

Interview of: Leslie & June Scott
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Interview Date: August 23, 2005

August 26, 2005

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Interviewee: Leslie & June Scott
The Scoot Farm – Greenville, KY
August 23, 2005

[Begin Leslie & June Scott]

0:00:00.0

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Tuesday, August 23, 2005 and I'm in Greenville, Kentucky at Scott Hams with Mr. Leslie Scott. And Mr. Scott would you say your name and your birth date for the record please, sir?

0:00:20.2

Leslie Scott: Lester Scott, October 1, 1943.

0:00:23.6

AE: And are you originally from this part of Kentucky?

0:00:26.9

LS: Just moved a half a mile; I was born here.

0:00:27.5

AE: Yeah; how long has your family been in this area?

0:00:32.9

LS: Well three generations I guess that I know of--four generations. Yeah; grand-dad bought this place in 1910.

0:00:41.3

AE: Okay; and so your family as part of a way of life has been curing hams surely for those--all those many generations?

0:00:48.5

LS: They had to--couldn't survive. The winter--summer food supply was curing hams in the winter time.

0:00:54.9

AE: Can you talk a little bit about the old days of curing hams and what that was like?

0:01:00.2

LS: That was the biggest day; they'd do it on Thanksgiving Day. They killed hogs and that was one of the biggest days. All the family got together and killed hogs... a very important day for them; they did that Thanksgiving Day, yeah.

0:01:17.9

AE: And when did you start your ham business?

0:01:20.0

LS: We started business in 1965 and they were just killing for their own personal use and we started with 100 hams in 1965.

0:01:32.5

AE: And when you say they were killing, who do you mean?

0:01:34.8

LS: Grand-daddy and his brothers and sisters--everybody on this road were Scott's. They were all brothers and sisters.

0:01:39.1

AE: Might be why it's Scott Road. [*Laughs*]

0:01:40.9

LS: That's right--that's right.

0:01:43.4

AE: And so you just decided to get into the business? What precipitated it?

0:01:48.8

LS: Well we thought--they sold a few to mother's brothers in Detroit. We thought we could sell some; it wasn't no trouble to sell 100 and then we went to a few more and then a few more, so it just grew from that.

0:02:00.2

AE: And did the curing recipe change over those years as you started the business?

0:02:04.6

LS: Yeah; we don't use the same that grand-daddy actually used. He didn't use any sugar and he buried his hams in salt and we hand-rub hours and just put--sparingly salt on them, just enough to keep them. It's all we wanted to do.

0:02:20.8

AE: And then you added sugar to cure?

0:02:23.1

LS: Added sugar; we use sugar.

0:02:26.1

AE: What kind of sugar?

0:02:26.2

LS: Brown sugar, yeah.

0:02:29.7

AE: And then your bacon, since we're here to talk about bacon, can you talk about it?

0:02:34.3

LS: Yeah; grand-daddy left his bacon in the salt the same number of days he left his hams, which was six weeks. I never could eat his bacon. We actually stay in the salt about five days and then equalize it about another five to seven days, and then we'll smoke it with green hickory wood and sassafras 'til we get the right color on it and that's basically all we do to it--don't put any nitrates on it.

0:03:02.7

AE: Oh really?

0:03:03.5

LS: Right; there's not but about three of us probably in the state of Kentucky that doesn't use nitrates that do it as--for their living, you know.

0:03:14.9

AE: And so what is your reasoning there? Why did you want to stay out of the nitrate?

0:03:17.9

LS: Well two or three reasons--it gives her a headache if she eats the nitrates. She will have migraine headaches. We have no additives even in our smoked sausage. We don't use the monosodium glutamate. It will give her a headache; and so we just stayed away with it; no use to using it anyhow. All it does is makes it pretty in color; so--

0:03:43.4

AE: And how do you think that's affected your business? Has it been beneficial that you're--

0:03:48.3

LS: Probably so--probably so; there's a group of people that buy our product because there are no nitrates it, and it's probably so.

0:03:57.5

AE: And so what all do you have in your product line today?

0:04:01.3

LS: We do the country ham; we bust it up in several ways. We sell it in ground ham, slices, cooked, almost any way you want to buy it, but we'd rather sell it in little bit pieces than to sell it

all in one big piece. We can add value to it and charge more for it by cutting it up. The housewife doesn't want to cook anymore; they both work. So they'd rather just have it ready to eat. I made the statement one time that if I could put it on a platter and serve it on a platter, the person would buy it. And we have summer sausage, bacon, hog jowl, and that's--comes off the chin of the hog. The smoked sausage is big for us and we're a small operation anyhow. At Christmas we'll get up to about 14 or 15 employees and now there's three of us here today; you know so--

0:05:01.7

AE: And how many flavors of bacon do you have?

0:05:04.5

LS: We just make the two--the pepper bacon and the--and a regular country bacon--just the two.

0:05:10.4

AE: And you sell quite a lot of bacon?

0:05:11.0

LS: No, not a lot; we sell--we don't sell a lot of anything, but it provides me enough money to live and to buy daddy's farm.

0:05:25.9

AE: Yeah; and so did--when you got into this did you get into it as kind of a hobby and to maintain a tradition or is it something that was going to sustain--

0:05:32.4

LS: Actually we thought we could make some money and she [June] could stay home and raise our kids--her education is social worker, and it worked out that way. We would have built it over on the main road if daddy would have sold us any ground, but he wouldn't sell it, so we had to build it back here and we took this and bought out the main road. Nobody has give us nothing. We started the business and--and moved it along as we could you know. Not--in no big hurry though.

0:06:02.9

AE: Well you also raised cattle, correct?

0:06:04.7

LS: Yes, sir--yes, ma'am.

0:06:08.0

AE: So you're spread pretty thin then with all these hams and all that cattle?

0:06:12.4

LS: That's my love--is the cattle.

0:06:15.6

AE: Yeah; and so your wife, June, has she taken over pretty much the ham business?

0:06:19.6

LS: She pretty well takes care of the ham business; I don't know much about it, you know other than we're going to put out hams such and such a day and I'm here. I do--I do go and promote her business about--I'll be Nashville this next week for three days and I go to Louisville and stay four days and she will, too. She works the business in Louisville, too. We both go and work booths and have direct sales to our customers.

0:06:45.6

AE: This is at the State Fair in Louisville?

0:06:48.2

LS: We did--we just did that but she's going back Thursday to get her awards, but we--we cooked--we cook at a large flea market at the fair grounds in Louisville and a large one at Nashville and we get to meet a lot of people, you know. Its' been good for our business.

0:07:06.6

AE: Yeah; do you enjoy that part of the business?

0:07:10.1

LS: Yes; but I have the best of both worlds. I can leave the customer and go out on the farm, yeah. It's quiet and peaceful out there.

0:07:18.0

AE: Yeah; when did y'all start selling over the internet?

0:07:22.8

June Scott: Two thousand.

0:07:25.2

LS: Yeah; she said 2000.

0:07:27.8

AE: And has that--

0:07:28.8

LS: See, that's her--I can't even turn a computer on.

0:07:32.7

AE: [*Laughs*] Has that completely changed your business--I would imagine?

0:07:36.1

LS: It did to some extent. It didn't do what we thought it would originally, but it--it's another tool of marketing. But it didn't turn the world upside down. It's still pretty-well round, you know.

0:07:51.6

AE: Uh-hm; so if you still are primarily interested in raising your cattle and your wife, June, holds down the fort here, who--who puts the rub--the cure on the hands and--

0:08:04.4

LS: That I do.

0:08:05.3

AE: Okay.

0:08:05.7

LS: And the young fellow in there named John. Me and him both--she salted them up 'til she broke her arm severely. She was on one end of the box and I was on the other until that happened. What year did that happen June?

0:08:18.6

June Scott: Ninety-nine.

0:08:20.3

LS: Ninety-nine and that ended her salting. She can hardly pick up a ham and carry it around. But we--we have always salted our hams. I don't clean up the mess; I just leave as soon as I get that done, you know.

0:08:37.1

AE: But it's important to you that you still be a part of that?

0:08:39.2

LS: Right, right; I still cook all the cooked hams. Nobody cooks any but me. And yeah; that's--that's very important. We think it is; may not be--we think it is.

0:08:51.0

AE: Can you explain how you think it's important?

0:08:55.2

LS: I think we know whether we've got the right amount of salt on. If we're going to blame it on anybody we get to blame it on ourselves and we don't get to say well so and so did that, you

know if we mess up. We're totally responsible for our own product; we put our own name on it.
So that's the way we think we ought to do it.

0:09:16.3

AE: Is there anyone else who knows your curing recipe?

0:09:19.2

LS: Uh-um.

0:09:20.0

AE: Just with y'all, huh?

0:09:21.0

LS: Just us and John.

0:09:22.7

AE: Have you written it down or anything?

0:09:24.7

LS: Yeah; it's got to meet federal regulations. **[Laughs]** Yeah; it's in the file over there. Other people know but I mean it's--it's supposed to stay in that file.

0:09:32.8

AE: Yeah; do y'all have children of your own?

0:09:34.8

LS: Have two--girl and a boy; the girl is a financial advisor and the boy runs a coal washing operation. He washes coal.

0:09:43.4

AE: And what are their names?

0:09:45.6

LS: Maclynn and William.

0:09:47.0

AE: Okay; and then do they have any interest in the ham business?

0:09:52.6

LS: Well the boy don't right now. The girl could come in and operate it tomorrow if something was to happen to us because they both grew up in the business and that's the only way they got any spending money in high school. They had to work in the--in the business. And when I had my heart surgery in 2000 the girl just took off from her job and come and helped her mother, you know.

0:10:14.2

JS: William helped us, too.

0:10:15.7

LS: Yeah; the son did, too. Yeah; he helped her deliver stuff and helped put down stuff. So we was in a mess; it was right at Christmas time and I was in Nashville and--and I thought I was important. I thought I had to be here, but I found out that I didn't. It just kept on going. I lost my clout. [*Laughs*]

0:10:37.7

AE: That was a surprise, huh? *[Laughs]*

0:10:41.6

LS: Yeah; I lost my--lost my job.

0:10:45.4

AE: So do you hope that they'll maybe take over one day?

0:10:48.8

LS: We always hoped that they would be interested in something you know that you're doing. We would hope the boy would because right now he could farm both of his grand-dad's farms, you know on both sides and one of his great-grandfather's farms if he would be interested you know at some point. It's pretty neat to get to do it you know. Of course, we just grew up here you know and didn't go very far.

0:11:20.4

AE: Uh-hm; so is there--I'm curious if when you started the business if there was much of a learning curve that you had to kind of trial and error to get the cure right and get your product where you wanted it to be?

0:11:32.9

LS: You don't--you're still learning. 35 years you're still learning. We didn't have any business you know--didn't know any business, anything about a business, didn't have any money, our families didn't have any money to let us have; we had to--what we did--we had to make sure it was right so we could eat, and we--that's probably the reason there's no more product--we're selling no more product. We tried to specialize in what we know. And some people went into it and--big and expanded and got lots of products and--but they didn't do it on their own.

0:12:20.2

AE: Hey. [To customer walking in.]

0:12:23.4

LS: [To customer] If I'm in your way I'll move. [To interviewer] Just they come here from Kentucky several years ago. Eighty-eight the National Convention was in Louisville and he shamed all of us that was in the meat business to enter product. If you didn't think enough of your product to enter he thought you ought to go quit you know and he did--me and June has

entered it every year since '88 and we missed two years having a champion in that period of time. Now the first year we were the bottom of the line; we was at the bottom, but the next year we didn't have enough money to fly so we drove to Albuquerque, New Mexico with that one ham. She didn't think we'd do any good so she didn't even get up to go to the Award's Banquet. But it's--and that's been good to us; it's helped us by going to that because we--we make a lot of gift boxes--\$10, \$15, \$20 boxes.

0:13:32.0

AE: And so tell me about some of the other awards you've won over the years.

0:13:35.9

LS: Well I think we won--we won two at Louisville this week. We won the Cut Ham Class-- that's they taste it; we won that class. We won Class Two. At the National we took third this year and we showed at Memphis as long as they had a show at Memphis but they no longer have a ham show and we won that thing eight times I believe. The business has given me and June an opportunity to see a lot of stuff that we wouldn't have seen you know and--you know we get to go to the Convention and some idiot elected me to the National Board, you know one time. I served on it for six years. **[Laughs]** I knowed nothing; they should have throwed me off, you know. **[Laughs]**

0:14:27.2

AE: Well when you go to a place like New Mexico and you're talking about Kentucky ham and bacon what--what do you tell the people about what you do?

0:14:35.7

LS: Well it--they move the National Convention around every year and it was in Buffalo, New York this time. Next year we'll be in California. You don't get to tell them nothing. You enter one ham and they tell you. And they have experts--they have 22 judges at the National competition to judge the competition so it's real interesting. We get to go--you don't get to go in with the product; you've got nothing to do with it. They'll tell you in about three days whether you've won or you had a good ham or whatever, you know.

0:15:11.5

AE: And then does that affect your business? Do you usually have more orders after an event like that?

0:15:15.7

LS: Ah; when we won the State Fair it didn't do that much for us. You know, you wasn't thinking you could sell a ham for \$4,000 a pound; you'd think the advertisement out of it would be great. It affected us a little bit but not--not a lot. Nothing has really affected our business a lot-

-just--just grew steady, you know. And if it hadn't have grew steady like that we would have probably been out of business, if we'd have just jumped in and spent several thousand dollars that we didn't have we would probably be out of business.

0:15:53.5

AE: And what would you attribute to your long-term success?

0:15:57.1

LS: Making constant the same quality product over the years. Not changing--of course we had to change--we sell very few whole hams anymore and our business is mostly mail order. We don't sell to stores; so the--you--when they go to pay that shipping you've got to sell them something they want and will buy again and again and again--they'll keep buying. We know some people that are sort of in the same business where the guys expanded fast but they didn't sell the product the second time, so they've quit products along the way. So I think that's--selling the same product and--and improving on it as you go along--lower that salt content down as much as you can.

0:16:52.7

AE: So what--

0:16:53.5

LS: The federal government mandates that it must have some salt in it you know.

0:16:58.5

AE: Right, yeah; so what--over the years as you've perfected your craft of cured hams and bacon, what--what do you look for in a good ham or bacon?

0:17:08.4

LS: We like a little tang in the ham--if it's a ham. We like a little tang. We like a pretty pecan color on the ham when we get it smoked. We prefer short shanked hams so we can get as many center cuts out of that ham as possible. The housewife has no use for that ham hock hardly anymore. They don't cook beans like they used to so you--we try to have as many center cuts in the ham as we can possibly get. And a good firm ham, too; we like for it to be firm to the touch. We don't like it to be squishy and move around a lot. The bacon, we try to keep it down around nine inches--no wider than nine inches. You know we'll trim it and make it no more than nine inches, you know when we get it cured and processed. We like it as lean as possible. The way they breed the hogs now though some of the bacon is too lean for--to taste good, to really have the taste; it's got too lean. But that's what the housewife wants, so you sell her what she wants or you don't sell her.

0:18:33.7

AE: Who supplies your hogs?

0:18:35.3

LS: Well we get our--all of our products except sausage trimmings from Premium Standard Farms out of Missouri. They're a good reliable source and when the lady out tells you--you're going to have hams Wednesday morning at 8 o'clock you're going to have hams Wednesday morning at 8 o'clock.

0:18:54.4

AE: How many hams do you smoke at one time or cure at one time?

0:18:58.8

LS: Well we buy 10 combos and that's--it will vary from 900 to 1,000 you know at a time. I do that about every 45 days except December. I have our coolers all empty of product so we can do nothing but put sliced product in there.

0:19:16.9

AE: And so do you--how do you feel when you're pulled in here into the ham house and taken away from your cows when Christmas--

0:19:23.9

LS: If it's a pretty day I'm an ornery son of a gun you know--huh; but if it's not pretty I--I don't mind it a bit and if it's as hot as it's been the last few days, but I also know on the other hand the farming is not making the money. This is what we're living out of. In fact, when we haven't took very little in the farming operation so it would be ours--nobody could take it away from us. So we built that out of our ham operation.

0:19:59.4

AE: When you travel who watches the ham house and--

0:20:03.6

LS: John, yeah.

0:20:05.2

AE: Okay; how long has John been with you?

0:20:07.5

LS: He's been with us this time I think seven years. Up and every since he got out of high school he would work somewhere about six months and then he would go get him another job. When she hurt her arm real bad I told him I didn't want him to ever leave and--and we hope we're that kind of employer that he doesn't want to leave you know, and we know very possibly he might, you know. But he's good and he will go see about the cattle and the water and stuff while we're gone, you know. He called me in New York and said the water was messed up over there, and my brother went and fixed it. John didn't have to go fix it, but he seen the water was messed up. And the thing I did—the county water was going full-strength. We'd have had a water bill.

0:20:59.1

AE: I'd say; well do y'all have any--do you have many walk-in customers like this woman here today?

0:21:04.7

LS: Mostly in--in the fall months. Today is a good day. They have--they have a real large flea market up here until dinner on a Tuesday, and since I do Nashville, a lot of people will drive from Nashville up here to this country flea market. They sell dogs, cats--whatever up there; we don't setup up there, and it's over with by dinner--strange--starts by daylight and gets over with

by dinner. People come from everywhere to this thing up here, and it's our busiest day through the week. And then in the fall months we have just about all the people we--we need, yeah. Hey, we sell cracklings, too, and I didn't mention that before as one of our products. We sell cracklings. We don't do those, but our friend up in Haubstadt, Indiana, makes cracklings. You know what cracklings are?

0:22:00.8

AE: Uh-hm.

0:22:00.7

LS: We couldn't find them anywhere and me and him was on the Board together and I asked him about him and he said yeah, I see cracklings. So we sell his cracklings and a lot of people make cornbread out of it.

0:22:12.7

AE: Yeah; do you sell a lot?

0:22:14.2

LS: Good many--good many, but like I said we don't sell a lot of nothing, you know **[Laughs]**
just enough to eat, you know.

0:22:22.1

AE: Do you eat your own ham pretty often--bacon?

0:22:26.7

LS: When I cook--and I cook and give out samples, you know like I say six days a month, I will probably eat too much, but I sample every batch I cook and they tell me that women who cook sample everything that they cook, you know.

0:22:44.3

AE: How do you like to cook it?

0:22:47.1

LS: We cook ours in water, put a lid on it, and--and steam it, simmer it; probably take longer than most people about 20 minutes until it's tender until you can cut it with a fork. She learned how to do that for her grandfather. He didn't have any teeth. Her grandmother died and she became his cook. So that--that's how she learned to cook it with the water and a lid on it. And we

say so in our brochure to cook it that way. That won't work on a real short-aged ham, but a long-aged ham six months or more it works real good.

0:23:26.3

AE: And what do you like to serve it with--gravy or--

0:23:31.0

LS: She'd rather have the gravy than to have the ham. We--we like it with bacon and with eggs and that type—you know, for breakfast you know, but we sell a good bit of it to use for supper. You can have it ready in--it's probably the easiest menu you can have, you know, real fast you know and--but if you're going to have ham and you haven't got biscuits that just about--that's not a good thing. What we serve at the State Fair, we put it on a bun; I mean it's good because it--you know but if we could sell them on biscuits, we'd sell a lot more. I can't make that many biscuits though. But we've sold a lot at the fair. We work the two busiest days for the Ham Association every year and turn two skillets on 425-degrees at 6 o'clock in the morning and never shut them off until nine at night and cook just as hard as we can cook. Now if we get ahead before the meal time we have a big steamer we put it in--but as soon as the meal is over with we're behind again, you know. We cook again for supper.

0:24:53.0

AE: And this building that we're sitting in now, this will built specifically for the ham business?

0:24:59.6

LS: Yeah; that's all it's ever been used for--yeah. We built it in about four or five stages. You see that partition right there?

0:25:08.6

AE: Yes, sir.

0:25:11.2

LS: That was the addition onto it. We started in there with just a room for 500 hams. We was just going to cure 500 hams and we thought if we ever cured 500 that would--man, we would really be selling a lot of hams. And that's all from a UK plan. They--they designed that plan. And then we added onto it again and we changed our smoking room and we rearranged it four or five times. Now it's a mess to try to work in here because of the way we did add onto it. If we--it burned down and we was to do it again, I'd build--I'd change it a lot you know.

0:25:49.9

AE: How so?

0:25:50.5

LS: I'd probably be--work out of the middle and have all my rooms going right off of one big room, but this is what we got. The Lord didn't give us much more so we just work with what we've got and--and as we added onto it we was able to pay for the add-ons. And--and if the University hadn't given some advice along the way we would probably be shut down. And if we hadn't went to the conventions. We would probably be out of business.

0:26:24.4

AE: Learned a lot that way, huh?

0:26:27.3

LS: I heard somebody talk about gift boxes. We decided that we wanted to get in the gift box business pronto. We heard somebody talking about cooking country hams and we asked the guy would he mind showing us what he was doing and he took us to his store where he was cooking them. I said man I know where there's a bunch of them cookers and bought one the next week and changed one of our rooms to a cook room and sure thing. It didn't pay for itself for a while but it paid for itself easy.

0:27:01.7

AE: So before you were on the internet you had a good mail order business?

0:27:04.3

LS: Yeah, because of the contacts I go out and get those six days. I used to go every weekend and--but I--we got it down to two weekends now. But I used to be gone every weekend somewhere cooking and giving out samples.

0:27:24.1

AE: You--do you look forward to that?

0:27:26.5

LS: Not as much as I did. It was quite interesting when I first started. I never had that much money--cash, you know. But it was real interesting. The people you meet is such interesting people. You--you meet the average Joe like me and then you meet some distinguished people that--that are out there. We do business with a fellow and you wouldn't believe what he does for a living, you know. By looking at him, you'd say well he's just an average Joe like me, but he's not, you know. And we've met some most interesting people. We met a couple in Georgia and they came to see us last year and they was in the area and wanted to come--wanted us to tell them what day we wouldn't be so busy they could stay all day. And we said don't come

Wednesday; we're putting down hams. That dang truck was late and it didn't get into town and we had to unload them at night and we had to put them down the next morning and they were here, and--but they didn't mind that. They just--they enjoyed helping us you know. And we've met some nice people by going out and doing it. About all you hear on television is how bad people are, but that's not true. That's not true. I wonder a million times why people come and buy from us out here in nowhere like this though, you know and wonder what grand-daddy would think about all these people who come and fill up his yard at Christmas time you know. He would be most amazed, I imagine.

0:29:05.5

AE: Yeah; what do you think brings them back?

0:29:08.4

LS: Selling them what they want. It has nothing to do with personality or anything like that; it's selling them what they want.

0:29:15.7

AE: Do y'all have some customers that you've had since the beginning?

0:29:19.2

LS: Yes; we've still got some that we had since we started, yeah. They're getting few and we've added a few, too; so--

0:29:30.6

AE: Well what do you hope the future of the business will be?

0:29:33.5

LS: We're probably not going to expand anymore when we're done unless the kids want to. If they'd--if they'd want to we'd be willing to do that, but I don't know; June what do you want the future to be? Retire, huh--neither one of us want to retire. We want to keep working as long as we're able. Her dad is 89 and he sees about--I've got 45 head of cattle at his house and sees about them pretty well all the time. So that's an inspiration and get up and work and he's looking to the future because he bought him a new television. It tore up after 45 years and the other day he went and bought him a new one, and we offered... well I had mine sitting over there in the trailer, so all he had to do is use it. He went and bought him a new one; he wasn't going to use that one you know. Yeah; I don't know if I look to the future as good as he does, probably you know.

0:30:38.3

AE: Well if it so happened that your kids weren't interested in keeping the business alive, would you close or would you sell your cure mix or--

0:30:46.8

LS: Maybe that's what we'll do.

0:30:48.9

AE: Yeah.

0:30:51.1

LS: Maybe that young fellow that operates it.

0:30:53.6

AE: John, would you like to see--you'd like to see it maintained regardless?

0:30:56.2

LS: Yes, yes, yeah, because it's been good to us. Yeah; we would like to see somebody do it, but if--if not, you know we've enjoyed it. Of course, we live here, so you--we'd have to move over to

dad's house you know. I own that so we'd have to move over there, if we sold the business you know.

0:31:18.5

AE: Get out of the way, huh?

0:31:20.3

LS: Yeah, yeah, yeah; but it's really been good to me and June--really has.

0:31:28.2

AE: Did you ever think you'd be in the ham business?

0:31:31.4

LS: Oh no, no, no; my ambition was showing cattle and my education is thataway, and we did it in 4-H Club and won the champion--to the State Fair several times and that's what we was going to do you know. And then got this and I thought I wanted to show cattle again. I started it--towards that--to do that again and I was too old, I guess. I couldn't--I decided not to do that. I guess I was too old. That--that was our ambition and hers was social work, you know, so neither one of us are doing what we thought we was going to do.

0:32:19.6

AE: So it's all worked out hadn't it in the end?

0:32:20.2

LS: Well I guess, you know.

0:32:22.2

AE: Yeah; tell me about the 4-H groups that you've worked with here.

0:32:27.6

LS: To me that's the most rewarding thing I do. I do that; like I said June does a lot of stuff here, but--but the kids I do I think and that I was supposed to give back to something that's been good to me. We helped start it as a statewide project. We got the money through the second year--the first two years Kentucky Ham Producers put up the money and then we--I got after a fellow I went to school with, Billy Ray Smith, the Commissioner of Agriculture, to give us money to do the program. It cost the kids \$10 to do it; I think they did raise them this year to \$20. They get two hams. When I would feel so bad and--and down after I had my heart surgery those kids would show up and I'd be ready to go 'til Midnight and I had been going to be at 7--6 o'clock

and all kinds of stuff like that. It's most rewarding when kids come and hug you and stuff like that you know.

We would probably go to--probably no more--we probably don't need no more than 25 the way our business is 'cause we demand that a parent or a guardian come with the kids to do this project. We don't physically do the work for the kids. I know some of the other producers that help with the project; they even help pick out the hams. We don't do that; they got some extra hams--they got six extra hams, and I show them on the extra ham what I think they ought to do to the ham and then I get out of the way. The other night when they was picking up their hams at the State Fair, one of the parents wanted to help pick it out. I said win, lose, or draw let her do it; let the girl do it. And we was--we were so lucky that we had one girl last year; she won the whole thing in the state. She was in the project again this year; she was tied going into the speech and then they had a callback even on--on that and she was tied again and had to give it the second time this time. And then she lost out that time.

Had a 10 year-old that he won the speech, won the ham; in his division he won it all. We had another girl that she had the grand champion ham in her division and she won it all--the speech and the ham. And then we had another one that won just in her division--the championship. So we had three champions out of five that was cured here at our place this time by the kids, you know.

0:35:19.6

AE: What do some of the kids say about their experiences curing the hams?

0:35:23.6

LS: Well if you read that there, they interviewed a couple of them there. Well they--they really enjoy it and you can't believe the salt they put all over them. Now we don't let them--we don't let them wash the hams like we wash them. We make them wash them in a sink and they got to wash their own ham--ain't no parent going to do it for them. And I think teaching responsibility is more important than what they're doing--to be here on time, to do the project, to complete it; if you don't take your ham to the State Fair, you forfeit your ham and it goes to the 4-H Club you know. And it's--it's one of the best projects I do as far as excitement of what I do. You know at this point in my life there's not a lot of excitement, so--

0:36:09.5

AE: I don't believe that.

0:36:13.1

LS: [*Laughs*] That's excitement. I guess probably some of the--but the 4-H Club project to me is--is really good. I--I do take their hams to the fair and all they've got to do is show up you know and I already had them entered--the whole deal, you know. And--but all we actually do for them is smoke them; they do the rest themselves.

0:36:34.8

AE: Are they surprised at how labor intensive it can be--time consuming?

0:36:40.4

LS: Well I guess; you know it takes them--they have to meet about five times. It takes them about an hour you know--because we talk about the history of hams and--and the first one we sort of have an orientation and the next time we meet we--we do the actual work, you know. And hams have been cured a long time--before Christ was--you know; so we try to tell them about that.

0:37:08.8

AE: Well give me a little bit of that--the history of the ham.

0:37:11.1

LS: She can do a better job in that can't you? She gave a speech at Las Vegas at the National Meat Convention on the history of country hams. She's quite--tell them what you know about them.

0:37:28.4

AE: Yeah; come on.

0:37:30.6

LS: She's not going to use this--

0:37:33.4

June Scott: Well there was--some of the earliest writings is--was written by a fellow named Cato and Cato was--he was actually telling a lot of things in agriculture and one of things that he described was how to process a country ham. He didn't exactly call it a country ham; he just said to cure the ham you put it in a glass jar or put it in a jar. Stone jar it could have been--and cover it with salt and let it stay for about 40 days, which is exactly what we do. We put it in a vat and cover it with salt and put salt on it. And then he said take it out and wash it and hang it in the air to dry. Now this was equivalent to the equalization process; that's what you're trying to do is dry it down in equalization and he said do that for about another 10 days, which is exactly what we do. And this was written several hundred years before Christ I think and then he said you could rub them with vinegar and this would keep the insects away from them. And that is exactly what my mom and dad used to do; they would rub them with something to keep the insects away and--so basically this was the directions for curing hams. And in some of the very earliest writings it--a fellow is writing home in the Iliad or the Odyssey One and he's telling his family to be sure and cure the hams, you know; it's time to do the hams and he's telling him where to go near the sea to get the salt that keeps the ham red--the meat red. And he was talking about nitrate; it was in the

sea salt. So ham is--the curing of hams is definitely a very old tradition and of course our ancestors brought it from the old country either Spain or you know somewhere in the Europe--one of the European countries here--is how we know how to do. And it's just in the south that the weather is right in this region. If you go north of the Ohio River the winters were too cold; so they would have frozen and meat won't take salt if it's frozen, so that's why you don't find country ham traditionally done up there or out west, you know, which is too--the weather just was not right and they don't have pork out there either I think is one of the things. So that's basically the--you know how we--this is not a new thing with people--the curing of country hams.

0:40:10.2

AE: Well what kind of reception do you get when you go to a place like Las Vegas and tell that history?

0:40:17.5

JS: Well of course a lot of people are surprised that it is not a new thing, you know. Even a lot of people now have never heard of country hams. They have no idea; we get asked a lot when they see the meat at room temperature and they're surprised that the meat is safe to eat because it's been--it's warm, you know. We're taught not to eat meat that has--or that has left out at room temperature, so people are surprised at that. And they're totally amazed that this is a thing that's

been done for centuries you know--the country hams and bacons have been eaten by people before Christ you know. And so--

0:41:00.4

AE: Do you enjoy being in the ham business?

0:41:02.5

JS: Yes; it's a fun thing to do. I think the--just because the history goes so far back makes it fun.

0:41:08.3

AE: So you appreciate the tradition a lot?

0:41:10.3

JS: Yes, very much.

0:41:11.9

AE: That's what makes it unique. So charming and interesting and important all in one is that it is such a rich history.

0:41:20.5

JS: I think the--the history of it is--is one of the most fascinating things about it and--and it was a way of survival. I know Les said while ago that you know people could not have survived in the frontier days or say the 1700s or 1800s and even the 1900s--my parents--we did not have a refrigerator or a freezer or electricity until I was past 10 and so we didn't have any meat. You would have had to have thrown all the hog away if you--could you not have processed it or cured it and then we wouldn't--you know we wouldn't have had meat in the summer time. We didn't have a refrigerator. So this was a way that--this was the only meat we had unless daddy killed a squirrel or something you know or we had chickens, but—but—[gives interviewer look like she wants to go back to work.]

0:42:06.9

AE: That's--you don't have to do anymore. [*Laughs*] Thank you Mrs. Scott.

0:42:12.3

Leslie Scott: Both of us have got to speak at the National Convention. She says she don't like to do it; the day she did that she made sure she carried her dress out there instead of letting the plane carry it in their luggage department and stuff because she had to do it early the next morning and she did a good job. I wanted to get the ham business for sure after she did her talk.

Before she got up to do it she had two other guys on the panel with her and they told her she had to be the moderator and then they told her she had to do the--the people that don't eat meat was picketing in the place or thought they would be, so they gave her paper on what to do if they come in you know. She was totally shocked. **[Laughs]**

0:43:00.7

AE: I bet she handled the pressure well.

0:43:02.7

LS: Oh she did; yeah, she did. But they told her she had to take a microphone away from a guy if he spoke overtime. That was a bad deal because she didn't want to do that you know. **[Laughs]**

0:43:13.6

AE: Yeah; your own representative so I guess you have to jump in there when--when you have to, huh?

0:43:19.1

LS: Well the room was going to be used for something else and they were recording what was said in there; so you had to be out of there. You had to clean up--

0:43:28.1

AE: Well growing up eating hogs and processing hogs and growing up with hog killings and all that--do y'all have a favorite part of the hog that you like to eat?

0:43:40.0

LS: Well we're supposed to say ham but I like the fresh tenderloin.

0:43:44.2

AE: No; say what you want.

0:43:46.0

LS: I like the fresh tenderloin. That usually disappeared at--at our house; over dad and mother's that usually disappeared the first thing. You would pretty well eat that tenderloin up you know and within the week you know--like June said, we didn't have--our parents--my parents had refrigeration a little earlier than her parents did. We grew up as poor as you could grow up. Somewhere around here there's a tea kettle that me and her started with. We didn't have hot water, you know and she heated her own water. And so I gave our daughter the kettle that belonged to her grandmother this past week. I took it to Louisville and give it to her and she had

to get up and heat the water in the kettle, to anything--to have any hot water. That was a big thing and hog killing, and I gave a speech one time and I said how everybody showed up for the hog killing. Some of them even come to hear the squeal, but I think they really come to eat a big dinner. I think that's why they always--it was a crowd there--every one of them. Of course, grand-daddy had seven brothers and sisters on this road and they wouldn't kill hogs all the same day but they'd wait about a couple weeks and they'd kill again you know and that way they had fresh meat coming on in until you could kill--cure the hams, yeah.

0:45:22.0

AE: Is that maybe one of the reasons that you like to carry cracklings now is it kind of harkens back to those days?

0:45:26.9

LS: Yeah; and every time I'm out of--every time I was out of cooking different samples of our product, you got any cracklings? They can buy cracklings in the store but they're made out of country ham skins or something else. They're not true cracklings like we grew up with and--but those are true up there and so it's an interesting thing to get to sell you know because people 65 and older you know had those and now they can no longer go to the store and buy those, you know. And so--and he does--he does a lot of them.

0:46:07.7

AE: Did your children growing up--did they ever experience a hog killing?

0:46:10.5

LS: Oh yeah [*Laughs*] yeah, uh-huh, yeah; well that was just part of farm life. You had to. Everybody had to do something, you know. There was a job for everybody. If you was big enough to do anything there was a job for them. I think we was used as slave labor don't you?

[*Laughs*]

0:46:30.7

AE: I think it's good for a kid to grow up on a farm.

0:46:32.8

LS: It is.

0:46:33.7

AE: And be put to work.

0:46:33.5

LS: Teach them responsibility.

0:46:35.8

AE: Exactly.

0:46:37.0

LS: I've heard my daughter say the most important thing that we taught her was how to work. I heard her say that and she works out of her home, nobody there to tell her what to do and she said that--that was probably the most important thing we did other than take her to church she said.

0:46:58.5

AE: Are there any people in the communities of Greenville still that raise hogs and have killings and do it the old-fashioned way?

0:47:06.4

LS: When she gave that talk in Las Vegas--that was 10 or 12 years ago, we went to the Extension Agent and asked and then there was only three or four families that were still doing it,

you know doing it all still on the farm. A lot of them are still killing hogs, but they take them to a processing plant and have them blocked out and then they would cure them you know--but actually do everything on the farm. There wasn't but two or three 10 years ago. There's not very many hogs in Muhlenberg County. My neighbor over here just bought five just because he wanted some hogs, you know and he just bought five and they said they rooted up to fill up the pond. He's got some leaks and he thought the pigs would stop up the leaks around his pond. Not any--I mean you can't go buy a pig to just roast. Of course, we've got one fellow in the county that is the largest in the State of Kentucky in hogs, Mr. Jim Bickett; but he wouldn't want to sell you a hog because he sends two double-deckers every day to Swift and Company in Louisville. It would be too much trouble for him to sell you one hog, you know. Not very many hogs--just like cattle; they're almost gone you know--nobody has got them. I'll bet there's very few scalding tubs around. I still have Dad's, you know.

0:48:29.2

AE: Do you?

0:48:34.7

LS: Yeah; it was a pretty exciting day for me, but you were real tired. Now daddy and them wanted to get it all done in one day and--but the last thing you did was ground the sausage at night. After you'd eat sausage you'd ground up sausage fat. I was give out. You ought to quit and do this part of it the next day, but they wouldn't do it. The Scotts were ornery; they wanted to

finish it up. Now some of the neighbors here, they wouldn't work at it all day like that. They would quit and finish it the next day; but daddy and them it didn't make no difference, you had to finish it that day, you know. I don't know why but I mean that's what we did. They--they salted the hams that night. If they killed them that morning they salted them that night. Some of the neighbors around here wouldn't salt their hams until the next day. They wanted the--the body heat to get out of the meat, you know.

0:49:24.5

AE: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

0:49:27.0

LS: I've got three. My brother lives here on the farm. He lives about a half a mile up here and before me and June started; we started where he lives now. He doesn't do any farming but he still lives here and Sis lives in Central City. She's older; I'm the middle one.

0:49:47.6

AE: Have any of them shown any interest in the ham business or what you do?

0:49:51.3

LS: No, no.

0:49:51.6

AE: No, just your own thing?

0:49:51.9

LS: Yeah, yeah; I'll tell you this and this is sort of interesting. When we first started and the way my federal inspection it's Leslie Scott's Country Hams--because there's too darn many Scotts, see, living on this road. So I wanted to identify myself from the rest of them, so I put my name on it, and I went out--giving out samples. All of the sudden I didn't think that was appropriate since June does more work here than me, you know. So I changed it to Scott's Country Hams, and I put her name on the label, says cured by Leslie and June Scott. I got up to Lexington and I had been there several times and I changed labels, see. And so this older lady says, "Uh-huh; I knowed you was buying that product. You wasn't curing it. You was just selling it!" I said no, ma'am; I kept my wife at home all these years and she didn't know women have equal rights, so I put her name on it. Well she sued me; she wanted her name in the same bowl as the man. That lady believed that, you know. **[Laughs]** But as the Scotts died off we changed it to Scott's Hams you know. **[Laughs]** We're the only ones—me and my brother is the only one that was--Scotts that stayed on the farm their brothers--uncles owned, you know; we're the only ones. Of course, Brother just lives here. He doesn't do anything, you know, about farming. That's pretty sad in a way you know because our dad lived right behind us here and had about 130-40 acres. They all

worked at the coalmines. That's a sad job--worked one day a week, two days a week several years ago you know, so they had to do something else. So each one of them bought adjoining farms--joined their daddy you know. That was sort of strange.

0:51:49.7

AE: Well it's a pretty place that y'all have here; that's for sure. I was telling your wife just as soon as I walked in--beautiful.

0:51:56.5

LS: Well I don't know about being beautiful but when we go away from home we like to come back.

0:52:00.0

AE: I bet you do.

0:52:01.6

LS: [*Laughs*]

0:52:02.9

AE: All right; well I sure do thank you for sitting here with me.

0:52:06.8

LS: Thank you--appreciate it; I hope I didn't make you--

0:52:08.6

[End Leslie & June Scott]