was also associated with wheat. At the time we had ... we had representatives, I don't know exactly how the system works today, but we had representatives in both Europe or ... or ... advertising and public relations and firms that represented you know, the ... the Department of Citrus in both Europe and Asia and ... and most ... most of those trips were incorporated with those firms and also you know, food shows that happened to be ongoing at the time and you know, whether it be Belgium or Germany or you know wherever.

Soash: *Which countries were you most predominately visiting?*

Austin: Later on a lot of you know, there was ... there was some additional effort to go into China, but while I was there it was primarily ... it was primarily Europe and so the countries I ended up going to were France, Germany, Belgium, [nodding his head] that sort of thing.

[break in taping]

Soash: *Okay, I wanted to ask you to go into a little bit more detail on some of the basics for us non-citrus majors. What does production entail? Did the fruit that you guys bring in; was it from your own groves? From other small growers?*

Austin: No I was ... I was primarily a citrus fruit dealer. A licensed citrus fruit dealer and you know, [smiling] more commonly known as a bird dog in the industry or was at one time, which meant I bought fruit from other growers and ... usually you know, was responsible for the harvesting and transportation of that fruit to a ... to a plant such as Tropicana or Coca-Cola or whoever.

Soash: *What did production entail ... I know your father's business did stuff with production, correct?*

Austin: Right, he did ... he did a fair amount of basic production work, such as fertilization spraying that sort of thing. Mowing, you know we didn't have a lot of herbicides back when he was around, or we didn't have any so we still used a lot of disk ... disking in groves back then. So you know, he was ... I've never been a production person. I've had some groves, but I've mostly relied on somebody else to take care of it for me or at least advise me.

Soash: *Going back to when you were a kid, you talked about pasting citrus labels onto the boxes. Can you tell me how the citrus labels play into your memory of the citrus industry?*

Austin: Well I mean that's one way they play into it. I pasted a lot of them. [laughter] But no ... looking back we had ... we had about ... I think we had either ... what was it [counting with his index finger] one, two, three ... we had about four or five packing houses in the area.

Soash: *Okay.*

Austin: Even back then and ... well of course we don't have any left today since due to the closures of the last couple of years, but ... but we had a number of packing houses and they all had different labels and a lot of them were ... were fairly descriptive, fairly colorful, that sort of thing, and ... and they depicted, you know, they depicted a lot of ... geographical areas in the state.

You know, since we were from the swamp we had some alligator labels and that sort of thing ... and some Indian type labels and ... and the other thing and I don't know if I realized it back then, but you know various labels even within one packing house depicted different quality ... or could well have been ...

Soash: *Oh.*

Austin: ... different quality you know, in the box.

Soash: *That's really interesting. How would that work?*

Austin: Well, there again I may be off in an area I shouldn't be in. But ...

Soash: *Go for it.*

Austin: ... but you know, A packing house may have ... may have had one primary label [gesturing with his hands] which they always put on their number one product, their best quality product. They may have had another label that they ... they put on some special, like a Christmas pack for someone and then you know, if they had a number two business or a business where quality wasn't quite the issue ... they were marketing somewhere like I said, where quality wasn't quite the issue they may have had a separate label.

Soash: *So each packing house would have their own individual labels?*

Austin: Each ... Each packing house would have their own individual labels and then might have several to do within the same packing house. And also ... also we had labels that ... that ... we had marketing organizations back then, one of them, which is now called ... it's Seald Sweet. You might be using the Seald Sweet label with ... with a given packing house so ... or you might have a packing house label that associated with Sealed Sweet.

But, so I, you know, I think it's one thing that a lot of people have been interested in is the ... is the old labels that ... that were used and ... and I ... I know that you guys are ... are going to have a presentation or a collection of at least ... replicated labels and so ... I think that's really exciting. I think it'll ... I think it'll grow a lot of interest.

Soash: *One last question about the labels; how effective do you think they were as an advertising tool back when you were a kid? If you can articulate that kind of ... [Austin shakes his head] I know it's a very broad question ...*

Austin: You know I understand and you know ... and I have to kind of use my perception of ... of back then, but ... but I think that they were a major factor in marketing ...

Soash: *Mm-hmm.*

Austin: ... I think that they were a major factor in ... in marketing. I think they ... you know, a lot of the Florida packed citrus was distributed in the northeast and I think that probably buyers and consumers

both ... that labels became very important to them and was a big decision maker in ... in what they were buying.

Soash: *Especially if you were from the northeast and haven't had a good sense of what Florida is all about and have this image of it as a paradise and you see that on the label and it might make you gravitate towards buying that particular fruit item.*

Austin: [nodding] Exactly.

Soash: *Okay ... moving on to your work on the tariff, you're all grown up now and not a kid anymore. You worked on the Tariff Oversight Committee; was that a state committee? Was it more local?*

Austin: It was ... it was state. It ... it was a committee that ... [sighs] ... that was formed primarily; had a lot of rural representatives on it, but it was primarily formed of ... from the relationship between Department of Citrus and Florida Citrus Mutual.

Soash: *Okay.*

Austin: And ... the committee was formed to ... it's you know, probably a better name for it would be Citrus Tariff Preservation Committee [laughs] ...

Soash: *Hmm.*

Austin: ... or something like that. But ... it was formed to ... to lobby and to monitor what was going on with ... the ... let's see it would be the ... the FTAA negotiations, which ... which was ... which was a trade proposal that was ... that was authorized or the Congress authorized for the US to be a part of, to negotiate tariff's trade issues with, in the western hemisphere.

The original trade proposal involved 34 countries in the western hemisphere. It was somewhat modeled after NAFTA, North American Free Trade Agreement.

Soash: *Right.*

Austin: It was very ambitious. Our committee ended up spending a fair amount of money on a lobbying firm out of Washington, Aiken and Gump, which Florida Citrus Mutual still uses today as their representative in Washington and ... the ... I guess you know, kind of the best way that, I'm sure the authority no longer exists you know, for the US to negotiate in that trade ... particular trade agreement, but in ... it's ... it's probably ... it's probably best described as ... as a proposed trade agreement that's been in a coma for a number of years now.

Soash: *So the main goal of the program was to keep the tariff intact to encourage domestic production? Is that a fair way of putting it?*

Austin: That's right, particularly since you know, we were no longer by that time ... we were no longer the dominating ... dominant producer in the world ...

Soash: *Yeah.*

Austin: ... of processed citrus product or orange juice and it was ... it was just ... it was an effort to make sure that we did whatever we could do or had to do to maintain the current ... we weren't trying to get an increase tariff necessarily or anything like that, but to try to maintain the tariff we currently had.

Soash: *Without getting too partisan, could you go into the politics of the tariff just a little bit?*

[inaudible talking]

Austin: Within our own organization or within the larger political ...

Soash: *I was thinking of within the state.*

Austin: Well, I think the, you know, I think there's always been a ... we always realized we had a difference of opinionand ... number one ... one being that how do you fund something that, you know, that's going to spend this much money, an organization is going to spend this much money. The ... we ... we pretty much funded it, or partially funded it I guess you could say because we ended up with the shortfall, but we partially funded it by ... by a grower non-mandatory tax or a voluntary tax on ... on boxes of fruit.

There was you know, a fair amount of back and forth about policy, how to approach this, you know, whether you ... how strong of a position to take, this sort of thing. I think kind of the good thing about it all ... is that at least today it's fairly defined that ... that most of the lobbying, most of the political action work, whether it be state or federal is being done by Florida Citrus Mutual and the Department of Citrus, its' ... it's kind of doing mostly marketing, research, and regulatory like that ... that they were originally mandated to do.

Soash: *Okay, I believe in my interview with Dr. Attaway he mentioned a box tax, is that what you were referring to?*

Austin: Right ... right, I think we ... we ended up with a voluntary box tax of a cent and a half a box for at least a couple of years.

Soash: *And the growers were in favor of it because it meant tariff could stay in place?*

Austin: Right. It was a, you know, here again it was ... it was a sales ... it had to be sold to the growers, but it's ... it's like what's going on today to some degree where you have ... where you have growers willing to ... to increase ... willing to accept increased taxes to do research. For example, because of the greening to try to work on the greening and cankering you know a lot of pests and diseases we have going on today.

Soash: *Okay, coming up towards the end of the interview I wanted to ask ... if ... about some of the interviews and editorials you have done in the past. In the biography it said that you have become to be known as the voice of agriculture [Austin laughs] in southwest Florida. [Austin laughs] If I don't embarrass you too much by telling you that.*

Austin: Well that may be ... that may be a little stretch [Soash and Austin laugh]. You know I could kind of preach it, representation of the small growers and that sort of thing because most of my customers all were small growers. Yeah, but that may be a little stretch about [Soash laughs] being the voice of agriculture. But I think you know, if ... if you look for maybe you know, maybe the reason you could ... you could some might ... some might think that was because you know, I ended up being fairly visible with the Gulf Citrus organization and we spent some time in Tallahassee, Washington, and here again like I said before, Ron was a big advocate of doing community relations and urban you know, trying to work with the urban community.

So he got us all involved with whether it be a service organization or whether it be a ... the economic development or the Lee County for an example, you know, he always wanted a representative. We always did talks you know, to the service organizations and he you know, wanted us to be, have representatives on the various chambers of commerce and economic development, that sort of thing.

Soash: *Is that why you were involved in the Horizon Council? Could you explain a little bit about what the Horizon Council does today?*

Austin: Yeah they're ... they're an economic development group. It's in Lee County, the advisory board to the county economic development. Encompasses, are ... they have about 50 members ... there's you

know, everything from the school board to the chamber of commerce to individual businesses ... and ... I represent Gulf Citrus on the board and we're the only ... only agriculture owned ...

Soash: *Ah.*

Austin: ... board. And ... and we have ... we make recommendations to the ... to the Citrus Commission ... [shaking his head] or not the ... Citrus Commission, but to the county commission, Lee County.

We just recently ... one of the big issues right now on our agenda is jobs and to try to encourage ... and try to encourage business, you know, we've been so dependent on tourism, for example, in our area, so we've been trying to encourage you know, private business, for an example we got the county commission to set aside twenty-five million dollars as ... for incentives to private businesses that would create jobs you know, in our area.

So it's ... it's kind of ... it's ... it's ... I consider it fairly important ...

Soash: *Yeah.*

Austin: ... that agriculture be represented even though Lee County doesn't have a lot of agriculture or certainly not a lot of citrus within the county. They ... they're kind of like ... they influence what's going on. Lee and Collier, we have five county Gulf citrus area and the two coastal counties, Lee and Collier, tremendously influence what's going on in Hendry, and Glades, Charlotte, for an example.

Soash: *Yeah that makes a lot of sense that every part of the community of the county, whether it's agricultural, whether it's more the actual towns and cities itself be represented. So it's good that you're providing a voice of the industry.*

Austin: And ... and ... and now there's a lot of land issues, use issues that are affecting agriculture and you've really got to start having a presence on ... you know in county government especially you know, the larger urban counties.

Soash: *Makes sense. What final thoughts do you have on the span of your career? Is there anything about your involvement in Florida citrus that you'd like to cover before we end the interview?*

Austin: Well, I guess I ... the main thing is you know, I consider myself very fortunate to be you know, involved in the industry and ... [smiling] especially the recognition I've gotten recently. It's been flattering and ... and you know, it's been great ... it's been great to you know, be able to serve ... have been able to serve on the Florida Citrus Commission and be involved you know, in the various organizations that I've been involved in. Gosh I don't know ... you know, it's a ... it's been great.

Needless to say, the industry is in transition and I suppose always will be. Probably never be the size industry it was you know, during my career, but I'm optimistic that they'll still have a commercial industry in Florida and going forward and ... you know, I, certainly here again, I've been real lucky to be you know, associated with the industry.

Soash: *Well, thank you very much.*

[END]