

Interview of: Rodman Meacham
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Interview Date: August 23, 2005

August 25, 2005

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Interviewee: Rodman Meacham
Meacham Hams – Sturgis, KY
August 23, 2005

[Begin Rodman Meacham]

0:00:00.0

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans on Monday, August 22, 2005 for the Southern Foodways Alliance and I'm in Sturgis, Kentucky at Meacham Hams and we're here to talk about bacon. And Mr. Meacham would you introduce yourself for the record and also your birth date if you don't mind.

0:00:19.0

Rodman Meacham: Okay; I'm Rodman Meacham and my birth date is July 16, 1953.

0:00:26.0

AE: Okay; and I was commenting before we started recording [*Laughs*]--on your family homestead here; can you talk a little bit about how--how long the family has been right here outside of Sturgis?

0:00:35.9

RM: Well this--this farm is like a lot of western Kentucky farms; it has a lot of history and--and it's been in our family for a long time. My dad actually moved here in the '60s--1960s and built

the first ham--the first part of our ham house, the sales room as you came in up here, as the first addition to our building here. He had--he had another building on what he calls the home farm, which is closer to Morganfield where he cured hams and--and bacon and things you know prior to that. So in the 1960s he moved here and started doing hams a little more--a little more earnest I guess you'd say and bacon as well.

0:01:18.2

AE: But prior to that your family has been curing hams and making bacon for some generations; is that right?

0:01:24.8

RM: Yeah; he--he learned the art and the recipe I guess was handed to him by his grandmother, which would be my great-grandmother and so she had--she had a recipe written in the back of a cookbook for--for the cure for the hams and the bacon and they started out. In--in those days you had a farmhand and you paid them with a hog or two for a year in the fall or early winter. They would--they would all get together and kill those hogs and then cure the bacon and the bellies and make sausage and--and put that meat up for the winter, and that's--that was part of the pay that those people got for working on that farm. So that's how he learned how to--how to do hams and--and bacon and he--it kind of grew from there.

0:02:12.4

AE: And what was your great-grandmother's name?

0:02:15.4

RM: He's going to get--he's going to get me if I don't do this right, but her--her--she was a Hamner was her--was her last name and I'm not sure about her first.

0:02:23.3

AE: H-a-m-n-e-r?

0:02:25.0

RM: H-a-m-n-e-r.

0:02:26.5

AE: The irony is hard to ignore. [*Laughs*]

0:02:29.1

RM: Yeah; Hamner, uh-huh.

0:02:29.6

AE: And so do you have any idea if the recipe that was in her cookbook--was that something she got from someone or something she made up? Do you know?

0:02:36.4

RM: I don't know the origin of it. I'm sure somebody in the family had passed it to her. And--and why she had it I--I guess--I guess it was written in her cookbook so somebody just probably said her put--write this down and so we'll keep up with it type of things. But I'm not sure about where she actually got it.

0:02:58.1

AE: Well can you talk about the process of curing ham back in your grandfather's era and your great-grandmother's era?

0:03:05.0

RM: Well it's quite a bit different than it is now of course without the benefits of refrigeration and all the other modern conveniences, but basically you--you would kill the hogs in the winter time, which that's your refrigeration and they had a smoke house and part of the house was--was

a salt box that they would put the bellies and the hams in to cure them and they kept up with it on a calendar and dad would say that if they had a day below freezing, they would take that day off and they would try and stay 40 days or whatever--whatever the time period was. And so if it had a day below freezing they--they would add a day at the end. So--so they tried--tried to have several days in there without freezing in a row. And then of course, by the end of that period, the curing time was--last you know a couple of months. They--at the end of that time the weather was starting to warm up a little bit in the spring and they would have what we call salt equalization which is that kind of early spring time when the temperatures are rising and humidity is low, which kind of allows the cure to further penetrate the ham and do a little better job and of course the next was the summer where you had the high summer heat and that was all of what they call the summer sweat. I'm sure--you're grinning so I'm sure you've heard these terms before, but they--the--that's where--that's where we think you get the flavor that you need from a good Kentucky country ham. So--and then--and then of course, you're back to winter again, so you start the cycle all over.

0:04:44.6

AE: Uh-hm; do you know what kind of scale they were working with back then?

0:04:48.6

RM: Oh, not really; I--I would say they would kill you know 20 to 50 hogs and where my dad really got his start--he was obviously pretty good at curing the hams and--and he had some

relatives and his brother-in-law in Louisville, Kentucky was an attorney, so as a gift or a favor to him, he would send a ham up there and they would have a party and they would serve the ham and then where did you get this and get him to cure me a ham next year. So dad started I guess buying extra hams as they--as they were killing extra hogs or whatever, so that he would meet that demand, and by the time he moved here and built this first ham house he was already you know I'd guess you'd say a commercial operation because he was selling those hams to those people and it just kind of grew from there.

0:05:38.1

AE: Uh-hm; and so your father grew up--they were raising their own hogs at that time?

0:05:41.7

RM: Yes, yeah.

0:05:42.9

AE: And so you say that they would process about 40 or 50; how many were they raising?

0:05:49.4

RM: Oh, I don't know--probably a few hundred in--in the course of a year, but there was--I think their primary reason for the hogs was just to have something to eat, so it wasn't like a commercial hog operation.

0:06:02.0

AE: And where do y'all get your hogs now? Do you still raise them?

0:06:05.1

RM: We buy hams, you know on availability from different packers and distributors so it's--we have--we have never slaughtered here at this location. It's--we've always purchased hams; that's just the way my dad started. We've never been in--in a slaughter operation.

0:06:19.3

AE: And what's your father's first name?

0:06:22.3

RM: William--he's 92 years old and he's--he can't get to the ham house every day but he's still very much interested in what's going on, so I'm sure I'll have to report to him here shortly.

0:06:32.9

AE: [*Laughs*] And so he came over here and started the ham house you say in the '60s?

0:06:38.6

RM: Uh-hm.

0:06:39.1

AE: Do you have an idea about that transition and when--when making hams and bacon went from a mainstay of a culture in western Kentucky to a money-maker and how he made that happen?

0:06:54.3

RM: I'm going to say along that--in along that early '60s--mid-'60s was when his--people started asking him to cure more so it became--it became a business at that time and--and he never did raise a lot of hogs on this farm, so when--when he built his first ham house, it was--the intent was to buy the hams and cure them. So as the demand increased, he increased the number of hams he cured; so--

0:07:21.6

AE: And what other business was he in? Did he--

0:07:24.2

RM: Well he farmed; he farmed this, too, so--and--and he worked for the federal government. He was--he measured tobacco and worked for the--they called it ASCS. It's the Farm Services Organization now so he did that kind of as a sideline, too; so--

0:07:42.2

AE: When did his father--your grandfather--pass?

0:07:45.6

RM: In the late '60s, early '70s?

0:07:50.9

AE: So was he around to see this kind of start as a business?

0:07:53.3

RM: Yes, yeah; he saw this start. He never was as interested in it as dad was but--but he--yeah, he--it was pretty much my dad's doing. But my--my grandfather was quite--quite a farming pioneer. He--in this county, he--he had the first rubber tire tractor and he also was involved--they--they had a program here up at the courthouse at Morganfield, there's placard at the courthouse square up there about--the first county of Kentucky to get rid of all the scrub bulls [undersized or poorly developed] so he was involved in that, you know getting all the--the cattle to purebred--to purebred sires anyway and he also had a seed corn operation and he raised--he--he imported Korean lespedeza [also known as bush clover] in here from other parts of the country and raised that as--as a forage source and they--and they used it as groundcover in the south. So he--he had raised a seed for that. So he was quite--quite a gentleman. I--I remember him; he was a--he was quite a gentleman.

0:09:04.4

AE: And so when your father started the ham house, how did that start--build a cinderblock building and call it a ham house?

0:09:11.0

RM: Yeah; pretty much--he built this first little room up here and what is it--15-foot square maybe and he could cure about you know 200 or 300 hams in there--is about what you could hang up in there. So he did it all right there in that winter except for the smoke house was always separate out there; so he had a separate little side building out there that he could hang up the

hams and smoke them, because we smoke our hams. Some people do and some people don't but we like to smoke them and it's kind of hard to do it in the same room that you cure in; so--

0:09:44.7

AE: Yeah; and so let's talk about your bacon.

0:09:47.3

RM: Okay; well obviously if you've got hams you've got bacon to cure. So dad--dad always had an old country bacon, I call it, and--and some of the bacons that we produce today are still based on that formula. I--I think initially you used the same cure that you use with--for the hams, so you know they're going to taste salt--salt content and then maybe flavor wise they're going to be very similar but--but he always added a little maple to his; that's one of the things that we put in at least one of our bacons, and--and that--that gave it a very unique flavor and so that's kind of how we did bacon too and still do.

0:10:40.2

AE: Uh-hm; and so over the years--40 years of--of being a retailer how has business changed?

0:10:46.7

RM: It's changed a lot obviously. We've evolved into--into pretty much a catalog and internet based business. We do sell to some suppliers like Cracker Barrel and some other wholesalers that are again a catalog business, so we're--we've kind of targeted that as our niche. I think people's tastes have changed somewhat so we've developed some bacons that have a little less salt content. The downside to that is that they're not as quite shelf stable as--as the old country bacons were, and you can't just leave them out without refrigeration for a long period of time. But--but they are very flavorful and--and you know with some other additives--some pepper and some other things, you can create some different tastes; so--

0:11:41.8

AE: What do you think about that--how creative people are getting with their bacon cures?

0:11:46.7

RM: Oh I see--I see new bacons all the time. You know I--I like--I just like the old country bacon myself. I just don't think you can beat it. I do like pepper bacon; that's probably my favorite. But some people and put pepper in all their cures, but--but we don't. We don't put it on our hams, so I really like it in the--in the bacon cure.

0:12:11.8

AE: How long do you cure your bacon for?

0:12:15.4

RM: We're in cure about seven to ten days depending on the size of the bellies and then the procedure would be to you know--to take them up out of cure and wash that excess cure off. I like to let them hang a few extra days in and kind of firm up--just kind of--and then we go into the smoke house and smoke them just until we get the right color and the right flavor to them, and from there, you know they're either--they're either or sliced and package or sold--and sold in slabs. It's a pretty simple procedure, really.

0:12:49.8

AE: Now you said you didn't have any in cure right now. Is this just a--a downtime for you or--

0:12:53.1

RM: It's just a downtime of the year. We haven't started building our inventories for the fall and you just happened to catch us at a time when--it's pretty typical this time of year; so--

0:13:03.8

AE: Uh-hm; what do you think as far as being a producer of both hams and bacons and they kind of go together as you say but there's a little bit of a different artform in the hams--so much

importance is put on the hams, but the bacon is such a craft also. Can you explain the difference there or do you think that there is a perceived difference?

0:13:27.7

RM: I--you know bacon is very--it's a lot easier and less time to produce than ham. So that's--that's a definite plus for it. I think there's been some health connotations from the past against bacon and--and we're trying to overcome those--the industry is. Certainly the hogs that--the product that we're buying now is leaner and--and not--doesn't have the real big thick fat it used to, so it's--it's got to be better as far as cholesterol and fat levels in it. But you know I guess ham is just something that's very popular and--and bacon should be as popular.

0:14:17.7

AE: Growing up did you expect to be the Meacham Farm--you know did you expect that business to be handed down to you and you would be curing hams and--

0:14:28.7

RM: I dabbled with some other things and I still have some other business interests. This is just one of the things that I do. But yeah, you know I--I think as of my late--my late teens I knew that I wanted to be involved in this. And my dad was really--he was one of those particular about how things are done and the quality of course is very--he's passed those things onto me, but--but

he--at the same time he wouldn't let me participate in a lot--especially when I was younger, so he made me watch, and I guess that peaks your interest. When--when I got to be a teenager, I knew I could do it; so--

0:15:06.4

AE: Do you have brother or sisters?

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RM: I have--I have two brothers and a sister.

0:15:09.4

AE: And are they in the business?

0:15:11.3

RM: No, uh-uh; they're--they're all out doing other things. So I'm the only one that's involved in the business.

0:15:17.0

AE: Do you have children of your own?

0:15:18.1

RM: I've got three children, and I got one still in high school. He doesn't know what he's going to do. I've got another son that's in his early 20s and he works in a bank and my daughter is an interior designer, so she lives away from here. So I don't know; there may be one of them that-- that might end up back in the business. I don't know; we'll just have to see.

0:15:38.9

AE: Yeah; is it something that growing up that they took part in because it is the family business?

0:15:43.8

RM: Oh yeah, yeah; you've got--got to make your kids work. So--especially at Christmas time. All hands on-deck I call it. [*Laughs*] So that's our busy time.

0:15:57.0

AE: And in what--how has the internet changed your business? I mean I know it's got to be just leaps and bounds but--

0:16:01.7

RM: Well it obviously--I--I don't know how you can operate and be in business especially with a catalog without--without an internet presence. So I like it because you know it's a fairly level playing field out there. You can--you can have a nice website and look--look just as big as the next guy down there who's a huge company. So that's not our intent to do that, but--but it does sort of level the playing field. One thing about the internet is you just have to constantly be you know evolving with it as the technology increases you know; people--people want to be able to get online and--and have an easy way to order, so we're you know about every--at least once a year we're updating our--our shopping cart, changing the website, trying to add the features that people are searching for because they can go find something else pretty quick. That--that's the downside to it. There's--when they type in the word bacon they're going to find a lot of bacon, so try to grab them and keep them. So retaining the customer is very important. So service and quality and--and all those things--we think we can do a better job with those because we're a smaller company whereas you tend to get lost in the shuffle maybe with some of the bigger ones, but by the same token they've got all the technology and the tools to--you know to--to keep up with things. So it's a challenge.

0:17:31.9

AE: What do you think outside of maybe it just being a family owned and operated small business, what do you think sets apart your product from other producers?

0:17:43.3

RM: Well--of course, I--you know everybody thinks they have the best product and I'd be remiss in my job if I didn't say that, but--but there are a lot of companies--I'll say this; there are a lot of companies that have unique things about their business, but the--probably the most important thing we have is--is our customers. And--and everybody has their own customers and we might share with other companies but--but those are our bread and butter, so we try--we try to maintain those and you find them different ways. You--a lot of it's word of mouth, so you know referrals are--are important. But you know obviously we have--we have good products as other companies do, but everybody has got their own unique flavor, their own unique little thing that they do; I've always said this to people that--that I could give you my cure and let you go back here in this building and cure hams and they would probably taste different. The building is important; the procedure is important, but you know the times, the--the you know--how you mix things, how long to smoke, what kind of smoke--all those things have a big factor--a big influence on--on what it tastes like and what it looks like; so... It's just--every business is unique and every business owner is unique, you know. So that's America. **[Laughs]**

0:19:12.5

AE: Do you have many local customers?

0:19:15.7

RM: You know it's funny; we do have some but as you can see we're kind of off the beaten path so we don't have a big retail trade and--and a lot of my fellow small ham baking producers are like that; they're out on the farm; the family farm is kind of where they originated; so most of our business is away from here. So we tend--we tend to kind of cater that way I guess you'd say.

0:19:46.9

AE: And then I'm thinking, too, about how in this part of the South curing was such a necessity as we talked about before and it's how you treated your food and it--now with refrigeration and all that you know, most anybody could have a hand in curing meat. What is it about this region and your family that makes it important to maintain that and still have you know a foot in that--that past but then also work it in the future and being part of the internet?

0:20:20.4

RM: Well it's--you know it's--it's important to me to maintain the family business, to carry on I guess you'd say. It's a way of life in the South, you know. The family is here close by; my--my father is still living, so you know it's--it's just kind of what we do and--and I enjoy it.

0:20:53.1

AE: What about barbecue in this area?

0:20:56.2

RM: We've all--we've got the best barbecue in the world right here in western Kentucky.

0:21:00.3

AE: Okay.

0:21:01.4

RM: [*Laughs*] How many--how many people have you heard say that?

0:21:03.4

AE: Not a one. [*Laughs*]

0:21:04.9

RM: You know they're--it's--it's kind of like curing the hams. There's a lot of influences into the flavors and--and I'm not that much of a student of barbecue, you know but--but I do know from living--at least in a couple different areas in the state of Kentucky that--that they barbecue entirely different than the way we do, and their flavors are different and consequently the people

there like their barbecue better, you know, than--than we would like ours--as we like ours, but you know you've got--hickory wood here is important in Western Kentucky just like if you went to Texas you'd be using mesquite, but--but hickory is readily available here, so that's a good--good flavor source. Sometimes you use some fir woods but--but hickory is the mainstay. And that's pretty much probably over the south, but you know I think--I think the--the water, the air quality, the--you know even--even the pork that's produced here probably has a different flavor than something that's produced say in Georgia. But just because of what they're fed and how they're--how they're taken care of. So all those factors make a difference, but of course with barbecue the spices and you know how they're applied and when they're applied and the temperatures and how long do you cook and--and all those things, you know those are all--are--are trade secrets or trade differences I guess you'd say.

0:22:37.3

AE: Uh-hm; well the hams that you get to cure and--and process do you know what they're fed or what they're--

0:22:43.9

RM: No; you know pretty well all of the--it's--the--the pork packers have kind of become centralized like--like the beef--not--not quite to that extent but--but most of them are in the mid-east, you know Illinois, Iowa, Indiana some, Missouri--so you know they're in the Corn Belt. So we've got I think maybe one--one major--and I'm not sure they kill hogs here--I don't purchase

from them so I'm not sure whether they kill hogs in Louisville anymore or not. But--so you--you know the hogs are coming from those areas. Even--even the hog operations have become so centralized and--and I know in the Carolinas you know there's a packing industry there because they've got a very big hog industry and--and in Virginia, you know there's some big packers over there; so I--who knows where they come from to be honest with you.

0:23:50.5

AE: Is there still a tradition in the country or in this area for home curing or hog killing?

0:23:56.0

RM: There--you know there are a few people, a few--especially we've got a big farming community here and there are a few farm families that still get the family together and kill hogs. They primarily would grind it up and make sausage and whatever, but you know the whole--the day of making the lard and all that stuff is long gone. But yeah, I think there's still some of that. And--and we also have some custom slaughter operations here, so you know these--a lot of these farmers are grain farmers and they--they don't raise any hogs anymore but they may still have a hog floor and they may raise--may feed a few hogs that--just so they can kill their own hogs and--and then they take them to a customer processor and have--have it done. So people still think there's value in that.

0:24:45.5

AE: And then you're on the Union County Fair Board; is that right?

0:24:48.2

RM: Uh-huh.

0:24:49.1

AE: And what--what do you do for them?

0:24:50.8

RM: We put on a county fair and operate you know a facility, so I enjoy that. I've been on it for 25 years, so that's--that kind of evolved from being on the farm. My dad was on that board, so--

0:25:08.6

AE: How does--how do hams and bacon figure into the county fair?

0:25:11.7

RM: Well we have--we have a really neat program that I've been involved in and actually it started at the state level about four years ago. We have a 4-H country ham program here and as a member of the Kentucky Ham Producers, I was active in helping getting that started along with Dr. Benji Michael who was the Extension Meat Specialist of the UK [University of Kentucky]. He did the lion's share of the work, but the--this year we had--we just returned from the state fair and the hams are still back there on the back table. We had 309 youth entered in that--in that contest at the state fair. So that's quite--that's quite a sight to see that many hams in one place, and--and then the procedure--it's a two-part deal. The--the ham is judged and they also have to give a speech and so I had 40--I had 43 kids that cured hams here at my plant and they come in and they do all the work. When the hams come in, they get to go pick their own hams; we call their name out and they go pick a ham up and then they bring it over and we--we help them rub the cure on it and go through the whole process; that's all hands-on, and--and I enjoy that about as much as anything I've done lately. I'm trying to educate a--another generation to become-- appreciate the products. That's--you know that's--that's my main interest I guess in it. But you know my--my--one of my children has been involved in it. So we just got back from the state fair and--and all that; so that's--that's been a neat deal that we've done.

0:26:53.3

AE: Have you had some kids who have come back and wanted to like intern with you or do a seasonal kind of thing?

0:26:59.9

RM: I've--I have done it through the years, I've--I've always worked a lot of seasonal kids in here. I just enjoy that--mostly high school students that can--and--and college age, so yeah we've done it through the years and we still pursue that.

0:27:20.4

AE: Are they surprised by anything that goes on behind the scenes and--the scenes in a ham house or is it something that they kind of have an idea about?

0:27:28.2

RM: You know most--most people that have not been around this meat in general, you know this--the sheer quantity, you know. When they say a combo of hams, it's 2,000 pounds of ham in a box, you know and it's--especially for the kids; they just can't believe that there's--ever was that much. But I think they're very impressed with--you know with the sanitation and--and all that--that we you know--that's just a part of our lives here and--and I think they--I think they enjoy you know that hands on; so--

0:28:05.3

AE: And then what happens to the hands after the--

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RM: Well, they get to keep them. They actually--they actually cure two hams in the program, so if they complete it--if they go and--and that's part of it; if they--if they get--if they chicken out and don't go to the state fair and give that presentation then--then they forfeit the hams. So they--they actually sign a little contract to that effect up front so their family gets to enjoy those hams.

0:28:32.3

AE: And then what does their speech consist of--what they learned?

0:28:34.8

RM: I think it's like three to five minutes and it's just--you know about curing a ham, what they've learned, you know; these kids get real creative. Some of them, you know--we--we have one young lady who did it in the--in the tense that she was the ham so she went through that--that whole process you know as being the ham and all the things that happened to her. It was real cute. You know some of the--most of the other kids are--and I encourage them--I give them some ideas of where they can go. I say look; you can go on the internet and you can go to the USDA. I give--we give them some websites and some places that they can go and we give them some handouts, plus you know I--I will sit down with them in a meeting and let them ask questions and--and we give them some handouts, things that summarize more or less what we've done in the project so that they have some ammunition to write their speeches with. But I

encourage them to--you know to--to look up like you know things like what is--let's look up some of the cure ingredients and you know what--what does sodium nitrate do because I think those are the extra things that--that will help them with their speeches. But I--I've never sat through the speeches at the state level, but I'm sure they're--you know they're quite excellent; so-

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0:29:59.4

AE: Speaking of cure, can you talk a little bit about what exactly goes into your cure?

0:30:06.0

RM: It's--it's a pretty typical cure; I think we probably use maybe a little bit more sugar than--than some people do because salt--of course, you can cure it with salt alone; so I just like--I like the flavoring that the sugar does to the ham and the bacon as well. Of course, we--we do--we do a little different combination to the bacon, but--but it's primarily sugar and--and salt and some curing agents; so--

0:30:39.3

AE: It is important where your sugar and salt come from?

0:30:42.7

RM: Not so much where they come from; it's just--especially the salts, you know there's--there are different grades of salt; there is a meat curing salt, there's some flake salts, and--and I like a salt that doesn't dissolve too fast. So that maybe a little coarser salt; some of the flake salts are more designed for--you know for emulsification of liquid so that they broke down a little faster and--and that doesn't work for me because of the timeframe that we cure the hams. So--with a dry-cured ham you--you need a salt--you want it to penetrate but you don't want it to just melt and run-off in a few days or something. But you know sugar is sugar; you just--wherever you can get it the cheapest.

0:31:29.1

AE: *[Laughs]* And then how many flavors of bacon do you offer or cure as a bacon?

0:31:32.9

RM: We've got--we've got a pepper bacon, a regular bacon--it's what we call a country bacon, and a maple bacon; so we've got three bacons, and like I said, the maple bacon is--is pretty much my dad's old country bacon, where they call it the old country bacon, we call it a maple bacon because it's--it's got some maple in the flavor.

0:31:51.6

AE: And so growing up on this farm and being part of this ham house and business did--do you eat ham or business do you eat ham or bacon every day?

0:31:57.2

RM: Oddly enough you don't. I--I can't--I remember eating a lot of bacon for breakfast, but you know we--we pretty much have ham at the holidays and now that we have the vacuum packaging and it's so much more convenient, we probably eat more ham than we did. But just--I mean grab a pack; we're going home for supper you know so let's... but--but I don't remember eating ham--I remember my grandmother had--had--she always had a ham in the pantry, because you know it would keep without refrigeration for a good while, especially in the winter time, and my mother would--would--the Christmas ham, she--we'd--we'd just carve off of it as we needed it and then she'd set it in a roasting pan back out on the porch with the--with the other Christmas foods--hoped it wouldn't freeze but that was--that was our big refrigerator out there on that front porch, so you know I have fond memories of that. And--and of course always shaved it off real thin. Bacon, you know we eat it three meals a day, you know. It's supper; it can be lunch; it can be whenever you want to have it; so--

0:33:16.5

AE: Well then let's see what else. How did you develop your catalog, and is that one right there on your desk?

0:33:23.2

RM: Yeah; that's--that's last year's catalog.

0:33:24.0

AE: Okay.

0:33:27.3

RM: Again, my--my dad started this back in--I don't know what year he sent his first one out--it started out just as a little brochure, you know. Here's--it would have a picture of him on the front and a couple of hams and a price list. And it just kind of evolved and today you know it's full-color; we have a lot of other items besides the hams that--some of them we produce and some of them we don't but--like the desserts and some of those things--but you know we feature--we feature the ham and the bacon and we put those other things in there just because people like to buy them.

0:34:13.6

AE: Uh-hm; do you sell bacon by the slab as well as sliced?

0:34:17.6

RM: Yes, we do; but--but most of our catalog items are--are sliced. We find that people you know just like the sliced; it's in a pound package, so that's just awfully convenient.

0:34:28.1

AE: How much does a pound of bacon run?

0:34:32.5

RM: Let's see if I can find the price here.

0:34:34.1

AE: [*Laughs*] Trick question, huh?

0:34:35.9

RM: I should know that. Three--three one-pound packages is \$16.95.

0:34:43.1

AE: Okay; and how has that price changed over the years? Do you have any idea?

0:34:46.5

RM: Oh, I'm sure it's gone up. We don't include the shipping in our products; we add that on. Shipping has gotten--it's one of those things that's gotten to be so expensive. Of course, the cost of bacon has gone from a few cents a pound to you know dollar or two dollars a pound sometimes, but the raw materials have gone up just like everything else we do. So--but it's--you know--

0:35:17.1

AE: So how many employees do you have?

0:35:19.2

RM: I've got--right now I've got--I've got four employees and we'll hire as many as 15 to 18 seasonal employees; so we--we tend to fluctuate our--because of the seasonality of the business.

0:35:38.3

AE: And April, whom I've spoken with a few times, is she like the manager of--

0:35:42.5

RM: She's like the manager, uh-huh.

0:35:43.9

AE: Okay; well do you have a favorite thing or something that you would say that you like the best about being a part of a small ham and bacon operation?

0:35:53.9

RM: It's--I don't know that I've got a favorite thing, but it's just a neat way of life. I like--I like the one-on-one--I answer the phone a lot during the holiday season. I like to talk to customers. I'm busy or don't have the time to do it as much as I used to but I do enjoy that. And I've got my own set of customers that will only talk to me, you know. And most of my employees do that as they develop a relationship with people because that's what it's all about. You know the level of service that we provide, you know--it gets harder to--to meet the bar every year because of all the technology. People want to know tracking numbers of when it was shipped and you know email confirmations and--and all that; so you know it's--you just have to--you just have to try to stay with the business and I hope it's something that I can pass onto my--my family.

0:36:58.2

AE: Uh-hm; do you do many shows or contests nationally or regionally?

0:37:02.6

RM: I used to; I don't anymore because--mostly because of my other business interests but I've done you know the Fancy Food Shows and the National Association of Meat Processors--those contests. It--it's bragging rights, but other than I'll be honest with you; I don't know that it's that much beneficial to your business. Now if you're out doing a trade show trying to gain new customers that's another--that's another thing. You know we just tend to work with--with what resources we have and it takes a lot--a lot of resources to go to a show in New York or someplace. So we--we don't do a lot of that. But we do some regional things. Our state is pretty active in trying to help promote small producers, small Kentucky products primarily so we've--we've done some things with them.

0:38:01.6

AE: Well is there anything that I haven't asked that you'd like to share?

0:38:04.5

RM: Actually I don't know. I think we've covered it; don't you?

0:38:09.1

AE: All right; I think so, yeah. It's been great. So thank you.

0:38:11.6

RM: You're welcome.

0:38:14.5

[End Rodman Meacham]