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**Citrus Oral History Project  
Globalization Research Center  
University of South Florida**

**Interview with:** Ben Hill Griffin III  
**Interviewed by:** William Mansfield  
**Location:** Frostproof, Florida  
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**Transcribed by:** Wm. Mansfield  
**Edited by:** Ben Hill Griffin III & Wm. Mansfield

[Tape 1, Side A.]

**Bill Mansfield:** I always put a label on the disc by saying that this is Bill Mansfield, from the University of South Florida's Globalization Research Center talking to Mr. Ben Hill Griffin III, on May 9, 2005 right here in his office in Frostproof, Florida. And Mr. Griffin we always get people to start out by having them state their name and telling us when they were born and where they were born. So let 'er go.

**Ben Hill Griffin III:** Okay. My name is Ben Hill Griffin III. I was born March 3, 1942. I've lived all of my life in Frostproof, Florida. I was born in the Lake Wales hospital, some fifteen miles away.

**Mansfield:** Okay. Tell me about your education.

**Griffin:** Basically my education is coming through the local schools then I went to the University of Florida, and my education concluded with an Associate of Arts Degree. But I generally tell people my education started when I was about six or seven years old, when I was put in the orange groves, with my father's direction, "to learn it from the ground up." So I never had any question as to what I was going to be doing in life. I knew what my career was going to be.

**Mansfield:** So you've been working with oranges your whole life?

**Griffin:** Oh yes.

**Mansfield:** How would you describe your current occupation?

**Griffin:** Well, my current occupation is chief executive officer over very highly, vertically integrated citrus organization, starting with groves, nurseries, citrus trees, oranges grapefruit tangerines, etc. Also, in our vertical integration we own a dry mix fertilizer plant. I think we're the second largest dry mix fertilizer plant—from a single plant operation [in Florida]—and we have a fresh fruit packinghouse. We were twice in the citrus processing business. Which took us around the world in a concentrated form of juices, from the market, to the consumer.

But we're no longer in the processing business. My father sold our first processing plant in 1980 and I bought another one in 1992. I've since sold that plant I bought in 1992. We're also in the cattle business. That's where I'm going today, to my ranch. So as we finish here I'll be looking at cattle rather than oranges.

**Mansfield:** [laughs] Okay, but before we go any further, you said you got your AA degree from the University of Florida, what year was that?

**Griffin:** Not from the University of Florida, but from Florida Community College in Ocala, in 1963.

**Mansfield:** Okay. One of the questions I've been asking everybody is: how has current trade legislation—in relation to oranges— how has that effective your business?

**Griffin:** Current trade regulations basically have been in place to bring about fairness in international trade. We've been living under those for quite sometime. It's not an uncommon thing, when you think about history.

We used to have a sectionizing plant, whereby we'd sectionize grapefruit and oranges. We ran that plant for some thirty years, until such time as the regulations were reduced to the point whereby citrus sections could be produced in Israel cheaper than what we could produce here in Florida. And when that came about and the market found

out where the cheapest product was, that brought about the demise of the sectionizing business in the state of Florida and the Florida citrus industry. It was a great loss.

**Mansfield:** Tell me what sectionizing is. That's a term I've not heard before.

**Griffin:** Sectionizing is when you take the peeling off of a grapefruit or an orange, down into the Albedo, which is the white covering. And you take the pure [fruit] segments of the piece of fruit. You segment it with a knife and place [the fruit segments] into jars, or cans. You can find them in the stores today. They're just not produced in the states. They may be brought in by 55 gallon drums and then consumer packed, but they are not produced in the state of Florida.

**Mansfield:** And when did that happen?

**Griffin:** That happened in the [early] eighties. It was concluded before 85. I would say 1985 was pretty much the end of it. At one time there were a number of sectionizing plants, but they dwindled. It's a highly labor intensive operation. The peeling actually became a mechanical operation, however the actual sectionizing remained a hand skill, basically [performed by] ladies.

**Mansfield:** And—I want to make sure I understand you correctly—they removed the tariffs so that Israel became a more cost effective place for people to go [for sectionizing]?

**Griffin:** Yes. They maintained the tariff on imports in the United States, from other countries, with the exception of Israel. They either removed [the tariff] or lowered it to such a point to where we could not compete [price wise].

**Mansfield:** What kind of warning did you have about that?

**Griffin:** There was nothing other than typical communications as to staying up with the industry, staying up with what was going on in government, not unlike what we're doing right now with the Brazilian tariff.

It did not have the significance of the tariff [on oranges], in that the citrus industry—let's say before the hurricanes we're producing 50 million boxes of grapefruit, which includes red grapefruit and white grapefruit—[thus] 50 million boxes [of grapefruit], verses 240 million boxes of oranges. So the economic drive train [gave] much more attention to oranges than was given to grapefruit.

You know, *If it doesn't hurt me why should I worry?* But the loss was to the Florida citrus industry. [The production of grapefruit sections was important.]

**Mansfield:** What changes do you foresee in the current tariff situation?

**Griffin:** I think the changes that [I] foresee is a heightening of the concern as to the loss of our tariffs on [Brazilian orange imports]. We have basically lost these tariffs, relative to Central America. But they are being maintained on Brazil. Brazil is the threat. Central American is not [a threat at this time].

Belize, Costa Rica, they have a lot of growing problems in [those countries] but Brazil is a much larger organization to be coming [up] against, because of its [size], because of its more efficient production than Central America. [Brazil has] tremendous investments in processing plants, trucks, ships, [infrastructure], that these other small countries of Central America do not have.

[Brazil] still has a long way to haul their product once it's processed. Some five hours, or so. However, once you get the trucks in line to do that—why it's just a matter of keeping fuel in them. So—that's going be anticipated as part of doing business with them from now on.

**Mansfield:** What –how can I put this? How do you get your information about legislation concerning the tariff?

**Griffin:** The industry is certainly in a very elevated position of attention. We have industry committees that are now in place. It is their responsibility to bring action to maintain the tariff. Simply put it'd be a form of lobbying effort to Washington.

We've got to remember that citrus is just a blip on the far horizon, relative to the economic dynamo of American industry. So, in Washington, when you mention the citrus industry it doesn't get much attention. After all, you've only have Florida, California, Texas, and a little bit in Arizona [that produces citrus]. (And Texas and Arizona don't really count because we pack more fruit in one packinghouse than the whole state can produce in a given year.) And California is a different entity, in that California [produces] 90% fresh fruit. They have a very small percentage of their [orange] production that goes into juice, because of their flavor is not as good [as ours]. So Florida pretty much stands alone as being the orange juice, and I emphasize juice, producer of our country.

So we stay informed by knowing that we have a problem. We stay informed by securing professional assistance in Washington. We stay informed to the point that we're making rather regular trips into Washington, to congress, to carry our message about Florida Citrus.

**Mansfield:** Okay. You say you stay informed, but how? What—or maybe I should ask about the professional assistance that that you all are receiving. What can you tell me about the lobbying effort?

**Griffin:** Well, let me tell you that we've got about eleven million dollars that's being put [into lobbying] on an annual basis. So this is not just something that you pick up the newspaper to keep yourself informed.

When you've got that kind of investment, that indicates—I think to our size industry—that we're putting some strong money into our efforts to stay [pause] in communication with what's happening with the trade groups. Stay in communication and participate all over the world, with the world trade organizations that we are taking part in; or working with them to see what is happening with other commodities [relative to tariff and government regulations].

Florida Citrus Mutual is the one that's carrying the heaviest end of this banner. They are the largest citrus grower organization [in Florida]. And they are supported then by the other citrus grower organizations, such as the Indian River Citrus League, Highland County Citrus Growers Association, Peace River Citrus Growers Association and Florida Gulf [Citrus Growers].

**Mansfield:** I guess I'm curious to get a little more of the details. It's like you've described the car, but I'd like to know how the engine works.

**Griffin:** Alright. We meet on a monthly basis.

**Mansfield:** You say "we meet"?

**Griffin:** "We," is a committee that has been formed [regarding] the Florida Tariff—I forget the full professional name of it [Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee]. But it has been formed within the last two years to specifically address the tariff.

**Mansfield:** Oh great! I hadn't heard about this.

**Griffin:** Yes. We meet on a need to basis, but no less than quarterly. We oversee a budget of some five, seven, ten million dollars, depending upon what we think needs to be done. There are a couple of lobbyists that are well recognized in Washington. There is one, that I'll have to get you the name of, it's Gump. It's very highly [thought of] and been in business a long time and been very effective. In the last year we've had considerable amount of time contributed by growers, processors, fresh fruit packers. Strong investments within the industry that are going to Washington. They are meeting face-to-face with our [elected] representatives. They're meeting with the chairmen of the ag-committees. They are meeting with the trade representatives of other countries. We are trying to get communications into the White House; which was very effectively done this past year.

Obviously, from a political standpoint, the President [of the United States] had to be pretty much interested in whatever Florida was going to be interested in [because Florida was a crucial state in the 2004 presidential election.] So it wasn't surprising that we could get the president's ear, at that time. What concerns me is what's going to happen when we're needing to communicate with the president and he's not up for reelection? [chuckles] That's a more difficult task.

But we've got a message to sell. It is not something that we take lightly, that, that tariff will be maintained. Politically we've got the Democrats and as well as the Republicans, equally interested in [free] trade.

And it's rather frightening to us to see this happening because of the growing world and the shrinking Florida citrus industry. So when we get to thinking of agricultural commodities [such as] corn, versus citrus. Corn is grown in every state in the union [compared to citrus being produced only in two states.] Wheat and rye and those types of grains, we don't hold a candle to them, in an economic standpoint of importance to the nation and the world. So we don't kid ourselves in that regard.

[However citrus] is unique, we have a uniqueness here. We believe, with every ounce of our being that the citrus industry is vitally important to our country. Should we lose the tariff we will become nothing more than [a people who are] at the mercy of Brazil. Brazil is down to two or three grower-processor entities and of course they don't worry about trade negotiations. They meet in private and set their prices and come forth and the American people don't have any protection [for food safety, quality competitive prices, USDA standards, chemical usage and so forth].

I'm sure you've been exposed to the comments relative the regulations in food safety; that, we here in Florida, have to adhere to. That's not true in Brazil. They don't have any child labor laws down there. They don't have in OSHA in Brazil. They don't have any restrictions on chemicals. They use whatever chemicals they want [to use]. One day, potentially, we could really have a major problem [with] food safety, on the product that's being brought in from Brazil. And this applies to tomatoes in Mexico and all these other [food products].

In this country we're greatly concerned about food safety [for food that's] produced here. But that food produced outside [of the US] we have no regulations for those people. If we do [have regulations for imported food] they're completely ignored.

**Mansfield:** I've heard other people talk about the advantages that Brazil enjoys, in terms of labor costs and the lack of regulations, but if you could, I'd like for you to tell me more about the Florida Tariff Committee [Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee]. That sounds like a really effective tool for education people about the importance of the Florida citrus industry. So could you tell me more about how it came together?

**Griffin:** Well, it came together as a "mother of necessity." [laughs] Relative to the recent trade negotiations that were pending some two or three years ago. It was recognized that we didn't have an official group in our industry that could speak for it. [Any existing groups] could be accused of being slanted [in favor] of fresh [oranges] or processed [orange juice concentrate], or slanted as to regulatory, or what have you. So Mutual took the lead and formed an ad-hoc committee, if you will, and—gosh I think it must be made up of some, maybe fifteen—seventeen people. [They come from] the Florida Citrus Commission, Florida Citrus Mutual, people involved in the industry from the investment standpoint, such as your larger growers and producers.

I guess that was one hat I was wearing there—I'm the past chairman of the Florida Citrus Commission. That had some impact as to who might be on the committee. It's not a group that is regulated under the state of Florida. It is not a group that is formed out of the Florida Citrus Commission, then, [as such] it becomes a political risk as to who represents what, how many acres they have to have. We put it in as an ad-hoc committee and it is recognized, by the [industry] leaders and those who should be informed, as being able to represent what is good for the citrus industry.

So I would suggest you should talk with Andy [LaVigne], the executive director— Have you talked to LaVigne yet?

**Mansfield:** I'm talking to him on Friday. [See Andy LaVigne's interview with Bill Mansfield, 5-13-05.]

**Griffin:** Good. Talk with Andy LaVigne, of Florida Citrus Mutual and he can give you more of those details.

**Mansfield:** Okay, so do you recollect who took the leadership in putting this group together? Is there anybody that stands out to you as—

**Griffin:** Mutual was, because Mutual came the closest to representing the entire industry. They have some twelve to fifteen thousands growers. They have a significant operating budget. They've been in business for sixty or seventy years. They have been on the world scene, more so than any of our other organizations; more so than the Florida Citrus Commission. They were able to take the as, their banner called for, "What's good for the grower is good for Mutual." So they were pretty much the white-knight and recognized as the most appropriate leader to put this group together.

**Mansfield:** Can you recall any of the people—well I know you can, but would you be comfortable sharing the names of some of the other people who were on the committee?

**Griffin:** Id' rather you just get that whole list from Andy.

**Mansfield:** Okay. Well, you talked about meeting with your representatives in Washington, tell me about that. Which ones in particular have you worked with?

**Griffin:** Well, you go [to] the chairman of the agricultural committee would be the one of the strongest. Then we tried to align ourselves with some agricultural based congressmen, that—although they wouldn't have any particular understanding of the Florida citrus industry, they'd have an understanding of farming itself. Whether it's growing corn or growing citrus, they have a constituency that they represent that can identify with what we're talking, you know? 'Cause you've got to have rain, you got to have fertilizer, you got to have a market [chuckles]. You got to have vertical integration that carries the

product all the way from the trees, all the way through to your consumer. This is one of the things that Brazil does not have.

It has the citrus production in Brazil, it has recently—say in the last five years captured some 50% of the actual processing capabilities in the state of Florida. As yet, they have not moved into a consumer tie-in [with] a given branded product, such as Tropicana, such as Minute Maid, such as Florida's Natural. I sometimes wonder that, if we were to lose the tariff, they would become much more aggressive as to taking a banded product [into their control].

'Cause if they take a banded product in now, then that would surely be a greater rallying point for protecting the balance of the industry. Because [the Brazilians] are not known for the grower [financial] survival, they are known for the processor [financial] survival.

**Mansfield:** What, Brazil is known for keeping the processors surviving?

**Griffin:** Yes! They are not interested in making returns to growers that are [an] economic positive factor. They're wanting to get [orange juice concentrate] as cheaply as possible and that does not fair well for the Florida citrus [grower's future].

If we were to lose our tariff, without question, the economists that have studied the relationships, indicate that Florida [citrus] would not be able to survive. Our citrus industry, as it is known today, would no longer exist.

**Mansfield:** That'd be a big loss for Florida.

**Griffin:** As the number two economic contributor to the state of Florida, yes. As you well know, [the citrus industry] is only second to tourism. And when 9/11 came upon us we were number-one, until the American people decided we could travel a little bit; then we became number two again.

**Mansfield:** When you meet with the chairman of the agriculture committee and congressional representatives and senators, who are from agricultural states, what do you tell them to educate them about the situation of Florida's citrus industry?

**Griffin:** Basically we inform them of the existence—like many of the youth of today, they go to the grocery store and find a package of bacon, they think you get bacon out of the grocery store. They don't [think about] getting [products] from the farm. So we inform [the congressmen] as to the importance of Florida citrus. We let them know that Florida citrus is [ranked] number two [as an] economic industry in the state of Florida. **Very, very** few people know that. Just like they don't realize the impact that the Florida cattle industry has on the state of Florida.

Maybe you do, but [Florida is] about number six in the nation on the cattle business, yet how many people in the nation appreciate that? They think we'd be number five hundred. They're not many cattle running up and down the beaches. [laughs] [Florida is the number one cattle producer east of the Mississippi.]

**Mansfield:** Yeah, people don't often associate Florida with cowboys.

**Griffin:** But we're here to talk about citrus. But, I just mention that as an indication as to [how little people know about Florida's agriculture]. But if you have no reason for knowing, there is nothing wrong not knowing that, so it's our business to inform them, to let them know what it is. And let them know of the importance of the citrus industry, not only to Florida but to the nation and our exports to foreign lands. And give them a sense of understanding that these tariff laws are in a position where by an entire industry can be lost.

It's happened [in] other places [and other states]. You're from [North] Carolina, and can well appreciate what's happening to the [textile] industry.

**Mansfield:** The textile industry has really taken a big hit in North Carolina.

**Griffin:** They are basically—if they are not gone, they are on their way out. We don't think they would want another industry on the way out.

I think that there is something that is going on in our world politics today that is helping us. This is out-sourcing. Our country has been doing a lot of out sourcing and trying to make people understand how that is good for them. And they are finding out that it is not good for them, from an economic benefit to our country. I think that may bode well, relative to maintaining an important tariff, such as citrus.

**Mansfield:** I just want to make sure I understand you. That people are starting to understand that outsourcing is not necessarily the best —

**Griffin:** —the United States. In a fashion, if you do away with the tariff, relative to Brazil, then we're outsourcing our citrus products [from] Brazil.

We try to explain to them the importance of quality. Brazilian products cannot hold a candle to Florida's quality. The only way that they are able to do that now is through blending [their juice with Florida juice]. Why do they blend? I'm not going to say that their quality is inferior (it is inferior) — but it is less than the quality that we can produce from nature's standpoint. They will never be able to [produce] our quality.

One of the reasons that they have been successful is that they don't have any freezes. In the state of Florida, we do. We're sub-tropical, however that's one of our secrets to the great quality that we have. That is, our citrus trees go dormant in the wintertime. Probably, November to February. So we go dormant and when the spring comes— boom! We come out with a nice flush, all-over, virtually [all our trees] at the same time, and everybody's in bloom, and there we have a uniform bloom. We have a uniform crop that we're taking care of, all year long, until it's harvested. And when [they are] harvested they're basically all of the same quality [and maturity] when they are taken from the tree. Brazil doesn't have that opportunity because they can't go dormant. It's too warm.

So what makes Brazil bloom, [then,] is rain. So, they get a rain today. A couple of inches and they'll bloom in several weeks. And two months from now, they'll get another nice rain and [their orange trees will] bloom again. So it is not unusual for Brazil

to be carrying six or eight different stages of maturity of fruit, on the tree at the same time.

They only harvest it [at] one time, so when it comes time to harvest—[they get a range of oranges.] They leave some because they're too small (when they are the size of marbles they don't have any juice in them). But they get the oranges that are close to maturity. Then they get [the oranges] that we call senile—it's over mature. And when they bring it in they are processing –that [wide range of oranges]. You've got about three or four different blooms that you're trying to make the best quality out of and it just can't happen. That is an inherent [maturity] problem. And our inherent benefit is that we have this sub-tropical area where our quality is far superior to anywhere else in the world. So if we loose that there will be no blending opportunities.

They'll say, "*We'll take the tariff off and still blend the Florida [juice] with the Brazil.*" Well, that sounds good, but there won't be any Florida [juice] because the Florida production will be going down. We can't survive the cost advantages that Brazil has. So we'll just go into planting houses, I guess.

**Mansfield:** I've heard some people have gone from raising oranges to raising houses.

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Mansfield:** What kind of response have you gotten from the congressional lobbying efforts?

**Griffin:** We have been derelict in recognition of the importance of being before our national representatives. We have let just a few little spotty contacts with Washington, maybe out of fear—obviously out of lack of understanding and the lack of need [to make our identity known]. [In the past] we didn't have the great need [for lobbying]. If we had a code or OSHA requirements or something that didn't work with us, we'd allow Mutual, or some organization like that to go in and represent the so-called, entire industry. On those types of things, it probably was okay. But we have found that we need to be there

[for] every session [of Congress]. And we need to bring them into Florida and show them the citrus trees, show them the processing plants, show them the packinghouses.

Most citizens don't have the opportunity to go into any manufacturing plants. I don't want anybody in our fresh fruit packinghouse, because there is the potential that someone might get injured and then you're being sued. So that's not [so different from] the rest of the industry. So there are very few people that I take through our fresh fruit packinghouses.

Citrus—I 'm trying to think when Citrus World, which is Florida's Natural now, they had their answer to [letting people see their operation]. They produced a film of their processing plant. And then they'd bring the tourist in, sit them down and then they'd see the film. I think that's good. I think that [film] informed people. They didn't get to touch it and feel it and smell it, but they could see it; and that's better than nothing.

So when we bring our senators and representatives down here, obviously we don't adhere to just showing them pictures. We take them into the facilities. We take them into the groves. It's a natural thing that people like to see things grow. That's just a human need, I guess, appreciating that. We like to see our children grow, see citrus trees grow. Basically [the congressmen] are looking for knowledge; they're looking for information. And we're in a position to have a good story to tell [and what a great Natural product we produce in oranges and grapefruit].

We don't have to talk about tobacco. We've got citrus to sell. And it's good for your heart and good for your skin and good for your eyes. It's healthy and so on and so on. So it's a story that people want to hear. So it's not a hard sell and doesn't need to be].

But you get somebody that wants to know what you're trying to tell them and that's a heck of a lot better than them tripping along and you're tapping them on the shoulder, saying, *Let me talk to you. Let me talk to you.*

**Mansfield:** Well, you talk to them about the economic—I mean the healthful benefits of orange juice, but what do you tell them about the economic impact; the people that are employed, the jobs that are provided? What do you tell them about that?

**Griffin:** We just tell them the size. You know, we have basically a million acres, somewhere between nine hundred thousand and a million (I always like to round up numbers, if you want to impress somebody. So I'd round that up to say a million acres.) We can talk to them about the economic size of the industry, some three billion dollars. We can talk to them about the need of labor and providing jobs for the state. We're not really [employing] migrant [labor]. A lot of people think [we hire migrant labor]. We start picking citrus in September, early October and we'll pick until the first of July. That's not typically migrant, like when you go pick apples for six weeks and then go pick something else for two months. So you've got a job source here that starts in [September] and go all the way through [to the end of June].

We have workers, not that great a number, but—I'm only guessing—but 20% of that labor stays on in the summer time to do work within the groves. There are plants that have labor requirements in the summertime. You've got to get those plants ready to go again for another season. So there is an ongoing requirement [for labor] there.

Of course your processing plants, they are processing the finished product twelve months out of the year. They're processing raw products [oranges and grapefruits,] from November through 'til some time in mid-July.

**Mansfield:** Can you think of the names of any congressmen, or senators that you've contacted? It would be important to have that for the historical record.

**Griffin:** I'm sure that Andy [LaVigne] can give you a good list of that. They seem to believe it to be tremendously important. [laughs] We tend to know that there is going to be a different one. We have to work with our own congressmen, from the state of Florida. We can not assume that a congressman from Panama City [in the Florida panhandle] knows anything about citrus any more than [a congressman for Massachusetts would know about citrus]. So we can't over look our own delegation.

We have found, for various reasons, (it's all political) that a given congress man could stand aside and say, *That's not really in my district*. That doesn't carry the same mantel as saying, *Hey, I'm a congressman [from] Florida and I represent all of Florida*. Not just that [district] where he is voted for. But most do, most do [and that's sad].

This [personal contact] is an effort that a professional lobbyist can't touch. A professional lobbyist can't touch me going in to the Chairman of the Agricultural Committee, or the House of Representatives, to represent my industry, when all he knows is what he's been told. I know things I've spent a lifetime trying to teach him, but he'd never get it. It's not that he's not smart, but you know, you learn things through osmosis that you don't get out of the book.

*Here's four books that I want you to read [about the Florida Citrus industry.]*  
Wonderful! But let me mention some things.

I know freezes like I know my children. I know when they came, the day of the month when they occurred. Of course in the 80's they came so fast it got difficult to keep up with them at that point.

For instance take the hurricanes. People not in agriculture didn't realize that we had two hurricanes hitting the state of Florida within the same twenty-four hour period. [Hurricane] Charlie was over Fort Myers and [Hurricane] Bonnie was over northwest Florida, within the same twenty-four period!

Down here, we can remember Charlie, but we could care less about Bonnie. But from an agricultural standpoint we said, *Damn! We could've had Charlie and Bonnie hitting the industry at the same time!* Of course it goes on and on with the other hurricanes.

**Mansfield:** You're right, living it is a whole lot different from reading about it.

**Griffin:** Sure.

**Mansfield:** You've talked about working with congress, to educate them about the needs of the Florida citrus industry; who do you perceive as your adversaries in this effort? Who are the people lobbying in the other direction?

**Griffin:** They're—not lobbying in a different direction. They're lobbying from a philosophical viewpoint that, in my opinion, says free trade is where we ought to be.

They're lobbying from their "world stage." They are here or there and they say that the United States has got this tariff or that tariff. They too have their tariffs and we're over there trying to beat them down and get them to remove their tariffs.

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B.]

**Griffin:** And they're setting over here in some high-rise in New York City, saying *Yeah, citrus is alright. Take citrus out of the way. It doesn't impact any of my constituency. But don't touch the fur trade, because I've got a lot of fur retailers and manufactures here, that I'm protecting.*

But you go right to the president, he's for free trade. His father was for free trade. Clinton was for free trade! The whole damn bunch is for free trade. But you've heard it time and time again, you got to be fair. You got to be fair. [Free trade, but fair! I haven't seen it work yet, and don't expect to.]

We had Canada, the United States and Mexico went through this, what, ten twelve years ago? [We're going to have] free trade with those three countries? There were protections there.

The Lake Okeechobee area of lettuce, tomatoes and etc, have been known for decades, as the winter breadbasket [sic; garden] of the United States. It's not there any more. Tens of thousands of acres that were producing lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, or what ever, has all been converted now to sugar cane. US Sugar had one of the largest packinghouses down there for produce. Now, I don't know much about produce, but it's an empty building today.

Belle Glade, heavy labor, all of those jobs are lost now. The state and the federal government are "buying jobs" to put into the Belle Glade area to help those poor people who don't have a job any more. They put in prisons so they can hire guards. You know, they are doing any number of things. They're putting four lane highways through there, hoping that some kind of trade will develop. There is a little bit of the tomato industry that's left, over around Naples. But it's now nothing more than speculative crops of row crops that's down there.

Fair trade! And we were promised it. Thank God the citrus industry didn't get caught up in it. If so, Mexico would probably have five hundred thousand acres of citrus over there.

They don't and it's—[to the benefit of the US consumers] — So we got to fight for fair trade. And getting back of US consumers, on a philosophical basis, if it's fair— Florida citrus will be able to compete with Mexico and Brazil. It will be fair and everybody will benefit.

But it doesn't work that way, when you've got to wait one hundred years for the Mexicans to build up an economic base that they can buy as many of the finished beef stakes that we could ship into [Mexico] as they ship [here] “on-the-hoof” cattle into the United States. Right now they are shipping the world out of Mexican beef to the United States to be fed, slaughtered and put on your table. But there's not a reciprocal. The finished “boxed” beef isn't going back to Mexico. They can't afford it. The economic balance is just not there. Presumably, one day it will be there. But I don't know if anybody in the cattle business today will be around. [the same goes for Florida citrus VS Brazil. Florida citrus won't be here if we lose the tariff.]

**Mansfield:** That's one of the things about globalization, it seems to be unbalancing everything and nobody is certain where it will [stop].

**Griffin:** The tariff is fair now. The tariff is fair because we know that the Brazilians, economically, are doing Okay. They've continued to plant [orange] groves. So I guess it would take an economist to figure out exactly where they are, but Brazil has survived [with a tariff] now for [fifty] years in the citrus business. Florida has been able to function, with a tariff. We've had to watch Brazil, to make sure that they've not been involved with any dumping. You know illegal trade tactics that hurt us.

But they were found [dumping cheap orange juice] and now we're looking at them again. It's nothing more than [“a slap on their wrists”] and [they say] they won't do it any more. That's okay. That's good. That will slow them down. And make [other people] be careful about their trade practices. [pause]

I was just trying to think of anything that I didn't [talk about]. We talked about infrastructures a little bit? That's one of the things that is a really big problem so far as Central America is concerned. The Brazilians are past that. They have an economic level that provides for the infrastructure that's there. And, with their ships they've even got the conveyance.

I don't know what they are, but I have been told, that their government has been a tremendous economic assistance to the growers down there [and] to the processors, in allowing them tax advantages; to help build their industry, which their country needs. [We don't get such government help. Our government ends up costing our citrus industry.]

I tell people that I'm just tickled to death that Brazil doesn't have any oil; 'cause if they had oil, the Florida citrus industry would have been traded away years ago. [laughs] To get Brazilian oil, there'd be no tariff on citrus. That would have been a hard sell for us to try and to maintain.

**Mansfield:** That would have been tough. But you talked about how this ad-hoc organization is sort of, I don't know how to put it, but it sounds like it is echoing and reinforcing what Florida Citrus Mutual is doing. Am I correct in assuming that?

**Griffin:** Yes, but there is—if that committee was not in place there would be those that would not support Mutual, if they were doing it on their own. There is human nature, where one organization maybe jealous of another. So by having this group that is **not** a part of Florida Citrus Mutual, then it can have the support of all the other grower organizations. They can say: *Hey that's not Mutual. We've got two men for our deal over here, and nobody is telling them what to do, so we can support this committee, where we might not be able to support Mutual.*

Mutual has twenty damned directors. Now deliver me from a little organization that's got twenty directors! I don't want a big organization [with] twenty directors. Half of them are not even going to listen to what you're saying when you're addressing them. If you've got twenty [they'd] be talking or winking at one another, or something. So there are those who would not be supportive if it was just Mutual.

**Mansfield:** I have heard some people say that they feel Mutual has not been as effective as it could be in representing the Florida grower.

**Griffin:** On this subject, it might be a case in point in that they didn't want to support Mutual, to do it. We had to secure funding [on this committee] to fund the lobbyist efforts, etc. None of these members over here get paid anything. They couldn't get [the money] out of the Florida Citrus Commission [sic; the Florida Department of Citrus], that's a state agency. They couldn't get it out of Mutual because they were fearful of paying, and [not being] a member of Mutual. They don't like the idea of paying Mutual some money, to then dribble back into this committee, unless it was totally separate and apart. [Thus the ad hoc committee stood on its own.]

So its—I didn't think too much about it. We just know it's the best way to do it. It keeps as much unity with in the industry. That's not to say there isn't disagreement or differences of opinions that are on this committee. There's plenty of them.

Everyone is supportive of being in Washington. There are those, from whatever viewpoint they are looking at, think the job can be done for half the price. There are others that will say *Sign a blank check, we can't afford to loose it*. So if we win, like we're doing, maybe we're wasting some money. But if we lose there is no going back, saying *I want to put some more money into the lobbying effort*. [By then it's be too late.] It's gone. [We must err on the high side of winning VS saving money and loosing.]

**Mansfield:** So you're trying to insure—

**Griffin:** We're trying to put sufficient [effort and funds] in Washington to maintain our tariff and obviously there [must] be a judgement call in there, even I have some questions sometimes. *Is that necessary?* [I ask]. Maybe someone else knows better than I, that it's necessary. [You must ask the question and then pay the price.]

**Mansfield:** What would be some of the questions that you have?

**Griffin:** Well, you know—once a given vote [is] taken, and we were successful [up to that date], do we just shut off the funding for any additional [efforts] until we find a need, or do we drop down to a maintenance level and go at 25%? (To maintain a presence there.)

None of our [committee] people are professional lobbyist. We're not there everyday. We don't want to be there everyday, but we need somebody there everyday. There can be the bell ringer that says *I don't like what I'm hearing. I don't like what I'm seeing. Let's have a meeting and throw it out on the table and see what other people say.* But that's all politics.

[laughs] It's like I heard on advertising one time. When you're advertising a given product, half of that advertising money does a wonderful job and the other half doesn't do a darned thing, but you don't know which half is which. [laughs] So, which of these dollars [do you want to spend and what half do you cut out]?

It's not fun to get on a plane with five or six people and fly to Washington and spend two days tromping up and down the halls and trying to talk to people that may or may not be interested in what you're talking about. But you must do it.

**Mansfield:** I've often heard that politicians will look at you and tell you exactly what you want to hear and then go and do exactly what they want to do. What kind of distinction do you make? How do you deal with that, where they say one thing and then do something else?

**Griffin:** You pull in all the resources that you possibly can, as to where "Senator So & So" is standing. You find out how he speaks in a given committee. Who his—They are [politicians] are professional in what they are doing and sometimes they are very good at not allowing someone to know exactly how they are going to vote. But when you're talking about something that's [been] out there six or eight months, you can get a pretty good read on [how they stand, and you keep looking them in the eye!]

You can extend an invitation for them to come down to the industry, spend a day, spend two days. If they're really interested they will probably come, if their schedule allows it. If they're not interested then you can read them as how many excuses they can

think up. Some of them are informed to the point that they don't need to come down here. But it's not a junket. They're not going to Europe or Paris, when you come into Florida and stop by Florida Citrus Mutual in Lakeland and see the Citrus Commission building. We don't have the glorious beaches and all, over here in the central part of the state. Which is where the industry is.

But they are generally interested and they want to be informed and they know that if they are able to support you, they will be contacting you at some point in time, to see if you have an interest in supporting them.

**Mansfield:** Earlier you said that you all were effective in talking to the White House because it was an election year and President Bush needed Florida to carry the election. How does the fact that his brother is the governor of the state—how do you all use that [connection]?

**Griffin:** The same way. [Though,] it was fine that Jeb was governor. We lobbied him as well. Didn't have to sell him. He knew how important the citrus industry was. After all, this is his second term as governor. So when he first ran he didn't know. He was fresh out of Miami and Texas. But he's been educated and knowledgeable and [learned well].

John Kerry was the same way. Had Kerry been the successful candidate, we had sufficient support on his side. We couldn't afford to be just on Bush's side. We had a commitment from Kerry that he was going to protect the citrus industry, if he were elected. The industry believed Bush, they didn't believe Kerry. [laughs] Not that he wouldn't have, but most of the citrus industry in the state of Florida was supporting Bush. But I'm convinced that Kerry would have been just as supportive of maintaining the tariff as Bush.

**Mansfield:** Tell me what kind of job you think the Florida Department of Citrus is doing?

**Griffin:** I think they're doing fine! We're living in troubled times. The industry is known for its combative nature when times get tough. Generally, when times get tough, that's

the best time to get something accomplished, verses [times] of higher fruit returns. That's when they get pretty independent in their thinking as to what they might want to do.

I think the Commission is doing a fine job. I don't think we could have a better executive director than Dan Gunter [see Dan Gunter's interview with Bill Mansfield, 4-12-05]. He is the right man at the right place. When I was chairman, Dan was the economist, from the University of Florida, that was with the Department. So he's had a tremendous number of years of experience. He was there before, and now he's back [as the executive director]. [pause]

This industry could have been better served by better commissioners, for the last ten years. That's not to say that they weren't qualified, but I felt like we were hampered by a lack of leadership. [I shouldn't say we didn't have any leadership] but the leadership was not] as strong as it could have been.

It led us into a position where some sort of loose committee makes a decision and you don't know where they might be wobbling, at that given time, verses having some stated thought out direction as to what would be best for the industry. Not by just one person, but by several. And with those several, then you join forces as to what the best decision is. You may be left, right [or] center, but when it all falls together, maybe you're just a little left of the center. Or a little bit right of center, but you—[get the point, you hit the target.]

For instance, our current advertising, the Commission [sic; Department of Citrus] [selected] our current advertising agency. And they have been making recommendations to the Commission, as to the ads to run. The Commission has not altered, in any way, any of the commercials that have been presented. They didn't say they wanted more color, less color, a little bit this way, a little bit that way. Not that they're advertising exerts but they are consumers. They should have an opinion. They sit there and they ask questions. And [how] do they vote? *I move to support the advertising agency [suggestions]. Well I second that. That's why we hired them. They're the experts. [We shouldn't change anything.]*

I don't buy that.

*They're the experts and if they recommended that, we'll go with them. We'll measure them two or three years down the road and see what kind of job they are doing. If they're don't measure up we're going to get rid of them.*

Well in two or three years you could be dead. So—[these men on the commission are supposed to be leaders, executive decision makers.]

**Mansfield:** So you feel lie it's just too slow to respond?

**Griffin:** I think they are too slow to respond. I think they are lacking in stronger opinions as to what needs to be done and to take action. We been raising hell over our advertising for several years and I think it is nothing other than a simple deal [that] we're not directing [the] advertising agency. We're letting the advertising agency present the ads and [we just pick them out,] then we're approving them. And they're coming from an advertising agency in Texas that doesn't know anything about the Florida citrus industry. They don't know anything about citrus to begin with! Maybe they drink orange juice, but they're in Texas. They hadn't been here before. [Who says they know anything about oranges!]

**Mansfield:** So in terms of the lawsuit against the [Florida Department of Citrus]—

**Griffin:** Oh well, that's another screw-up [laughs]. I'm sorry, you've got me on the wrong subject today.

But the Florida Citrus Commission [sic; Florida Department of Citrus] is the most unique governmental, industrial organization in the United States of America. Nobody else has got it. We are a department of the state of Florida, just like the [highway] department is, the corrections department, whatever. And we are fully independently taxed by the growers. We don't get any money from the state. All other agencies have got to get general revenue monies. So the Commission was set-up back in the thirties and the main thing that they are doing—they're doing regulation, they're doing research, but the main thing they're doing is advertising. And they are doing it for the Florida citrus grower. We have had some wonderful advertising. We had some advertising that wasn't

so wonderful. Anita Bryant, everyone knows that was just a fabulous deal while it lasted. And then we've been on some others that kind of did the job. *A day with out orange juice is a day with out sunshine.* That was a big one. That was very successful. But you can't hit a home run every time.

So now we come to the point where there is a group of growers, six—I think it is, and they say they don't want to pay any [box] taxes. And that is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard in my life. Because we are self taxed. We're self administered, to secure advertising and promotion that's going to benefit the Florida citrus grower. There is nothing else in this industry that is going to do anything for the entire Florida citrus grower.

Florida Natural, they are a fine company. I've put a lot of fruit in there. And they advertise. They're advertising is what benefits their brand and their growers and that's fine. But we don't have any advertisements, anywhere that benefits [all the growers], unless it comes from the Florida Citrus Commission. If we lose that, the grower won't have to pay that eighteen cents a box tax, but that eighteen cents is not going into his pocket. The processor, give him a little bit of time, competition will make him lower [prices] to where that eighteen cents is gone—no longer in the grower's pocket. And we won't have anybody that can carry the message, of the Florida citrus industry [as well as the Department of Florida Citrus].

[Tape interruption to change discs]

**Mansfield:** But you were telling me about the benefits of the Department of Florida Citrus's advertising?

**Griffin:** Yes.

**Mansfield:** What I hear you saying is that you think the Department of Citrus does a good job and you're opposed to— or you don't agree with this lawsuit?

**Griffin:** I do not agree with the lawsuit. You have twelve growers that are sitting up there that are members of the Florida Citrus Commission. The industry can come in on an individual basis, myself, or a group—Florida Citrus Mutual for instance—and make proposals. Then [the Department of Citrus] can look at [the suggestion] and decide if they are going to take action or not. The advertising is so crucial to us, as growers [we can take our message to the consumers and not depend on others.]

Advertising is the only means available to the grower. Brazil now owns half of the processing plants and will not spend money to protect the Florida grower.] Our advertising budget, even if we're in the range of sixty million dollars, you and I know that sixty million dollars, over the entire country for a twelve month period of time, that's not enough. That's not [a big] impact on those you're trying to bring the message to; [but it is necessary.]

The Commission could make [a] regulations to insure, to the consumer, that when it said 100% Florida, it was 100% Florida [juice]. And we could advertise to tell them; ["If you want the best,] buy this product because it's 100% Florida. If you want food safety, this is the product to [buy]."

It scares me to death, relative to foreign imports [and domestic products], that food safety could be another message to our consumers]. We could have ruination problem in the citrus industry, because of food safety. [It could take years to recover.]

**Mansfield:** Well, I'll ask one more question and then I'll turn you loose.  
What do you see as the future for the Florida citrus industry?

**Griffin:** I see the future of the Florida citrus industry as being one of quality. I think quality is our anchor for the future. That may be through an entirely new brand, [a new orange juice brand]. It's not unlike the "angus beef." You know everybody wants angus beef. You go to the grocery store and everything says angus, angus, angus. And there's not a darn thing different between angus beef and hertford beef. But it's the advertising and the [high] quality control. So I think that's where it's going to be, [quality!].

[Another thing] I think that we need to be very, very concerned about this [box tax] lawsuit on doing a way with the Commission, or greatly hampering the Commission. The Commission needs to be strengthened, not weakened [to insure our future].

I think that through quality, the industry is going to be healthy. The industry is going to be healthy as long as we maintain the tariff. But if we can't hold the tariff, or we start losing the tariff bit by bit (which is nothing more than slow death). The grower will turn from asking *What can I do to enhance production, what can I do to enhance my quality, etc.* to [asking] *What can I do to prepare my land for housing developments.*

And then there will be pavement and environmental concerns like we've never seen before. Because, the huge amount of land, where Florida citrus is now grown, is just sandy soil that is not good for growing any thing else [other than growing oranges, relative to agriculture, but it's also great for building houses].

**Mansfield:** You think there will be a contraction of growers? Will some of the small growers be able to continue?

**Griffin:** I've heard about the small grower for a long, long time. I'm sure there will be some contraction. But, there is another element that's out there, my company has a number of small growers, that joined our company, gosh, years ago. They are just as economically viable to stay in the citrus industry as I am. We're doing the job for them. We've got the staff to do all of the permitting and OSHA requirements and the regulations that you have [to adhere to]. So I guess I'm a little bit hesitant to say that the small grower is no longer [viable].

[It's] a popular thing to say *Aw, the small grower's dead.* Well. I heard that twenty, thirty years ago and he's still alive. Sure, but there some big growers that are not here any more too. So it's going to be more difficult for a small grower to manage his own affairs and stay in the citrus industry. He is going to be encouraged to seek some type of an organization where he [can be assisted.]—He can not be an expert in all the areas he has to today. We've got personnel here and all they do is permitting work, OSHA work [and government regulations].

I too have a small grove, personally, that my company takes care of. Thank goodness because I don't have the expertise to go through all the permitting [either]. I don't have the expertise the time or the interest to go to all of these government officials to carry out the requirements that are [required]. [However,] being a member of this [citrus] organization [simplifies those responsibilities].

Haines City Citrus Growers is another [organization]. Alcoma used be [a good organization] until they sold out to the Brazilians. Holly Hill is another. There are quite a number of organizations that may have larger [growers] but also have smaller some growers involved with them [that level out the differences between a large grower and a small grower].

**Mansfield:** Okay. Is there anything you want to tell me about that I haven't asked about?

**Griffin:** Well, I wish you had started with the Citrus Commission first. [laughs] In some aspect, I'm more concerned about that than I am the tariff and I'm really concerned about the tariff. Governmental involvement hasn't had any thing to do with the Citrus Commission's [problems]; that's something that the industry is doing to itself.

**Mansfield:** Well that sounds like a good place to stop. And again, let me thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

We'll transcribe the interview and send you a copy for you to check for errors and such. But also I need to ask you to sign this release from.

**Griffin:** Are you going to publish a book and make millions?

**Mansfield:** No. This [release form] lets researchers know that we have your permission to use the information in this interview. [Sounds of release form being signed].

Oh, sorry, I for got [to include] "the third."

**Griffin:** There's a [Ben Hill Griffin] IV is the reason I [called that to your attention].  
[Sign] here?

**Mansfield:** Yes sir, right there. [sound of signing] Thanks, I'll send you a copy of this interview and you can check it for errors. Send it back to us with any corrections.

**Griffin:** Well, I don't normally participate [in interviews like this].

[End of interview]