

**BILLY BILLEAUD'S  
Billeaud's—Broussard, LA**

\*\*\*

Date: August 20, 2007  
Location: Billeaud's—Broussard, LA  
Interviewer: Sara Roahen  
Length: 49 minutes  
Project: Southern Boudin Trail

**[Begin Billy Billeaud-Boudin Interview]****00:00:00**

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Monday, August 20, 2007. I'm in Broussard, Louisiana, with Mr. Billeaud at his business Billeaud's. So if I could get you to say your name, please, and your birth date, that would be great.

**00:00:25**

**Billy Billeaud:** Okay; my name is Billy Billeaud, and I was—my birthday is September 13<sup>th</sup>—oh you want—September 13, 1960.

**00:00:33**

**SR:** *[Laughs]* Thank you. Maybe you can just tell me, to start out, how you got into the boudin business?

**00:00:42**

**BB:** I bought this store 17 years ago, and my background prior was fast-food. And I know the profit margin in fast-food is much greater versus groceries. So the first thing I did was start plate lunches over here as a way to, you know, just make better margins. And the second thing was hotdogs, and then the third I think was the boudin. And one of the meat companies that delivered to me also wholesaled boudin; that's where we bought it prior. The guy that delivered was—I can't even think of his name, but I respected his

opinion and I kept changing my seasoning. And he gave me some ideas on different ingredients to add and so forth. And we finally got it where we thought it was ideal after about two months of trial and error, and I've never changed—altered the recipe since.

**00:01:39**

**SR:** And so they didn't sell boudin here before you bought the place?

**00:01:41**

**BB:** Yes, but we bought it from another manufacturer, and I probably sold their boudin for a year until I started doing my own.

**00:01:52**

**SR:** Oh okay. So—so you were buying like a wholesale product?

**00:01:54**

**BB:** Correct.

**00:01:54**

**SR:** But now do you make the boudin on site?

**00:01:56**

**BB:** Oh yes. We make—right now it's summer. It's a little bit slower. We're making 200, 300, 350 pounds a day Monday through Saturday.

**00:02:09**

**SR:** How did you—why did you decide to go from fast-food to this kind of a business?

**00:02:16**

**BB:** I wanted the opportunity to own my own business, and the fast-food place I was working for, you know I never—. I saw myself actually owning a store one day, but way down the line, and this presented itself quicker, and I was single at the time, so the risk wasn't as great. You know, I don't know if I'd jump into that kind of risky deal with the wife and two kids that I have now. But back then, it was 1990; the oil field was just getting ready to come out of the crunch, so the economy was real slow. It was a risky venture at first. I had some surveys done on this business, and I was told I'd never do more than \$2,000 a day in volume. And at the time this place was doing about \$1,000 a day. So I took the plunge and I worked my butt off and I got it going.

**00:03:04**

**SR:** Do you make more than \$2,000 a day?

**00:03:06**

**BB:** Oh God, yeah. [*Laughs*] We—we're probably averaging \$10,000 a day in volume now.

**00:03:11**

**SR:** That's great. And just before—I'd like to go back to the boudin eventually, but maybe you can describe the store overall.

**00:03:20**

**BB:** We're a small community grocery store with a real good meat market, and I've developed a fast-food, you know. I'm here to make a profit, so—about a 25-percent profit margin in groceries or less; the meat department does probably 35-percent profit, but cooked prepared foods are where the real profits are. So I've constantly tried to drive those sales and come up with things that would sell. But our biggest deals would be boudin, crackling, plate lunches, and hotdogs—well it's right at 42-percent of our sales. Last year I bought a smokehouse to start making beef jerky, and I'm hoping that will become number five on the big player of profit-making.

**00:04:08**

**SR:** When you say “prepared foods,” do you mean foods that are ready to eat right when you buy them?

**00:04:14**

**BB:** Correct. Foods that you walk in and buy and eat in the parking lot or on your way back to work, or whatever. We don't have any place to sit down over here. We get real—at one time I was thinking that—and Albertson's opened up down the road about seven years ago. I was thinking about taking one of my gondolas of groceries out, and we're so busy at lunchtime with the plate lunches that I decided if I took a gondola out and put

seating in, my parking lot would stay full instead of people coming in and getting the food and leaving. So instead of having a congested parking lot and letting a few people sit and eat I—everything is to go. They have to eat it elsewhere.

**00:04:51**

**SR:** And can you tell me some things that are in the regular rotation of your plate lunches?

**00:04:58**

**BB:** Mondays she always has beef steak and chicken stew, black-eyed peas, peach cobbler, you know rice and gravy—that stuff. Monday is a good seller. Thursdays, we normally have pork roast or beef roast, and those are real good sellers. The other days, you know Friday we'll have barbequed chicken or barbequed pork chops and—as one of the meats—and then we'll have étouffée or shrimp stew as the other. You know we have two meats every day and pretty much the same vegetables. We try to keep it as simple as we can for the cook, for everyone involved, just to be able to mass-produce and get them out faster.

**00:05:33**

**SR:** And as far as people ordering the boudin, do—when people order boudin, like for lunch let's say, will that be their only lunch, or do they order a plate lunch and boudin, or is there some kind of pattern?

**00:05:48**

**BB:** Some people get a couple links of boudin, maybe \$2.00 worth of crackling; some people order a link of boudin and a hotdog; some people get a plate lunch and a link of boudin. The bulk of our sales tend to be in the mornings prior to lunch. We'll probably sell 65-percent of our boudin in a day by 10 o'clock in the morning, and the other 35 throughout the rest of the day, lunch and evenings included. We—I started marketing—trying to market the boudin on the highway with billboards probably eight years ago, and when I did that is when our volume really increased. We get a lot of people from south of here—Houma, Thibodaux, Jeanerette, Morgan City—all that—that when they're traveling towards Lafayette and they'll see these big billboards, and those people tend to love boudin. And they'll find us from the billboard, and they become regular customers; whenever they're traveling through, they're stopping and buying a bunch of cold boudin or frozen boudin.

**00:06:46**

Salesmen are probably our biggest purchasers of boudin. We have salesmen come in here now; they call in advance: *Give me three five-pound boxes of boudin, or, Give me two ten-pounders, give me 30 hotdogs and five-pounds of boudin*—that kind of stuff. All morning long we're selling bulk boudin, hot boudin. These salesmen bring it to their shops where the laborers eat—have that break at 9:00 or 10:00, and they'll eat a link of boudin or whatever.

**00:07:11**

**SR:** Oh so it's—what kind of salesmen do you mean?

**00:07:14**

**BB:** Oil field salesmen. You know this whole area is oil field driven, and it's nothing but service—service companies up and down Highway 90. You know the oil fields it what brings all the money in, so we're trying to capitalize on the oil field money.

**00:07:28**

**SR:** So they butter them up with the boudin?

**00:07:29**

**BB:** Oh yeah. [*Laughs*] I don't know if they're buttering up to get sales or they're thanking them for the sales that they've already gotten, but they sure are good customers.

**00:07:39**

**SR:** And so if you sell 65-percent of your boudin before 10:00 a.m.—well first of all, what time do you open?

**00:07:45**

**BB:** Six-thirty.

**00:07:46**

**SR:** And does that mean that people are eating it for breakfast?

**00:07:48**

**BB:** Oh yeah, a lot of people come in and get boudin for breakfast. A lot of the salesmen are here at 6:30 or 7:00. They'll pick up their boudin that's packaged, you know, for the volume packaging or whatever, and they say, *Give me one link on the side*. And they'll eat that en route to wherever they're delivering the boudin to.

**00:08:09**

**SR:** Where are you from? What's your heritage?

**00:08:10**

**BB:** I'm actually from Broussard. I grew up across the street from this store. At age 10 we moved to Lafayette, and then when I bought this store I moved back to Broussard for about five-years, and then I've moved back to Lafayette since then.

**00:08:24**

**SR:** And how did boudin—did boudin play a part in your growing up?

**00:08:30**

**BB:** We ate boudin. I was never—I don't eat the stuff now. I bet you I haven't eaten the equivalent of a whole link in 10 years. I guess just making it so much—. When we first started I was, you know—when I was—didn't have much volume, I was the head boudin-maker and the crackling cook and the hotdog server and the cashier and everything. So I think so many years of making it, it's gotten to where I really don't have any desire to eat

it. But when I was younger, you know, it was a treat to go get boudin. We probably did that once every couple weeks or so. And then when I was driving, when I was in high school, we'd go—me and my buddies would go hunting or fishing; we'd always stop and get a link of boudin on the way back.

**00:09:08**

**SR:** As a snack?

**00:09:08**

**BB:** Correct.

**00:09:11**

**SR:** And what is your heritage? Are your—is your family from this area a lot—way back?

**00:09:15**

**BB:** Yeah. My dad—my dad's family is from Broussard, and he didn't speak English until he went to school. And we had family still in—well my mother's side is probably even more closely linked to France. Both of my—both sides of my ancestors come directly from France; we didn't go to Nova Scotia. My father's—I don't know; maybe my great-great-great grandfather and his brother came to Broussard back in the 1700s, and one of them was a real ingenious fellow. He's the one that started sugar caning this part of the country, and my cousins still have Billeaud Planters and Billeaud Properties,

and the family split back in the Depression. My great-grandfather or great-great grandfather was another really intelligent fellow, and he had tremendous property holdings, and he and his brother had the sugar mill. He also had the grocery store or mercantile back then. And he had different plantations in South Louisiana. And over the years, his descendents kind of sold off all this property. But during the Depression, I think it was my great-grandfather split from the sugar mill because the mill had been losing money for years and years, and that side of the family got to retain all that property—farm property. Well of course there's been oil and gas production on that property for the last 50 years, 40 years, and they're the rich side of the family [*Laughs*] through land ownership, which is very nice. They get that mailbox money every month.

**00:10:49**

**SR:** So they're—they're not sugar farmers?

**00:10:53**

**BB:** Not anymore. The mill closed down probably in the early '80s. I think it was such an old mill that it wasn't efficient anymore, was the story I got. But it was a landmark for this area. I mean it was there for 100-something years, so it was—you know it was the driving force of the economy in Broussard 100 years ago. It was actually the driving force back when I was a kid in the '60s, you know. Half the town worked for the sugar mill or worked, you know, farming or whatever.

**00:11:25**

**SR:** Hmm, so your family is entrenched?

**00:11:26**

**BB:** Yes, oh yeah.

**00:11:30**

**SR:** And how do you feel about the fact that you are preserving, you know, your culture and your family's culture? And it seems like maybe that wasn't a totally conscious decision when you decided to buy this place, but is it conscious now?

**00:11:48**

**BB:** It's definitely conscious now; it was not in the beginning. Things just kind of evolved that way. You know, I've always liked the idea of preserving culture, and I've thought of different people during my lifetime that I felt were just like a major credit to the Cajun culture, and of course these were always older people and they've passed away through time, but I tried to do my part in preserving the culture. Unfortunately we moved to—out of Broussard when I was 10, and the little bit of French I did know how to speak, I lost it when we went to Lafayette and I went to Catholic schools. And you know, very few of the kids were familiar with French there so I lost pretty much all of my French-speaking abilities.

**00:12:31**

**SR:** But you must hear it a lot around here.

**00:12:34**

**BB:** When I came to this store 17 years ago, there were probably three or four customers that spoke French only. They were all older people, and since then they've passed away, and every year there's less and less people that speak French you know. All the older crowds, you know not getting out as much and are dying off unfortunately, and the heritage is not being passed down.

**00:12:59**

**SR:** But still just for the record, when I walk in here—I mean from the outside there's a gas station also with your business correct?

**00:13:06**

**BB:** Correct.

**00:13:08**

**SR:** And I mean, when I walk in here it's just—even the groceries are so regional, you know from [*Laughs*] the groceries to the plate lunches to the boudin. It's not—you don't have a lot of things that people can get even, you know, in New Orleans or just a couple hours away.

**00:13:26**

**BB:** Well actually there's an Albertson's a mile down the road, a Wal-Mart two miles the other way, a Super Wal-Mart is getting ready to come into Broussard. And I'm not threatened by them because we're able to do things in our store that the locals enjoy that the larger stores—the chain stores—are not able to do. Like our seasoned meats, specialty meats, and things of that nature; the stuffed chickens, and you know, all the different things that we do that—making the boudin and the crackling, you know. You can't get that at a Wal-Mart unless you're buying some product that they got wholesaled in, you know, and it's not nearly as good a quality.

**00:14:04**

**SR:** Right.

**00:14:05**

**BB:** So I think we're safe from the large chain stores taking our business, just 'cause we're able to get our own little niche, which is around—centered around the Cajun culture.

**00:14:15**

**SR:** Can you talk a little bit about what it means to have a meat market in Acadiana? Because I know in other parts of the country that means you just sell, you know, some steaks and some pork chops. But here you have a lot of products that you do something with before you package them?

**00:14:36**

**BB:** Right. I would say half of our sales are seasoned—meat sales are seasoned meats or stuffed with onions and bell pepper. We'll grind—we call it a meat lug; it will hold probably 40 pounds of onions, bell pepper and celery. And we'll grind that in the grinder every day, and it comes out real fine and mushy—onions, bell peppers, celery full of juice, and we stuffed all the meats with that and seasoning, and then we also put a marinade on it—a lot of the meat also. The way the plate lunches started off was—

**[Interruption]**

**00:15:10**

**SR:** So you were saying the way the plate lunches started?

**00:15:13**

**BB:** Yeah. Right after I started here, I realized a meat market—to sell, to increase your volume, you need it to have fresh meat daily, and if you pull the meat out of the meat case you got a couple options. You can try to grind it and sell it as ground meat, or you can throw it in the trash can, and you're not going to make any money doing that. So the first thing I did was try to figure out how to keep fresh meat out, was to start selling any meat that we pulled out from the day before on plate lunches. And that enabled me to cut all fresh meat every morning—or throughout the day—to keep the meat as fresh as humanly possible and still have a way to make more money on the product. So when you take it out of the meat case and you're marking it up—you know you're trying to make a 35-percent profit on it—then you're cooking it on a plate lunch, and then you're trying to

make you know a 65-percent profit. So it worked hand-in-hand, and it really helped get me going and got me thinking about how to be more profitable and so forth.

**00:16:13**

**SR:** Yeah. So the—what you have—what you take out of the case might dictate your specials for the next day?

**00:16:18**

**BB:** Correct, it definitely does. Mondays are standard and Fridays usually are standard, and the rest—the other three days of the week are whatever we get out of the meat case that particular day, or from the day before, or sometimes—one thing that we sell here about every two weeks on the plate lunch, believe it or not, is smothered turkey wings. I had never eaten turkey wings in my life. I still haven't eaten turkey necks, but I eat that every time we have it. They're so delicious, so—and we cut probably a case or two of turkey wings every day, and if it sits in the meat case for more than a day we'll pull it out and put it in the freezer. And when we get enough of them in the freezer, we'll defrost it and then cook it on the plate lunch.

**00:16:58**

**SR:** Hmm, and who—do you have a cook that's been with you for a long time or—?

**00:17:04**

**BB:** Yes, I have a woman from Saint Martinville that's been here probably eight years. She's a terrific cook. She tries to make everything taste as well as she can every time she cooks it. Which is the whole key to making something good, is you've got to have the desire to really want it to be good, and she does. Since she's been here our volume has doubled. We've reached a point where we can't physically make any more because of the limited space. We can sell about 225 plate lunches a day, and she hits right at that number daily. And we run out—when we run out, we're just out, and that usually happens around 12:00, 12:15.

**00:17:41**

**SR:** And how often do you make crackling?

**00:17:44**

**BB:** Oh every day, Monday through Saturday; we don't make them on Sunday. But my crackling guy—this is the hot part of the year, so crackling and boudin volume is kind of down. He cooks probably eight cases of crackling—eight to ten every day now. In the wintertime he'll cook 10 to 14 cases every day.

**00:18:03**

**SR:** And what do you mean by case?

**00:18:03**

**BB:** A case weighs about 50 pounds, and one case will yield probably 13-and-a-half pounds of cooked product.

**00:18:12**

**SR:** And so it's a case of what—what is that product called?

**00:18:13**

**BB:** It's pork bellies, the same thing they make bacon out of, but it has the skin on it. We trim a little bit of the excess meat off, and then we'll slice—cut them diagonally or long ways—and then come back and cut them in one-inch squares—cube it. And you try to make a one-inch square crackling, 'cause that tends to cook the absolute best.

**00:18:31**

**SR:** Hmm, why is that? Do you know?

**00:18:31**

**BB:** I don't—if it's any larger it's hard to get the fat in the middle cooked. If it's smaller, then it cooks too fast and the skin doesn't cook properly. I don't know. I've tried a bunch of different sizes, and the one-inch square seems to be the actual perfect size for my cooking.

**00:18:51**

**SR:** And so it sounds like your crackling still has some meat on them, versus—?

**00:18:56**

**BB:** Oh yeah, the crackling have a lot of meat on them. In fact they have so much—some of the bellies that we get in have so much that we trim them, and we use the trimmings to make boudin. We'll cook probably 25 cases of boudin meat a week, and three of them would be—or four of them would be trimmings from the crackling. So as the guy is trimming the crackling, we'll fill up a box to make it weigh 60 pounds, which is—I kind of centered my recipe around a 60-pound case of boneless pork meat.

**00:19:24**

**SR:** And so is that like Boston butt or—?

**00:19:28**

**BB:** It comes from the butt, but we buy it boneless, you know. It's boneless butts, basically what it is.

**00:19:32**

**SR:** Okay, can you—without divulging any secrets, could you take me through the process of making a batch of boudin?

**00:19:40**

**BB:** Certainly. We'll use a 60-pound box of boneless pork meat, and it comes in pretty good sized chunks, so you cut it up a little bit to help it cook faster; and 10-pounds of

pork liver, and then from there we'll add onions, bell pepper, and celery and water and boil it until it's completely cooked and falling apart. And then we'll take it out of the pot and grind the meat, and at the same time we're cooking rice—so for 60 pounds of pork meat I'm cooking 60 Hitachi cups of rice, and we have these big gas rice cookers. And the way I kind of developed the recipe was one cup of rice per pound of meat. While—when we take the meat out and grind it, we'll then skim all the grease off of the boudin, the juice that's left in the pot, and then we'll add the seasoning to the rice—to the juice. And after we get that dissolved real well, then we'll put the rice in, and then when the rice all breaks up you kind of stir it around to get all the rice seasoned completely. There's no more clumps or anything in there. Then you add the meat back in after it's been ground and stir that up until everything is a consistent texture. And then we'll put it in the sausage press.

**00:20:50**

**SR:** And so you make kind of a stock as you're boiling the meat?

**00:20:53**

**BB:** Correct, definitely. All the flavor comes out of the juice from the meat, but you know we do skim all the grease off. The grease actually has the most flavor, I think, but it sure is nasty looking, and I couldn't sell that, so we get rid of all that.

**00:21:09**

**SR:** And so the—the onions and the celery and the bell pepper, they get sent through the meat grinder also with the meat?

**00:21:13**

**BB:** Correct, they're cooked down to almost nothing with the meat, and then they're ground. So all of the flavor is there; you just don't see it 'cause it's—once it goes through the grinder it kind of disappears, I guess. And then we'll add green onions that are not ground. We chop the green onions at the end and add that in there when we're adding the meat.

**00:21:30**

**SR:** And so your recipe hasn't changed in—or has—?

**00:21:33**

**BB:** I think it took me a month and a half to get it where we wanted it 16 years ago, and it's never been altered since.

**00:21:42**

**SR:** And is it—is it a certain style of boudin, or is it regional or how did—I don't know what characterizes it.

**00:21:50**

**BB:** You know I don't—I know different places do it differently. Some places like it real hot; some places like a lot, you know—some people make it with a lot more rice; some people make it with a lot more meat. I think we've found a real good consistency. I've been accused of having too much meat in my boudin, you know. Some people claim it's too rich. But Dr. C and Coach T gave us an A-plus, so—; they're the Boudin Linksters [[www.boudinlink.com](http://www.boudinlink.com)]. I like the way it is. The customers apparently like it, and I don't see us really changing it. I don't know how we can improve on it.

**00:22:29**

**SR:** Well I'm sure you can't. There's so many different styles that people in this area—they have opinions—but you can't please everyone.

**00:22:35**

**BB:** Correct, you surely can't. Some people do want more seasoning, and then there's other people that say it's just right, and it's other people that say it's, you know, too hot. Like my mother doesn't eat it 'cause she can't take any seasoning. So you know, you really—ours is kind of a middle of the road. It's seasoned enough to where, after about your third or fourth bite you'll want something to drink. And I try to—the guy I used to work for in fast-food, his family has got a long history of fast-food, and they own Popeye's franchises and Mr. Gatti's and this and that and everything else, and he told me once something is seasoned properly if at your third bite you're desiring something to drink. And so I've always tried to season everything according to that, and it seems to really work well.

**00:23:20**

**SR:** So it's not overpowering; it's just—?

**00:23:21**

**BB:** Correct.

**00:23:23**

**SR:** It just sticks with you. So your mom is a Cajun who can't—doesn't like seasoning?

**00:23:27**

**BB:** Yeah, I don't get it. And she claims she didn't season food when we were kids, and I know that's nonsense. She loves salt; I think she's trying to get high blood pressure—I'm not sure. *[Laughs]* But any seasoning at all, she just turns her nose at it; anything red, so she's thinking it's red pepper.

**00:23:44**

**SR:** Oh right.

**00:23:45**

**BB:** You know, and we have this argument constantly about something seasoned and something spicy, and you know she loves to pick at me about different things and seasoning is one of them.

**00:23:54**

**SR:** That seems to be a cultural pastime.

**00:23:57**

**BB:** Yes, definitely. She likes to talk politics also. She's a liberal—unfortunately.

**[Laughs]**

**00:24:02**

**SR:** Oh, she didn't raise a liberal?

**00:24:06**

**BB:** Oh heck no. Can we please play this on the air so she can listen to it?

**00:24:08**

**SR:** Well there will be a transcript that she can read. **[Laughs]**

**00:24:11**

**BB:** Okay.

**00:24:11**

**SR:** So what kind of rice do you use? Is it—what size grain?

**00:24:14**

**BB:** We use the Water Maid short grain—or medium grain it's called now. It used to be short grain, but it's—for whatever reason they changed it to medium grain. Once or twice we've run into rice problems and could not get the bulk—we buy it in 50-pound sacks; couldn't get it in and had to from a different supplier, get long grain rice and it just is different. It's nasty. It makes the boudin dry, the rice shows in the casing. It looks like—I don't know, it looks gross and it doesn't taste near as well, and it definitely—the long grain rice will dry it out. I guess it absorbs more moisture than the medium grain does. But the Water Maid rice seems to be the best. We've tried a few different brands, and they're consistent, best quality.

**00:24:56**

**SR:** And so do mean that they changed the name from short to medium, or they changed the actual—?

**00:25:00**

**BB:** When I was a kid Water Maid was short grain rice; Mahatma was long grain. And now for whatever reason Water Maid is medium grain. Everyone still calls it short grain, but the bag says medium. You know, when that happened I don't know.

**00:25:15**

**SR:** Hmm, well that's—that's interesting to me. And so then, once you have the boudin in the casing, what do you do?

**00:25:25**

**BB:** We shoot it out of the casing—well out of the sausage press. It's a hydraulic sausage press that forces it out into the casing. There's two guys doing this normally: one of them putting the casing on the horn and working the process, and it shoots it out and the next guy is standing there linking it. And as he's linking he—you know you're just twisting it back and forth; as he's doing that we have an ice-bath that it goes into. The last compartment is a big sink, a four-compartment sink. The last compartment, you know of course it's sanitized first, and they fill it with ice and water, and the boudin goes in there, and as he's doing it it's cooling off to 32-degrees. And in about five-minutes he'll reset the temperature; he'll take it out and put it on these big trays, and then we wrap it and stick it in the cooler and put it on the rack in the cooler. So it's, you know, between 32 and 40-degrees right after it's made. And then from there—you know they probably make 15, 16 of those trays—no probably 18 trays of boudin a day right now in the summer, and each tray weighs approximately 35 pounds.

**00:26:27**

From there we'll take it out and then heat it up in the big gas rice cookers. Or we'll package it in bags and sell it in the meat case, and then we also sell it frozen in five-pound boxes.

**00:26:38**

**SR:** So the boudin that you sell here hot, that's essentially steamed in the rice cookers?

**00:26:45**

**BB:** No, we're boiling it. We got to get—we're making— actually three years ago I enlarged again to make—for more cooking facility, and I put two more rice cookers in the back just to heat up boudin. These rice cookers will hold 38 pounds or so at a time, and we have one in the meat market that's going from 6 o'clock in the morning 'til noon pretty much non-stop. And on certain days—Wednesdays and Thursdays primarily—we're having to use rice cookers in the back just to heat up more product to keep it coming for the different customers coming in.

**00:27:17**

**SR:** Oh okay, so it's fully—it's fully submerged in water. So you boil it?

**00:27:20**

**BB:** Yes, it's the fastest way to heat it. We used to steam it back in the day when, you know, we were selling 25 pounds a day, 30 pounds a day. But once our volume started really increasing we had to—the fastest way was to boil it.

**00:27:35**

**SR:** Yeah. What about, do you have customers—or do you know of people—who, after they buy boudin they don't just eat it in the link but they actually cook with it in some way?

**00:27:45**

**BB:** I know people stuff pork chops with them. We have customers that request that and stuffed chicken breast. As far as for doing something, I've of heard people using it and taking it out of the casing and stuffing bell peppers and things like that with it. Or they'll—the duck hunters, they'll stuff their ducks with it before they cook it. I have some friends that hunted out of the Wax Lake Outlet—it's been 10, 12 years ago. And they used to stop here every Friday afternoon on their way to going hunting for the weekend. And they're staying on a houseboat, you know, with a little generator to run the electricity and so forth, and every week they'd buy several bags of cold boudin to take to their camp. And finally I asked them; I said, *How y'all cooking this stuff?* He said, *Man, on the pit.* I said, *On the barbeque pit?* He says, *Yeah, it's delicious.* And since then I've cooked it that way. We cook it in our smoker now. I mean there's a million ways to cook it. I know people cook it in the oven a lot, and it's really good on the pit. My wife loves to cook boudin on the pit; my kids love it that way. It dries out the casing and you know, you bite the casing and it's like biting into the boudin.

**00:28:53**

**SR:** It's funny what you learn from your customers, huh?

**00:28:57**

**BB:** Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**00:28:58**

**SR:** Oh that's interesting. Well let's see. What did I want to ask? Oh yeah, I wanted to ask about the smokehouse? Where—where is your smokehouse that you purchased?

**00:29:08**

**BB:** It's in the same room that we do all our cooking in. It's actually recessed outside, and the door to enter it is on the inside. It's a rotisserie smoker. It's—we're smoking andouille and tasso and turkey necks and sausage and beef jerky in it. And we, you know, plan on expanding it more as I get better with it, and I have to do a few alterations. I need to actually make some more rods to—for the sausage and things like that to hang it.

**00:29:39**

**SR:** And so before you bought that last year, I think you said—

**00:29:43**

**BB:** Right.

**00:29:42**

**SR:** You didn't make andouille and tasso and—?

**00:29:44**

**BB:** No, we didn't. We bought that from another source.

**00:29:47**

**SR:** Oh okay. What about, are you a cook at home?

**00:29:52**

**BB:** Heck no, I'm an eater. I don't cook; I just eat. I actually—I think I tend to have a knack for coming up with recipes through trial and—. You know I'll work on something; I'll decide I want to do this product. I'll mess with it for a month or so until I get it, and I'll ask everybody I know to come and try this and sample it. I want everyone's opinions. Like when we started making jerky, we tried four different kinds of meat, and then we—the cooking process, and how long do you actually smoke it, and how long do you actually heat it up and cook it, and how much seasoning to put. And we finally got it narrowed down. We're using eye of round now and cooking it for four hours—or smoking it for four hours. And we settled on exactly how much seasoning to put on the meat. We cut the meat and strip it, and we'll mix the seasoning with water. And everything we season is by weight. If something weighs 10 pounds, you're going to have the same amount of seasoning in it versus if it weighs 150 pounds. The sausage, you know, the jerky, the boudin, everything—any time we make anything we weigh it, and then the seasonings times a certain ratio, so it's always consistent. And for the jerky, we actually put a little water in it just to really mix up the seasoning and get the meat all seasoned consistently. And then we'll let it soak overnight in the water in the cooler and then put it on the—in the smoker the next morning.

**00:31:14**

**SR:** And so you're a cook. You just [*Laughs*]—when you have to?

**00:31:18**

**BB:** I don't—I don't profess to be a cook, but I'm smart enough to get every opinion I can to get the best product I can. I think it's really the whole key to it. I have a brother that claims to be a cook. He owns a restaurant, and he wants no one's advice on anything. He's tête-dur, they call that: hardheaded. So yeah, he's very successful, but I think he could do better if he would just get a little help from a few people that know what they're talking about and what they're doing. But you know, he knows everything. Just ask him.

**00:31:48**

**SR:** Where is his restaurant?

**00:31:48**

**BB:** His restaurant is named T-Coon's; it's on Pinhook and Kaliste Saloom [roads]. He actually named—my father's nickname was T-Coon, so he named it after him. And I mean he does a bang-up business, breakfast and lunch.

**00:32:02**

**SR:** And that's very regional cooking too.

**00:32:02**

**BB:** Oh very much so. He's probably got more heritage in him than I do in myself.

**00:32:09**

**SR:** So there are two people in your family who went into the food business?

**00:32:13****BB:** Correct.**00:32:15****SR:** Do you think there's a reason for that. Did you—was food a big part of your life growing up?**00:32:19****BB:** My dad loved to cook. He—we had seven kids, so I mean there was a big pot of something cooking every day, and he did it 90-percent the time. And my brother, David, the one with the restaurant, really took after my dad more than all of us. I kind of did it as, you know, a business—just another way to improve my living. But my brother has always, always cooked. He was in insurance sales for years before he started his restaurant, but his big thing, you know, he always wanted to be a cook and own a restaurant. And he finally did it, and he's done very well with it.**00:32:52****SR:** Wow. What about—we have an oral history project about gumbo, called the Gumbo Trail.**00:32:57**

**BB:** You need to go see him. He's better—he's more entertaining than I am ever going to be.

**00:33:04**

**SR:** I will. It's interesting: I've been to eat—I've eaten at his restaurant. It's fun to know that y'all are brothers. What kind of gumbo did you grow up eating?

**00:33:12**

**BB:** Chicken and sausage—fresh sausage. You know of course we had shrimp and okra gumbo, and you know all the different—let me think what else. My parents never were real big on super-strong smoked meat, so it was more of a chicken and a fresh sausage-type gumbo was the number one, and a seafood gumbo. But I'd say the two we ate the most was shrimp and okra, or chicken and sausage.

**00:33:37**

**SR:** And made with a roux?

**00:33:37**

**BB:** Oh yeah, definitely. Everything is made with a roux, and my parents never bought roux in a jar. They always made it. My dad used to make rice dressing with the roux, and he learned—he liked to make a lot of it and then package it and freeze it. Sometime when I was in high school—or so you're talking at the late '70s—he learned how to cook a roux in the oven instead of—when we were kids, we had to stand at the stove and stir the

roux so it didn't burn. And sometime when I was probably 18 or so, he figured out how to cook a roux in the oven, and you cook it a lot slower and a lot longer, and it takes a couple of hours instead of 20 or 30 minutes. And he'd cook his roux in there, and that's how we cook it over here now for our dressing mix and some of the different products we use.

**00:34:27**

**SR:** So you put roux in your rice dressing, huh?

**00:34:28**

**BB:** Yes, it makes it different, and it's delicious. It's really good. We sell rice dressing mix over here in little 16-ounce containers, and we probably make it at least every week, and a half a pot-full will make 72 of those 16-ounce containers. I'm not sure how much—how many gallons that is, but we do that about every week and a half, and it's not something we promote. It's 'cause it's such a pain. It's not near as profitable as a lot of the other products we sell, but so many people buy it religiously that I have to continue doing it. It's something I started doing from copying my dad's recipe when I first started with this store. And it worked, but I found other things that were easier to do that were more profitable that I pushed, and the dressing I never really pushed. But we, you know—I'm stuck making it forever 'cause the people would have a fit.

**00:35:20**

**SR:** And so that's the—your dad's legacy in you store, huh?

**00:35:22****BB:** Uh-hm, yeah.**00:35:25****SR:** Do you remember what kind of fat he used for his roux?**00:35:29**

**BB:** Just a regular vegetable oil and flour. He didn't use a fat or anything like that, but his dressing recipe, which I copied, is probably 70-percent beef, 30-percent pork—no I'm actually wrong. He's got chicken livers, chicken gizzards, beef and pork in it, and it's more pork than beef. I had the beef and pork backwards, but I'd say 25-percent chicken gizzards and 25-percent chicken livers, and probably 30-percent pork, and then the rest would be—the other 20-percent would be the beef. And then of course the onions, bell peppers, celery and things of that nature, and then the roux.

**00:36:10****SR:** Huh.**00:36:12**

**BB:** And then his seasoning, I—when I started, instead of seasoning things with different containers, I started mixing my own blend. And he used salt, red pepper, black pepper—things like that. And I started kind of with what he did, and then I took the black pepper

out and added white pepper. And then at one point I found out that I could actually get a company to mix our seasoning for us instead of us doing it here, which would make it a lot easier, and the cost was nominal to have it done. So now we buy our seasoning in 50-pound boxes already mixed up for us.

**00:36:48**

**SR:** And it's still white pepper instead of black?

**00:36:50**

**BB:** Oh yeah, yeah. No black pepper. I think it's got—I'm trying to think. It's salt, pepper—salt, red pepper, white pepper, paprika, onion powder, garlic powder, something else. I can't think. I have it written down in all the ratios. These people have been mixing it for us for 12 years, so it's something I kind of just forgot. You know, but they have our recipe on file and follow it every time.

**00:37:16**

**SR:** It seems like a lot of, you know, meat markets and little stores in this region have their own seasoning blends.

**00:37:22**

**BB:** Yes, that's become very popular in the last 10 years or so. I'd like to say we're the first ones to do it, but I doubt seriously, but this—we're the first ones that I know of that sold the little containers of our own seasoning. Before I made the—had the containers, I

had a lot of customers. We used to process deer back in the early days during—in the winter during hunting season. You know, I was doing anything to get some volume in this store, and I used this same boudin seasoning and deer sausage and people just love it. They, you know—and we try not to do any deer; we have signs up saying we no longer process deer or any other wild animals, and we'll still do 150 a year because it's people that been coming here for 15 years with their deer that won't go anywhere else, and they won't take no for an answer. So we do it. But they used to buy seasoning, our bulk seasoning, in little bags that we bag chickens in or our meat—you know, little meat bags. They want two pounds, five pounds for their house. And then my supplier that mixes the seasoning for me, I questioned them about putting it in canisters. He said, *Oh yeah, we can do that*. And we started selling seasoning probably 12 years ago. And we sell probably three or four cases a week of it.

**00:38:32**

**SR:** Do you process any other animals?

**00:38:36**

**BB:** You know these hunters that go to Texas and kill the exotic animals like the Axis Deer and the Sika Deer and things like that, you know—to us it's all deer. You know, they all look the same. And then there's locals around here—it's not near as common as it used to be 'cause of these, all older people—but a lot of them always raised pigs, and they'd slaughter their pigs and bring it to us, and we'd hang it in our cooler, and then we'd cut it up for them and package it for them for their freezer.

**00:39:05**

**SR:** Back to the roux for a second. When you were growing up, was there a lot of jar roux?

**00:39:10**

**BB:** I would imagine they sold it, but I never—I don't recall seeing it 'cause you—you look at the big joke in the old Cajun cookbooks, was, *First you make a rue*. And then you worry about the rest of the stuff after. Everything started with the roux. First you make a roux. You know I can just remember that—that statement from when I was a kid. So I don't—I don't know when they started making roux and selling it commercial—wholesale, you know in jars. But I know my mother still wouldn't take a roux out of a jar. My wife and I are kind of lazy, so we'll use jarred roux at home.

**00:39:49**

**SR:** It's a convenience thing, huh?

**00:39:49**

**BB:** Oh God, yes. Who wants to make roux? It's nasty. [*Laughs*]

**00:39:52**

**SR:** And so do you sell that here?

**00:39:55**

**BB:** Yes. Oh yeah, we sell three or four brands of roux, you know. We don't make any roux here to sell. The roux we make here we use ourselves for our different products.

**00:40:04**

**SR:** Is your wife Cajun?

**00:40:05**

**BB:** Oh God yeah, more so than me.

**00:40:07**

**SR:** Yeah, and she's a cook?

**00:40:10**

**BB:** Yeah, she's a better cook than me. She'll learn, where I'd rather, you know—I mess with food at work enough. I don't want to do it at home. But I can cook some awesome barbeque chicken.

**00:40:24**

**SR:** I bet. And you have children?

**00:40:25**

**BB:** Two boys, 12 and 15.

**00:40:30**

**SR:** And do they have any relationship to the store?

**00:40:33**

**BB:** They both claim they're going to own it one day, so we'll see. I know I grew up thinking I would never be in insurance and I would never be in fast-food, and the first two jobs—no, in sales rather, insurance sales. The first two jobs I had out of school were sales and then fast-food. And you know, so I don't know. They say they're going to do this, and that means they probably won't, but we'll see. I hope so. I hope one of my children will want to take over one day 'cause it's a nice little business, and you know we have a good lifestyle. They're going to Catholic schools, and I'm sure they're going to go to LSU or something. You know, I think it's a good avenue for a living for them.

**00:41:12**

**SR:** Do they come here?

**00:41:12**

**BB:** Oh God, yes. All the time. School started last week, so I'm not going to see them near as much now, but a couple times a week my wife will bring them buy. They love the—my oldest one loves the boudin; my youngest one loves our hotdogs. And they both eat the beef jerky. They grab bags of that every time they're here.

**00:41:30**

**SR:** That's sweet. Do you have—I've asked some people about this, and it seems like there isn't—there might not be sort of a running story. But do you have any idea where the boudin tradition came from?

**00:41:46**

**BB:** No, I don't. I—you know back in the old days, the old farmers, they used the hog lard to preserve things in. They'd melt the fat down and store andouille or, you know, different kinds of sausage and things in that—in jars, in cellars. It sounds kind of nasty. I know they made boudin back then just with whatever meat was left over, just as another way to have food for their kids. And they'd actually, you know, use the real intestines and use a cow horn and make this stuff up and shove it through the cow horn with their thumb and make their boudin that way. You know I—when it all originated, I don't know. I think probably who knows when? But it sounds kind of nasty, the way they did it back then. I think it's come a long way since then.

**00:42:34**

**SR:** Do you think it's changed since even you were growing up, the boudin standards or the taste?

**00:42:41**

**BB:** No, no, I don't. I think by the time I was a kid back in the '60s, boudin was—what I ate as a child tastes just like what I eat now in my opinion, or just like what we make.

**00:42:54**

**SR:** And what—what do you think the component is in your boudin, or what in your process got it the A-plus grade that the Boudin Link guys did?

**00:43:03**

**BB:** I really think it's our seasoning. It's—I got real lucky with the seasoning. I put a bunch of stuff together and asked several butchers and people—different people I knew that I respected their opinion. And one would say, *Try—add a little bit of this*, or, *Add a little bit of that*, or, *It needs a little bit more spice, a little bit more kick to it*, and so I added more red pepper. And then the last guy, that he was delivering meat here once a week, he said, *Man, just a little bit more salt*. And every time I change it I write down what I'm adding, so you know—you know a different recipe. And I'd cook hamburgers for them or something like that with the seasoning in it instead of just tasting the seasoning, and make them actually eat something. And I got it where everyone thought, *Man this is good. This is good. Don't change it anymore*. And that's the recipe we've been following. And I think that, for whatever reason, gives it—the boudin the flavor it has, you know. And you know consistency is the big part of it also. It's kind of—it's kind of hard to mess it up the way we make it. It's exactly 60 pounds of meat, exactly 10 pounds of pork liver. The only variable would be the bell peppers and the onions—could be a different size, 'cause you know we put 14 onions and 8 bell peppers and three things of celery in it. So if you have super large onions—we buy the same size every time, but they're not always consistent. And so the vegetables could vary a hair. Besides that, you know everything is weighed and measured every single time, so its consistency is there.

And I think the seasoning, and I think our ratio of rice per meat also really—I got lucky and did that just right I think, in the beginning, and never altered it.

**00:44:47**

**SR:** So where do you get your meat?

**00:44:50**

**BB:** My warehouse is Associated Grocers out of Baton Rouge. And then there's also a supplier in Carencro called Prejean's. and they pretty much have the market cornered on pork meat in this part of the state. They really sell a lot of pork meat, and we buy quite a bit of—most of our pork from them. And then all our beef from my warehouse.

**00:45:10**

**SR:** Is that related to the Prejean's Restaurant?

**00:45:13**

**BB:** I doubt it. Prejean is a pretty common name. It's like Boudreaux a Thibodaux, you know.

**00:45:18**

**SR:** What about Billeaud?

**00:45:19**

**BB:** Billeaud is not that—there's not millions of us, just hundreds.

**00:45:25**

**SR:** How many employees do you have here?

**00:45:25**

**BB:** I think 26.

**00:45:29**

**SR:** Okay, and you ship also. Is that right?

**00:45:33**

**BB:** Yes, boudin is kind of a pain to ship. We use Shipping, Etcetera. We refer anyone that wants it shipped to them and they come and get it. They'll call us and tell us what they want, how they want it packaged, and they'll come, pick it up, and then they'll prepare it in their shipping packaging. One time—I used to do it a fair amount until I found Shipping, Etcetera. I shipped 30 pounds of boudin to a woman in New York City, and it cost \$100 in shipping, and I'm thinking, *This is absurd. I can't justify sending someone something that costs them more to get it shipped to them than the actual product is worth.* Crackling, we ship a lot of. It's light. It doesn't have to be there next-day air, you know. We seal it, and I can—I just use the post office for that, you know. I'll do that a couple times a week. But I try to shy away from shipping, just 'cause it's such a hassle. And I'll refer everyone to Shipping, Etcetera and let them handle it.

**00:46:25**

**SR:** And what kinds of people—what kind of person wants 30 pounds of boudin shipped to New York? Was it a Cajun?

**00:46:32**

**BB:** I would think it's someone that's traveled through this area and eaten it. We've got—we get a lot of people from, you know—people just travel these days. And we have billboards on the highway, and you know they're coming through Lafayette going to New Orleans or something, and, *Oh this is where the Cajuns are* kind of thing, and, *Let's see if we can buy something Cajun while we're going through.* And they'll see my billboard. I have these big double billboards that say *boudin* and *crackling* on them, and boy they'll follow the arrow. They'll take the turn there, and then they'll stop when they're lost and ask someone, *How do you get to that place that sells the boudin and crackling?* And eventually they'll get here. We have people every day that walk in here, and you can tell they've never been here. They're looking around like, *Oh, you know, and— Can I help you? Yeah, where's the boudin,* or whatever, you know? And one time I had two women from Michigan come in here. They had seen the sign, and she said, *We're interested in your boudin.* I said, *Where y'all from?* And we started talking, and I said, *Have you ever tried boudin?* No. So I gave them—I cut up some for them and they took a little grain of rice and tasted it and talked to each other and said, *Oh, this is good.* I said, *It's not that good?* She said, *Well it's just too spicy for us; we can't take this.* [**Laughs**] And then some people take a bite and they say, *Oh yeah, give me a lot of that. I want some more,*

you know. And then they—*Do you have it cold? I want to take it home*, kind of stuff.

You know some people, you can tell right away they love it, and some people, they don't want to ever touch that again.

**00:47:52**

**SR:** Right.

**00:47:52**

**BB:** Or they just look at it and think it's nasty, and they—well they turn their nose up.

**00:47:56**

**SR:** I think also the liver flavor turns some people off who don't eat that.

**00:47:59**

**BB:** Right, I would think. Ours—we only use 10 pounds of it for 60 pounds of meat, so it's not strong. I know other places that use 15 or 20 pounds, you know a larger ratio, and you can definitely taste it. Ours—I don't—I know it has to add some kind of flavor and some taste to it, but it's not enough for me to notice 'cause I'm not a big liver eater at all.

**00:48:24**

**SR:** Well do you travel much?

**00:48:26**

**BB:** Uh, unfortunately my wife makes me go to Florida in the summer—that kind of, you know—not, no. I’m not a traveler by any means. So I do like to fish a lot, so all my spare time is fishing.

**00:48:37**

**SR:** Oh yeah, where do you go fishing?

**00:48:38**

**BB:** In the Basin, Atchafalaya Basin a lot, or Cypremor Point for speckled trout.

**00:48:44**

**SR:** So y’all eat a lot of seafood at home?

**00:48:44**

**BB:** Oh yeah, lots. Lots.

**00:48:45**

**SR:** Not just the meats.

**00:48:47**

**BB:** My wife loves crabs and shrimp and crawfish.

**00:48:52**

**SR:** Can't argue with that.

**00:48:55**

**BB:** No.

**00:48:55**

**SR:** Well I—you've given me a lot, and I appreciate your taking the time out of your day. Is there anything you can think of that I didn't ask that you want to say about boudin, or anything else?

**00:49:04**

**BB:** No, I think you did a wonderful job.

**00:49:06**

**SR:** Well thank you. I appreciate it.

**00:49:08**

**BB:** Turn it off.

**00:49:11**

**SR:** Yeah.

**00:49:11**

**BB:** She actually sounds like—.

**00:49:11**

**[End Billy Billeaud-Boudin Interview]**