

**Carole & Ed Daniels**

Where: At their farm outside of Pickens, WV

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Date: September 3, 2019

Location: Pickens, WV

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

Length: 00:35 + 00:19 + 36:27 = 37:21

A ginseng digger and cultivator since he was young, Ed Daniels and his wife Carole own and operate Shady Grove Farm in Randolph County where they grow ginseng, goldenseal, ramps, cohosh, and industrial hemp, among other plants. In this interview, Ed and Carole talk about their forest farming and seed saving practice, the hopes for their farm, and Ed's family tradition of medicinal herbs.

Ed Daniels is a 2020-2021 participant in the West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program, leading an apprenticeship with Clara Haizlett of Wellsburg. Learn more: <https://wvfolklife.org/2020/10/21/2020-folklife-apprenticeship-feature-ed-daniels-clara-haizlett-agroforestry-forest-farming/>

Shady Grove Botanicals: <https://www.shadygrovebotanicals.com/>

CD: Carole Daniels  
ED: Ed Daniels  
EH: Emily Hilliard

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00:00

EH: Okay, let's see. Why don't you...why don't you introduce yourselves and tell me your names, where you're from and what you do.

ED: My name's Ed Daniels, I'm from Randolph County, West Virginia. School bus driver for about 9 months out of the year. Farmer year round--ginseng

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ED: Goldenseal, any medicinal root that we can find that could be eventually on the endangered list we try to take in and nurture to try to expand the life of those and hopefully get other people into growing as well!

EH: Nice.

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EH: Sorry I'm having some volume issues with my headphones. Test, test. Okay, it's working. Okay, what about you?

CD: My name is Carole Daniels and, Ed's wife. And we are forest farmers. I'm also a court room deputy for the federal court, but this is what we enjoy doing and want to create something for our retirement.

EH: Why don't you tell me a little bit about how your first encounters with ginseng as a kid and then how you got interested in this?

ED: Well as a young man growing up in the late 70s, money and jobs was sorta hard to come by, especially if you was a young kid. There was hayfields. You could work all day and maybe make 10 bucks. A lot of work for that. Then there was ginseng or gathering wild roots and herbs and I found being in the woods was a little bit cooler, a lot more fun and it was a great learning experience for over the years seeing how an area that once was flourishing with ginseng and goldenseal and you go back at a later date and you're like what happened? And some of it can be due to forestry. You open up a hole in the canopy and sometimes it'll stunt the growth of those plants. So not always done due to man, but there's a good part of it and I've seen that we need to make a change.

EH: So would you go out with your family members to dig?

ED: Not really. My dad sorta got me on it one year squirrel hunting and once I saw the plant with the berry and had a vision of it in my mind, it was like I gotta go find some more of that and it was just like a Christmas package that you would open on Christmas day. You never knew what was actually there. You

could guess. You couldn't rattle it for sure, but you could get down there and look at the top of the scar, the new growth bud and see how big it was. And it sorta gave you the inclination that it could be a big root or just an average sized root. So, yeah, everyone was different so it was exciting.

EH: And would you take it to a local dealer and get clothes money?

02:33

ED: Yeah. That's how I really got started. If I wanted a new pair of basketball shoes, my parents would get me a pair of shoes for school, but you know, if you was gonna play sports you had to have a separate set of shoes and they wasn't going for that. So I went out and earned that money and thought, boy it would be nice to have a new pair of jeans and a new shirt too, so that was a little extra. And when I was 15, I bought my first VW bug. It was a '74 Volkswagen Beetle. 500 dollars I got that year from my ginseng.

EH: Nice.

ED: Yeah.

EH: Where did you grow up?

ED: I grew up in Randolph County, the little town of Mill Creek. Really small area, probably less than 500 people. It's grown in the last 10 years. But small area, a lot of small families, but good people.

EH: So how did you learn how to do this forest farming and capture the seed?

ED: Well, it didn't really dawn on me until I was living in Virginia and we were coming home one weekend, so I didn't have a whole lot of time, so when ginseng season come in, I went back to some of the old places I used to go to when in high school. There wasn't much there and I thought, boy, did I cause that? So I started takin' seed and putting in those areas. And roots from other areas and maybe playing a little Robin Hood, I don't know. But I wanted to see that seng come back to be like it was at one time. And to do that, I felt that maybe I need to grow it on my property. Because it's against the law to take the seeds out of the wild, so if I grow 'em here on my property, even though they come from wild plants, I feel like I'm not crossing any strings by taking those seeds back and putting in the wild. We've got a lot of kids that's interested in the program Plant the Seed and so every year we donate a little extra seed to the schools and Cub Scouts and church groups and Vo/Ag to get kids into--just a small farm project they could do and not have to have big farm equipment to get started.

EH: Why don't you describe your farm and what you have going here?

ED: Well we're not certified organic yet. I feel that we're above that. We grow organically. I've been to places that folks have that status and have paid for it and still spray the heck out of their plants. And that sorta bothers me because they know how long they have to quit spraying it so they can fit through one of these [unintelligible] test program and still be legal. That tells me that our government's not, doesn't have a problem with you spraying something that could cause someone to get cancer in a couple years. Although it's not in there that they can detect when it went through their hands. To me, I'd rather go organic and that's how we've been. We plant everything and do it basically no till and we spade a hole for every root that we plant. And it takes time! I mean you go out and dig 2-300 plants in a week and then come up and try to plant 'em--that's a lot of work for 2 people and without Carole there to help me it would never have got done. A lot of times I'd get about halfway through on a weekend and give up because you're tired! You know, it's a job! And but we're starting to see that the seeds are coming back and what we're doing's doing right. So we're taking it and accepting it well and have who we done it!

06:17

EH: Would you tell me a little bit about some of the areas that you have and the processes? Either one of you can answer too. (laughs)

ED: Well the areas we have here are sorta a mix, due to the fact that we're basically at the top of a mountain which is sorta strange to be growing ginseng, but it's the property we have and we have this shade that's needed so we're trying it in different areas. The west area--a lot of people said it wouldn't grow facing the west, but believe it or not it does pretty well. The north and the east has been really producing well. I don't have any planted in the south because it's just so warm and facing directly into the sun, so but as far as the north, east, and west, I would say that if you give it the shade and a little bit of dampness, you can grow some ginseng, and you don't have to nurture it, it wants to grow there. It's just the shade's a big part of it and the type of trees. They like the sugar maples for sure. Poplars, black walnuts contribute to good calcium for those plants and that's what they really like is calcium. You can prime your ground using gypsum and gypsums not something that I'd want to use. I have heard of it. It will loosen the sod and put a little calcium in there, but the best is all natural. Get you some leaves, make you some mulch and make some teas actually. You can use some bark, rotten bark and make a compost tea out of that and help water your plants with it and it's all natural and it's healthy and it helps your plants grow real well.

08:09

EH: And then you make products from the berries and plants. Could you talk about those?

ED: Well, this is gonna be one of our better years for the berries so our process in the years past has just been to make a little bit of the berry juice for my own consumption. I have diabetes and I'm treating it with a pill, but the diets the best and believe it or not, the ginseng berry juice and the ginseng top have RB3 which will help lower your A1C numbers I've heard as much as 4 points. I just went for my physical for driving bus and I was, my A1C was 5. I was a 10 when I went in the hospital in March. So I'm back on to my health meds. I've taken ginseng and the byproducts of ginseng and I think it done me good.

EH: And what are the other customers and what are they, why are they interested in it?

ED: There is a couple different markets for ginseng. This Appalachian green ginseng which is what's freshly dug, has a Korean market. They use it a lot in culinary and they will actually come looking for you for this. One of the reasons we bought this place where we're at is because it's out in the middle of nowhere. And a lot of times by giving someone directions it still gets 'em lost trying to have us and we've had some friends from North Carolina that pulled up our driveway and said, "Hey do you sell ginseng?" So it's pretty scary when they're seeking you out like that, but it's a desired product. The market is strong. Everybody says that this year it's gonna be slow because of the tariffs and the treaties and such. Ginseng was there back during the Great Depression. Gold and ginseng held its value when everything else lost. So yeah, it's always worth something, even in trade.

10:20

EH: Yeah I was curious to know if anyone has tracked minimum wage against the price of ginseng over the years.

ED: I think it follows. I think it follows.

EH: Really?

ED: Yeah, because they need that lower income person out there to go dig it.

EH: Yeah, yep.

ED: Yep.

EH: Yeah, it seems like something that has traditionally filled in the gaps for people...

ED: ...and a lot of it too is the opioid addiction right now. I mean it's sad to say--I hope the rest of the season is as busy as it was with people knocking on our door prior to the season because they was trying to sell the stuff and we wouldn't buy. You know? We don't want to be that guy. But at the same time, somebody's gonna buy it. They're out there. Somebody's buying it. These people are still digging it. They're getting their money for their dope and that's what we see. That's forewarned.

EH: And then your interest is really in the seeds and developing good seed stock, right?

ED: Yeah. We want to be known as having the best seed stock that we can provide to a customer. Not the cheapest, not by volume, but if you wanted to buy 6 or 12 very healthy plants that would start you a seed production farm, I wanna be your guy.

EH: And with the berry juice, is that sort of a concentrate or how do you make that?

ED: It is a diluted process where you soak the berries for a given period of time and then you rupture them to get the seed out. And we have a press which is called a ricer, potato ricer and it does about 2 cups of berries at one time and you pour those in there and squeeze out the juice and then add that back to the diluted process that you soaked it in and you're making a pretty strong tincture there.

EH: So how much do you take? Is it a daily tincture that you take?

ED: I don't have to take it daily now. Before I have taken up to a teaspoon per day. It's hard to come by so you really want to make it last. And if you get into a situation, holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas maybe you find that you're blowing your diet and your sugar numbers is up a little bit, might be a good time to have a little extra of that around. But you know, once you do it for a little while, it helps maintain your sugar levels and you don't have to watch it as close. But you go eating potatoes and bread and a cups of sugar or soda pop, it'll blow it back up. But I usually try to save it for the holidays, yeah, when I blow my diet. (laughs)

13:19

EH: And what about the leaves? What do you make out of the leaves?

ED: Well, last year was our first year using the ginseng leaf. Carole made an elixir from a recipe that my great-granddad Charlie had used for many years! He lived to be 99 and he used this tincture probably once a day. Maybe not every day but he tried if he could get his product. And that was the ginseng leaf with some tea berry leaf and berry and a piece or two of the ginseng root and he made it and let it sit for months at a time and then as it turned color, you'll see it turn to a mint green, you have to have what 121 or stronger on the alcohol to pull the chlorophyll out of the leaf, but it'll turn it a mint color and it's actually a pretty good product of ours now and we're happy that we're carrying on something that my great-grandfather started.

EH: And do you find local people interested in ginseng products?

ED: Probably more in my roots than the products. Now, our local crowd's probably not our strong point. However, going to fairs and festivals, setting up doing vending, getting the word out and meeting folks and letting 'em know what our product could do for 'em and getting them interested enough to try it and then having 'em place orders a month later or shorter, knowing that your products doing well for 'em. And it gives you a little pat on the back to sort of say that you're helping out by just offering advice. Don't push your product and the ones that do use it will help spread the word.

EH: Do you get people saying, "Oh my grandfather used to take this elixir," or are there other stories like your grandfather Charlie that people have?

ED: Yeah. There's a lot of stories out there. A lot of self-healers here in the mountains for many years. My family grew up in logging camps and snake bites to compound fractures to head lice to you name it, it was in those camps. And these guys they didn't have an ambulance or 911 they called. They either tried to help 'em out or determined whether or not how deep the hole was gonna be. So the old remedies were passed down just like the Bible and it's very important, we need to get back to both.

16:01

EH: Were those Randolph County logging camps?

ED: Yeah, head of Mill Creek, head of Buckhannon River here behind us, north um...Middle Fork, the Middle Fork River was a lot of 'em. Old steam engines, yeah.

EH: Yeah, I've seen some of those photos, with huge trees!

ED: Oh yeah, especially here in Pickens. There's a lot here in Pickens. Yeah.

EH: There's a great book Matthew Neal Null, just a novel about logging camps in West Virginia, right at the moment when they were basically just clearing the whole land, called Honey from the Lion. You should check it out. I really loved it.

ED: There's one here in Pickens called Haven in the Hardwoods. I think, we have it here. But it's got some pictures of some logs that had over 3,000 board foot in one log.

EH: Wow.

ED: Yeah.

EH: Yeah, it's interesting to look at those. [unintelligible] What are your hopes for the farm?

17:09

ED: Invest for the future. Prepare all you can. I don't know, what do you think?

CD: Well I'd like to continue with the sustainability of our medicinal plants for not only our grandson but his family and other people that could benefit from our roots and our products for a better, healthier life.

EH: Will you talk about his patch?

CD: Briar's patch? We started that 2 years ago. He helped plant the seed. We have pictures of that. And he helps us plant, he brings us the mulch and he's very entertained with it. He can recognize ginseng and we want him to be--we want him to love that plant and this farm just as much as we do and I think we've already, he's already to that point. You know, he loves it over here and he makes, we make memories and I just want him to continue what we've started here for him.

ED: He's gonna have a good start if we can just manage to keep the outsiders out.

EH: Could you talk a little bit about that? Have you had trouble?

ED: Just a little bit. More so when we was in Huttonsville, and that's why we dug everything out up there and brought it down here. Actually a boy that was his parents was renting our house there and I just happened to be up there and he come out of the woods, said "Hey man, you wanna buy some ginseng?" I was like, "What?" And he goes "Yeah, you wanna buy some ginseng." I was like "Dude. Where'd you dig that at?" And he said, "Right up there, there's all kinds of it." He said, "Well there was!" and I was like "Oh man!" So yeah, you know. It's hard when that's around the population, it's hard to keep it. It is. I don't care how big a fence you build. It's money.

EH: Have you seen changes? I mean I know you don't really dig except to replant, but has sort of places you can dig and changes in the environment affected ginseng crop from when you were a kid?

ED: It has. Today's areas have been timbered probably 2-3 times since I was there as a teenager. So the land is a lot more open. Not much understory as far as the green plants if there's anything it's a big thicket from where it's been sitting for 7 years, after it's been timbered, and then you'll start getting the understory of the trees coming up. But it takes a while and sometimes your plants don't lay dormant for the full 7 years. They'll die off and they'll come out and try to come up and they'll get sunburnt and they'll go back down and they'll probably never come back. But some you know, they're vibrant, they'll last and you'll see 'em again 4 or 5 years and sometimes it's 7 but yeah, the timbering plays a big part on it and it has changed. I mean it's--the woods aren't as shaded as they used to be.

CD: And just overharvesting as well.

ED: Yes, overharvesting.

CD: You know, some people may not practice the harvesting, the proper harvesting methods and that's with anything, not just ginseng but any type of plant out there if you're not taking the certain, so many per area, then it could be detrimental to the future of that plant.

ED: You should only take 33% of the mature plants that are producing red berries. And then that's a question, because in the wild, a wild plant may produce berries at 8 years, sometimes maybe not so if the first year of that plant has berries on it, it gets harvested, it could have been a 10-year plant, it may have only produced berries one year. So are we allowing it enough time to put back? You know, one of the things that I see as a digger and a grower, I think the 4-prong rule would really work. Therefore, it has to be probably a 10-year-old plant before it could be dug. And that should have produced seeds for a couple years, not just that one year. So it'd be more seed, more seedling growing and we might see a turn on the whole ginseng as far as population goes.

22:18

EH: What about enforcement or private land--is that an issue with digging?



ED: It is. A lot of the lands is leased now for hunting and with that hunting lease you have permission to usually dig seng on that property. So a lot of the guys are trying to pay for their lease by digging the seng that's there if it has seng. Which isn't a bad deal. The big timber companies, they don't really care about what the seng is that's there. Their forester who goes out and marks timber, he might dig a pocketful every once in a while, but then the guy that's cutting the trees, when he cuts the trees and he sees the big pot of berries, he may shut his chainsaw off a minute to go and dig that root, but all in all, timber, a lot of the guys that's in the timber, they're more about the logs, they're not about the ginseng, so.

EH: I think even in some of the surveys they do of the land, they don't even count other forest plants that aren't trees.

ED: And it's a shame because just here on our little farm, you know I can see potential in the next few years with our nurseries to have root stock that's plentiful to sell a given number by pound or piece per year. Not just sell large volumes but more of the quality-grown products that we're known for. And people appreciate that and if you give 'em good stock and they have good luck with it when they try to transplant it, using your methods and your material, then the word of mouth spreads and in 2 or 3 years you don't even have to advertise, it's just people are there knocking on your door wanting your product.

EH: What are the other wild plants that you are managing here?

ED: Ramps, some people know 'em as leeks, but here in the mountains, they're known as ramps and I think they're totally different than a leek, but I've heard 'em referred to as a leek. Some cohosh, black cohosh, not so much of the blue--we do have a bunch of blue seed that I broadcasted over the last couple years. A couple plants have started but what we're farming would be goldenseal, ginseng, some different mints, some other-- blueberries, elderberry...

CD: Staghorn sumac, I mean we have other...we're trying to get more herbs too this year. We're trying to...

ED: Blackberries and apples, we do apples.

CD: Mmhm. We have quite a bit.

ED: Yeah.

EH: Yeah, that's a lot. What would be helpful if there were sort of infrastructures to help make your market or work better, more viable, what would those be?

25:22

ED: Given markets with a flat rate that didn't fluctuate with tariffs and embargos that our president imposes just because he has the money to pay for it, not thinking of how much it affects people as it trickles on down the line. Just a little more thought on things like that would really be great. Yeah, the market in ginseng alone is way down this year so far, as low as I've seen it in a long time, and it's being blamed on the tariff. We'll see. 'Cause really the Koreans are the ones that should be buying this early seng which is the green seng and they're mostly the ones that you're selling that to are here in the states. So I don't see where it's hurting their market unless they are actually selling some out of the country, which they claim they're not. The Chinese are taking the dry to sell, so that market I can see where it's going to affect and we've already been warned. But this green market, I think it's, it's creating a buyers' market and they cry wolf to get the price down so that you can buy cheap and then double your money.

EH: And so the green is that--so digging season is September 1 to November?

ED: 30th.

EH: 30th, and then, but you can bring in the dry until March?

ED: If you get the, you have to get a certificate to hold it that long. You can't just assume that it's okay. You have to go to a place to get it certified. They'll weigh it and tell you the date and have you sign off on it and that way you've got a certificate, I think it cost you \$2 a pound. But it's there to protect ya and that way if you're making tinctures or whatever in your house, you should have these certificates 'cause you do have ginseng in your possession. And they can come in and give you fines for it for possessing out of season. Although you've done it back during season and you haven't consumed it all, it's just on your person or in your dwelling, they can still give you a ticket for it.

EH: Wow. So who else should I talk to, either related to ginseng in the state, or forest farming, wild plants?

27:57

ED: The Olsons!

CD: Jim McGraw from...

ED: I don't know about him.

CD: He does more studies for ginseng.

ED: He's at WVU and he's traveling, retired now.

CD: Forest farmers. We don't really know too many people that forest farm.

ED: Larry Harding.

CD: He's in Maryland.

EH: Yeah, I'm confined by state borders a little bit.

CD and ED: (laugh)

EH: Yeah, I always say culture doesn't move along state lines!

CD: (laughs)

EH: (laughs) But I am sort of part of a regional grant that's looking at the whole...

ED: And that's something that'd be nice--being able to get some grants to be able to pay for the fencing and things like that! I mean, because you know, deer is sort of public enemy here. And turkeys as well. And everybody says, "Oh just shoot the deer." And I was like nah, they was here probably before I was, so. We build a fence. We're fencing with an 8-foot-high deer fence. It's not cheap. Things like that, you know, take away from any type of a profit we thought we was gonna have this year.

CD: Security.

ED: Yeah, security. That's gonna be the next thing.

EH: Yeah, like cameras or actual people or what are you thinking?

ED: Cameras would help. We gotta move here. We know that. We've just got too much going on really. It don't seem like a lot but there is.

EH: Oh, it seems like it.

ED: Yeah. There is. So we've got...

CD: Yeah, you only saw 10 minutes' worth.

ED: We do have other seng planted here. It's scattered but it's here.

EH: Are there Dept. of Ag or US...

CD: Division of Forestry.

EH: USDA or Extension...

CD: That regulates the ginseng in the state of West Virginia.

EH: But are there any grants available through...

CD: Not that we're aware of.

EH: Wow.

ED: I've actually tried to become one of the state seed banks to create seed from the ginseng either a seed sale or rootlet sale back to the state of wild plants but since I moved 'em from the wild and planted 'em on my property, they won't let me call 'em wild.

EH: Whoa.

ED: And if I do classify it as wild, then I can't sell the seed.

EH: Jeez.

CD: It'd be great to establish...

EH: You're in a catch-22.

CD: Yeah! To establish a seed bank for future stock.

ED: And that's what a great idea. I mean you take these eastern states that have Appalachian seng, if they all had a seed bank and was putting back 20,000 seed a year. 20,000. That 20,000 gets tripled in 4 years. So you know 60,000 now and those are putting off seed and that's. The numbers just swell. Like you've

seen those berry pods earlier that we was collecting, you know? You don't see the number until you break it open because a lot of it's doubled.

EH: Yeah. yep.

CD: Sometimes there's even 3 seed, right? But usually 2.

ED: So those numbers putting back into the woods you know, should mean something to the timberland. The guy that actually owns that land. There is value in my property other than the trees that I sold. 'Cause what am I gonna sell now for the next 20-30 years while that tree's trying to grow back? You know? I could raise 2 runs of seng off of that area in 20 years.

CD: Maybe somebody it'll be...

ED: And it's \$60,000 per acre you know, it adds up! And it's easy and in about 10 years, you should be able to get \$60,000 with a 12000 investment. And that's a good ballpark but that's pretty true.

EH: Do you think that there will be an increasing market, an increasing interest as time goes on and sort of climate change and things progress?

ED: Honestly, you hit something right there that we've focused on for the last couple years with the absence of opioids in the market and we're all seeing that, everybody's pulling back. The folks that's experiencing pain or thinking they're having pain are still looking for something. There is herbs and medicines out there that's created through wild crafting that will combat these pains and does it just as well as the over the counter pharmaceutical drugs. Once these folks realize that and start using it and have the faith, that's the big thing. People, they don't believe it. And once you've experienced it and I have, it's a total eye opener. I mean you'll trust a plant from then on out. I mean it's amazing the power of a plant.

EH: And we didn't talk about it at all but you have a pilot hemp project.

ED: Yeah. It's our first year growing hemp. We started off with about 1700, we're probably down about 1630. We lost some to deer, rabbits and just pest and weeding out the males to keep it from going to seed. What an adventure it's been! It's one of those things that was on my bucket list--to grow a whole field full of hemp and I can say I done that now and on to bigger and better things. I'm hoping that we can get a greenhouse going up here and get it to where we're sort of a perpetual farm on the hemp, putting off a crop about the time the next is harvest, ready to be harvest, we'll put one on the ground or into the greenhouse, but yeah, if we could do that 3 times a year, we both could stay at home and be farmers.

EH: And so do you work outside of the ginseng farm?

ED: I do. I drive a school bus. I've got about an hour and a half run in the morning and a hour and a half in the evening and the time in between, got rental properties and we've also got a small farm in Huttonsville and then the farm here. So this one here's really attached my interest for this summer and hopefully it's gonna be the one that pays off.

EH: You've got a lot going! (laughs)

ED: And a portable saw mill too, so (laughs). Yeah, whenever you're--we had an outdoor shop at Snowshoe. Outfitters. So I took people and guided hikes for teaching 'em about plants and how to fly-fish, how to tie a fly, how to ride a mountain bike and just showing 'em the scenes that I knew was pretty stellar here in the state. So we done that for several years so a lot of people have met us and have come

back to see some of the same things we showed 'em in the past. So it's pretty cool our eyes have the vision of what other people are looking for and hopefully it will be into the roots and herbs because that's what we've focused on for the last 6-7 years for sure, and the bounty of the crop was pretty good this year. I'm hoping the plants and the seeds that we stick in the ground for next year will prosper and from here on out it should take care of itself. Self-planting.

EH: Is there anything else you'd like to share? Well thank you guys!

CD: Thank you!

ED: Thank you!

36:27

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