

MARK CORMIER
Trahan Foods - Rayne, LA

Date: September 8, 2007
Location: Rayne, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 20 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin Trail

[Begin Mark Cormier-Trahan Foods-Boudin Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Saturday, September 8, 2007. I'm in Rayne, Louisiana, and I'm sitting here with Mr. Mark Cormier. Could I get you to say your full name and your birth date and also pronounce the store where we're at right now?

00:00:22

Mark Cormier: Okay, Mark Cormier. I was born in October 20, 1968.

00:00:32

SR: And the store?

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MC: The store's name is Trahan Foods.

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SR: Trahan Foods?

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MC: Trahan Foods, yeah.

00:00:40

SR: Thank you. And can you tell me, before we get started on boudin, what this Frog Festival is about, because I noticed coming into town that there's a Frog Festival in Rayne this weekend?

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MC: Yes. It's a yearly event.

00:01:02

SR: Okay. Well do people eat frogs in Rayne?

00:01:07

MC: Yeah. they eat frogs—fried frog legs and—.

00:01:12

SR: So I can find some of that, as well as boudin today?

And so we were talking a little bit before we started about how long you've been making boudin.

I think you might be one of the youngest people I've talked to so far who makes boudin, and

you've been doing it for a while. Can you tell me when you started?

00:01:27

MC: I started right out of high school. I was 16, yeah. And they just taught me and I've been doing since—since '84.

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SR: And the whole time at this store?

00:01:45

MC: Yes, ma'am.

00:01:50

SR: And how did you come to work at this store? Are you---is it family, or—?

00:01:54

MC: Well I had a cousin that worked here, and she was going out to college, and we were talking one day and they asked me, to see if I wanted a little part-time job. I started cleaning up and then they started—then I started cutting meat and they showed me how to make boudin sausage.

00:02:14

SR: Oh okay. So first you were cutting meat.

00:02:17

MC: Yeah. Well clean-up guy, and then we started—but then they teach you this on the, along the way.

00:02:24

SR: Hmm. And so you must have grown up eating boudin if you grew up in this area.

MC: Oh yeah, yeah.

00:02:35

SR: Can you take me through the process of making a batch, just from the beginning. Like what time you get here in the morning and what's the first thing you do?

00:02:48

MC: Oh okay. We get here around 7:00, prepare—get the meat ready.

00:03:03

SR: So the meat—you use pork. What cut do you use?

00:03:08

MC: We use pork meat, picnic steaks, picnic roasts that we use. Yeah and you part-way cook that for a couple hours, and then once it's tender well we also—once it's tender then it goes through a process of—.

00:03:33

SR: And so you cook the meat. You boil it in water, I guess?

00:03:37

MC: We boil it, yeah, with the seasonings. And like I said, it takes about two hours 'til it's tender. And then once it's cooked, well we cook it—also we cook the rice off to the side. It [the pork] goes to the grinder, and then we separate the fat and the meat, and we also got pork liver in it.

00:04:01

SR: Oh you put pork liver in it?

00:04:02

MC: Yeah, pork liver also. And then take that, separate that, and we grind it. It's separate. I grind the fat and the liver with two different plates. One is a smaller than the other—that way it doesn't, you don't get a chunk of fat or chunk of skin or whatever, and you have to—. And then the rest of the meat goes through the—you grind that with a bigger plate.

00:04:33

SR: Okay. So the liver and the fat gets ground really fine?

00:04:35

MC: Yeah. And then you mix it with your seasonings, the juice that's left—the gravy or whatever, pour that to make it moist. And then that goes to the stuffer, and then we go from the stuffer—you have the casing, and you make your links.

00:04:58

SR: And so when you say that you cook the meat with your seasoning, do you mean vegetables?

00:05:04

MC: No. Salt, pepper—yeah.

00:05:08

SR: And do you put any vegetables in there at all?

00:05:09

MC: Onion tops and green onions and parsley flakes.

00:05:17

SR: And so I guess the picnic cut, does that have a lot of skin on it?

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MC: Yeah, it has a skin on top. Some have bones and some don't, but we usually use the boneless 'cause it's a lot easier to separate and you don't have to worry about the bones, you know, getting grind or anything.

00:05:42

SR: And where does that meat come from? Does it come from the area?

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MC: Yeah, from a pig. It's the shoulder, the shoulder part.

00:05:50

SR: And does it come from this area?

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MC: I don't—the warehouse.

00:05:58

SR: And what about, what kind of rice do you use? What kind of grain?

00:06:04

MC: Long-grain rice. We usually use—I forgot the name of it.

00:06:11

SR: That's okay. No, I just mean like if it's long-grain or short-grain. Long-grain?

00:06:15

MC: It's long-grain.

00:06:18

SR: And so was there already a recipe for making boudin here when you started?

00:06:25

MC: Yeah. The original. The owner's grandpa, he owned the store at the time. It was his recipe, and then they just carried it on from there.

00:06:38

SR: And so who taught you how to do it when you started?

00:06:42

MC: The, well, the manager before me, you know.

00:06:44

SR: But not the owner's grandpa. He wasn't doing it anymore?

00:06:49

MC: The only one that—well now I am, but—*[Laughs]*.

00:06:53

SR: Now you're the only person making it?

00:06:56

MC: Yeah, that makes it right now. I'm learning—teaching somebody right now to do it in case I'm not here or whatever.

00:07:03

SR: And so does this—the boudin that you make here, does it taste like the kind of boudin that you made—that you ate growing up, or is it different?

00:07:12

MC: Yeah. I mean every—everybody's tastes a little different. I mean you can buy it anywhere(s) else; they've got a little different—how you say that?—little different way of doing, you know, putting different I don't know—. Seasoning might be a little stronger, or some might be a little milder.

00:07:37

SR: And now that you make boudin, do you eat it very often?

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MC: Not really. I'll taste it, but it's not—I don't eat a bunch of it.

00:07:52

SR: It seems—

00:07:52

MC: Because I'm around it so much.

00:07:56

SR: Yeah, you get enough of it. What about—so you're from the area. What is your heritage?
Are your parents both from this area, Acadiana?

00:08:07

MC: Yeah, they both from around Louisiana.

00:08:11

SR: And I've noticed that people eat boudin for breakfast a lot. When— when do most of your sales happen here for boudin? In the morning or in the afternoon?

00:08:24

MC: Morning, noon, afternoon. I believe it's, I mean pretty much—I mean you don't get a whole bunch in the morning, but dinner time, lunch time, I don't know. And in wintertime more. For some reason wintertime they want more—more boudin in the winter 'cause it's cold out.

00:08:49

SR: Well this time of year [**late summer, early autumn**], how much boudin do you make a week? I mean do you know in pounds, or—?

00:08:54

MC: Summertime I'll make between 200—about 400 pounds a week. We make it on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Tuesdays I'll make a 200-pound batch, and then Thursday I'll make another 200-pound batch, and then by the following Tuesday again it's time to make more. But the

wintertime it will go from 500 to 600 pounds. It varies. And then Christmas, around the holidays it's more—get visitors that come in. And I've seen us make up to 1,000-pounds in a week, you know that Christmas week.

00:09:37

SR: Wow. And so most people, when they let's say—when they buy it around Christmas, are they going home and eating it at home do you think?

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MC: Yeah, they bringing it home. Like I said, they live, they live out of state or whatever—that's from, you know Rayne, that they'll take it home with them.

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SR: Wow.

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MC: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

00:09:56

SR: But most of your sales—do you think that it's people who sort of eat it on the go, or do people, a lot of people take it home?

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MC: Some eat it on the go. Some of them have parties, you know. They have, some have wedding showers, bunch of occasions I guess. They—it's like a little snack for them. I don't think it's just a main meal. It's just something to snack on, like an appetizer.

00:10:27

SR: Right. And you sell—do you sell all of it already cooked, or do you sell some of it uncooked?

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MC: Well boudin is already cooked, you know, but I mean it's cold and yeah, we sell both cold and—and heated up.

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SR: What about, do y'all do any shipping?

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MC: No. Like if we have somebody that wants to, they'll call us and we'll mail it out to them. We have that, yeah. We did that.

00:11:01

SR: Let's see. Oh, I know. I wanted to ask you without giving away any secrets. I think I saw on the internet that your boudin is pretty spicy. Would you say that?

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MC: Well we have a spicy and a mild, you know. You got your choice. It's not, well I mean it's spicy but it's not overpowering. You know, not something you can't eat.

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SR: And how do you get that spice? Is that with cayenne pepper?

00:11:26

MC: With pepper, yeah, red pepper.

00:11:34

SR: So I noticed on the internet that these guys that have a website called www.boudinlink.com, they rated yours really highly recently. Do you—what do you think, I don't know, makes your boudin different from other boudin(s)? But you know, in the area, or what's particular about your boudin? Do you know?

00:11:54

MC: I have no idea. [*Laughs*] Maybe it's consistency. I mean you know, that might be it, you know—about all I can say.

00:12:05

SR: Well it's a pretty old recipe. Maybe it stands the test of time. Are there, is there a lot of competition between boudin makers?

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MC: I guess. I mean I never really—I mean they got a few places around, but I don't think so.

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SR: It seems like maybe people eat enough boudin out here—that it doesn't matter how many suppliers there are.

00:12:34

MC: I guess. I don't know.

00:12:37

SR: So I know that the making of boudin started with the tradition of boucherie, like killing the whole hog and using all of its parts. Have you ever been to a boucherie?

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MC: No, I haven't. I've heard of them but I haven't.

00:12:59

SR: You've heard of them happening like nowadays?

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MC: They have a few that I hear of.

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SR: It doesn't seem that common anymore. Do you know, what about blood boudin? Have you ever made that or seen that made?

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MC: No, I've never. I've heard about it, but I've never did it. I've heard my, you know, older people talk about it.

00:13:34

SR: That's also dying, a dying tradition, I think. Do y'all make crackling?

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MC: No, ma'am.

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SR: Do you make any other kinds of sausage?

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MC: Yeah, we make sausage. Yeah, smoked sausage and fresh sausage.

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SR: You make that in-house, huh?

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MC: What's that?

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SR: You make that in-house? Smoked sausage?

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MC: Yeah, we have a smoker over here that we smoke our own sausage.

00:14:03

SR: And so is that andouille, or is that a different kind of smoked sausage?

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MC: No, we don't make an andouille. He just—we've got a pure pork, and we got a beef and pork, and a fresh: we have an onion top and parsley and a hot. That's basically it, and we also have a chicken sausage.

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SR: Oh okay.

00:14:28

MC: Yeah.

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SR: How is that seasoned, the chicken sausage?

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MC: It—we have—it's a variety. You've got a hot and a mild, your choice of—

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SR: Do you make hogshead cheese, or anything like that?

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MC: No.

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SR: Are you—who is the cook in your household?

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MC: At home it's me, me and my wife I guess. We both do it. It depends whoever is there earlier.

00:15:01

SR: But you cook at home?

00:15:02

MC: Yeah, yeah. I cook.

00:15:06

SR: What—I mean, that’s kind of unique in this part of the country. I think a lot of men cook at home, whereas like another, in other parts of the country that’s not very common. I think that’s pretty cool. What sorts of things do you like to cook?

00:15:23

MC: Pork roasts and a gravy, and I add barbeque, fried chicken—mainly what you’re hungry for. I don’t know. I never really thought about it. *[Laughs]*

00:15:43

SR: What about, I’m also doing an oral history project about gumbo. Do you ever make gumbo?

00:15:48

MC: Yeah, I make gumbo.

00:15:50

SR: What kind do you make?

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MC: Sausage and—chicken and sausage gumbo; maybe a seafood gumbo every once in a while.

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SR: With a roux?

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MC: Yeah, with the roux—chicken and sausage.

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SR: And do you put filé in it also?

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MC: Some do. I don't. I guess it all depends if you like putting it in there.

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SR: And what about okra?

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MC: I'm not a big okra fan. **[Laughs]** No, that's not my—my wife loves it, but I'm not. Usually when she makes a gumbo I'll like—she'll make it on the side—a side dish for me.

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SR: She'll keep one side dish out without okra?

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MC: What's that?

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SR: Without okra, you mean?

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MC: Yeah, I'm not—. People like it. I just never got a taste for it.

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SR: And is you wife from around this area too?

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MC: Yeah.

00:16:49

SR: Who taught you how to cook?

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MC: Um, my mother-in-law. **[Laughs]** Well my mama kind of. She was one that never really wanted you in the kitchen. That was her kitchen. But then when I got married, we kind of got tips from my mother-in-law and the guys that I worked back in the—in the market, they kind of cooked, so they would give me tips on how to make the gravy.

00:17:19

SR: I guess you were in the right place to be talking about cooking. Just one more question about—you started, you told me earlier, as a meat-cutter here. Can you just tell me what that means? Is that the same thing as a butcher?

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MC: No, not the same thing. The butcher, they more or less start from scratch all right: the pig or the cow is alive, you know, and they go, they go from the whole process. We get all our stuff boxed. Like picnics come in one box, butts come in another box, and then your pork loins in another, and you basically cut it for the case.

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SR: And do y'all sell any—any like meats that you season, you know like pre-seasoned?

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MC: Oh yeah, yeah. We do that. We have barbeque packs, stuffed roasts, seasoned and already to go; meatloaf and hamburger patties. Basically anything that you want and we can, we can get for you.

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SR: And do you have your own, like, seasoning blend or do you use—?

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MC: Yeah, we have our own seasoning, you know, mixed already. We also sell some in the store, yeah.

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SR: It seems like a lot of stores in this area do that: they have their own seasonings.

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MC: Yeah, everybody has got their own little spices that they like, and I guess that's—like what you asked—saying about the boudin, how everybody's tastes different. Well I guess the seasoning, that's a big part to do with it too: someone might add a little something, make it taste a little different.

00:19:13

SR: Did that recipe for the seasoning here exist when you got here?

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MC: Yeah, it's basically the same. I mean not really changed. I mean it's not no real big secret—only [*Laughs*] just the basics you know.

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SR: Okay. Well thanks. I appreciate your sitting down with me. It's really nice for you to give your time.

00:19:40

[End Mark Cormier-Trahan Foods-Boudin Interview]