

SCOTT MENARD
Trahan Foods - Rayne, LA

Date: September 8, 2007
Location: Rayne, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 18 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin Trail

[Begin Scott Menard -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, with Mr. Scott Menard. And if I could get you to just say your full name and your birth date, I'd appreciate it.

00:00:19

Scott Menard: Right. My name is Gregory Scott Menard. My birth date is July 22, 1970.

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SR: And so we are—can you say the name of the store?

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SM: It's Trahan Foods.

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SR: I tried to say that earlier: Trahan. And you're the owner?

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SM: Yes.

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SR: And how long have you been involved in this store? Is it a family business?

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SM: It's a family business, yes. I've been involved practically all my life, since I've been about five years-old, and been working here full-time since I've been out of high school, which was in '88, until the present. I bought this store October 26 of '06, so we've been here almost a year now.

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SR: And it was—I mean, did your parents run the store?

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SM: My uncle, yeah.

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SR: And Mark was telling me that the original boudin recipe came from—is it your grandfather?

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SM: It was my, my uncle's grandfather. I mean I've been involved with the family all my life. I've—my aunt and uncle raised me since I was, you know, been a young child. My dad died at a young age, so they took me in, and so that's—that's how I came accompanied with them, and the recipe was from his grandfather, David [*Pronounced Di-veed*] Trahan.

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SR: Can you say that name again?

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SM: David Trahan, David Trahan. They say [*Di-veed*] is French for David.

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SR: Okay. And do y'all speak French?

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SM: Not much.

00:02:03

Mark Cormier: I can understand it a little bit.

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SM: Not a whole lot.

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SR: But you must get people from the older generation who come in here and—.

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SM: We get some and we have, we have some cashiers that's been here 26--28 years that speak fluent French. And I mean I remember Ronnie, some of Ronnie's grandparents, that's all they spoke was French. I mean there wasn't really hardly any English at all that—that his grandmother spoke. So there's not many people today that come in and speak a lot of French. I mean the older people but not—it's kind of fading away you know. So—.

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SR: Ronnie—was that your uncle?

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SM: Yes.

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SR: And have you ever made the boudin?

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SM: I've helped them make it. I mean Mark has been making it the past 10 years. Well I mean, just you making it probably the past 10 years, but I mean he's been making it for probably 20 years or better.

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Mark Cormier: Nineteen eighty-four.

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SR: So y'all are around the same age. Did you go to school together?

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SM: No. He's a year older than me.

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SR: But your, your family has been from this area for a long time I guess.

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SM: Yes.

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SR: Do you know how long?

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SM: [*Laughs*] Shew, I don't, I don't know. I couldn't put a year, you know—.

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SR: That's all right. Some people in this area know, you know, from back to the 1600s.

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SM: Yeah. I'm not big into genealogy and all that, so I don't—.

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SR: When you were growing up, was the store—did it look like it does now, or has it—?

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SM: It was actually very small, almost like a convenience store. Ronnie took over the business. He was 18. I think he had four employees. And then rebuilt that store in [*Sighs*] '84—rebuilt a new store in '84, and then we added on in '86 maybe, a couple years after. And we added on again in 2000, which is the original store we have now. So it's, it's grown you know quite a bit since—since Ronnie has had it. And he was 18 when he bought it years ago from his grandfather. Now I don't know how long his grandfather had it, but I know the time—he always tell me when he, when he bought the store there was 28 stores in town, like mom-and-pop stores.

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SR: How many are there now?

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SM: There's only—there's one chain store, which is Winn Dixie, and there's four—there's three independents. We're the biggest independent in town. Now you have convenience stores, but a lot of the mom-and-pop stores just shut down.

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SR: And what—what do you think your customers come to you for that they don't get at the Winn Dixie, or other big—?

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SM: I think our other biggest strong point would be our meat department, you know meat. Our perimeter department is produce, deli—I think that's things that we do real well at. I just think that we can beat our competitors on it, on a daily basis, but probably the biggest thing in our store is our meat department. I mean we have people come from all over, all over the parish you know, neighboring parishes that—you know, different small cities around this area that come here just for the meat.

00:06:12

SR: And—

00:06:12

SM: That's—that's probably our strongest selling point for our store.

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SR: And so they probably have a select—a wide selection of meats at the bigger stores, but what makes your meat different?

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SM: I think the biggest stores don't—they don't cut meat; they more—a lot of stuff is packaged meat. If someone wants, you know—we just do it the way it was done years ago. We still cut meat on a daily basis, you know. If you go to Wal-Marts and stuff you won't, you probably won't find a saw. You probably won't find a grinder. You won't—you know, just things to process the meat. They get everything packed in just like a—just like canned groceries. It's just they—it comes in a box, they unpack it, put it out there, you know. There's no meat-cutters in those stores. You can, you know—lot of them stores you can't go in and ask for, you know, a rib-eye cut. They just, they just don't have it. They don't have the personnel to do it, you know. Some do and some don't. Most of the Wal-Marts don't have that. I think Sam's is starting to—Sam's has some—some Sam's have the, you know, meat—fresh cut meats—so they have butchers and stuff, but for the most part that's—. I think that's our strength, you know.

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SR: And also, maybe, we were talking earlier about the seasoned meats, you know, and stuffed roasts and stuffed—. People probably—

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SM: Specialty items and stuff like that, yeah. We do quite a bit of that. That another thing you won't find at—at, you know, most chain stores or, you know, big markets. They just don't have the personnel to do it, and then the person they do have probably don't know how to do those things.

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SR: And what are some of your, you know, top sellers as a specialty meat?

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SM: Well our boudin is a real, real good seller for us. Our sausage, fresh and smoked. We sell a lot of stuffed roasts, pork, beef, stuffed chickens. Top seller—I don't know. What do you mean by top seller? It's hard to say. Barbeque packs.

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Mark Cormier: Yeah, barbeque packs.

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SM: People buy different things different times of the season. You know, I mean things sell better, like you know boudin sells a lot more in the wintertime when it's colder—they eat more of it. Summertime, it's hot. They don't eat as much of that.

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SR: What's a barbeque pack?

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SM: It's a pack that we put together with pork—seasoned pork steaks, a whole chicken cut in half, some fresh sausage. And we sell a lot of that.

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SR: I guess you must have eaten pretty well growing up in this store?

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SM: Hmm, yes, sure have. [*Laughs*]

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SR: I was asking Mark about cooking. Do you cook?

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SM: Do I cook? Sometimes. I'm not, I'm not a big cook.

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SR: Do you eat boudin?

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SM: Yes, I eat boudin. I like boudin.

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SR: And how do you—how do you eat it? Do you eat the casing?

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SM: No, I don't eat the casing. I don't. Now if you—I'll tell you what: my preferred way to eat boudin is barbequed. Now if you barbeque it, you eat—then you eat the casing. But that's, for me that's the best way to eat it.

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SR: And by barbeque, what do you mean by that?

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SM: Just like you'd barbeque a steak or a hamburger, and you put it on the pit until it—the casing—turns golden brown, and take it off and eat it.

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SR: And why do you eat the casing then? It changes?

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SM: Because it's—it dries it out. It's real—it's not moist like if you boil it. It's not stringy. It's real tough, and when you bite the boudin it—you know, when you bite into the boudin it just breaks the casing.

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SR: And so you barbeque it raw, or has it already been cooked once?

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SM: The boudin is actually—it's actually cooked. But you have to heat it up, and you know when you put it on the barbeque pit it's really just to brown the—the casing, and it's cooked.

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SR: Do you eat the casing, Mark?

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Mark Cormier: Yeah, I eat the casing.

00:11:03

SR: *[Interruption.]* Yeah, it looks like it's break time in here. I can wait. I was asking Mark what—so you got a pretty high rating from www.boudinlink.com, and I'm wondering what you think sets your boudin apart from other ones, or what the—what's particular about it.

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SM: Well I think our recipe just speaks for itself. We have a real good recipe that's just a mixture of the meat and the, and the spices, and you know it's not too much meat and it's not too much rice. Just an old recipe we had that—that's been successful over the years. I think only from what, from what I read on the link the only—the only rating we didn't get A-plus for was because of the way we sell it. It's wrapped in plastic and not butcher paper. I think the ones—the guys who write the link, that was their downfall to our boudin: the way we present it, we sell it to our customers.

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SR: Their aesthetic is they prefer the butcher paper, I guess.

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SM: Uh-hm.

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SR: But you've been wrapping it in plastic for a long time?

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SM: Quite a while, yeah. It's just, it's more efficient. It's less messy; you know, it's just not as messy. You just, you can serve it quicker to your customers and you've got to realize our—we serve our boudin with our meat department, and we have a full blown meat department. A lot of these other stores, that's all they do. You know, you go to some of these stores and all they do is sausage and boudin. They don't have a whole meat case. So it just works for us; that's how we do it.

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SR: Were people making sausage in this store when you were growing up?

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SM: Uh-hm. Yeah, yeah.

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SR: And I noticed, just sort of walking through here, there are a lot of other sort of Louisiana products on the shelves. It's probably another reason that your customers like coming here.

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SM: Yeah. I mean we have—I mean Louisiana store—we're going to sell a lot of Louisiana products. And we get a lot of customers from out of state that come here and buy those products, you know—not just our meats and boudin, but also seasonings and rice you know. We have just a lot of things that they can't get in other places.

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SR: So when you were deciding to buy the store and take over as the owner, did—do you think at all about how you're sort of carrying on what might be a dying tradition?

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SM: Yes. I mean I see the—a lot of meat department, like the workers in a meat department, is a dying breed. You don't, you don't have as many young people coming up that want to cut meat or do those things, so it is definitely a dying breed. But it's, you know, it's an interesting job. It's a challenging job. And yes, there's a lot of rewards because you know what you put into your product is what—what goes out. So you get the rewards as well as, you know, doing the hard work to get it to that point.

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SR: Making people happy?

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SM: Yeah.

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SR: Do you have children?

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SM: I have one—one son. He's 14.

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SR: Wow. And does he hang out here? Does he work here?

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SM: At this point, no. He don't hang out here too much.

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SR: We'll see if he's the next generation, huh?

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SM: Maybe so. We'll see.

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SR: Does he eat boudin?

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SM: Yeah, he eats boudin.

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SR: Well I ask because, you know, a lot of old food traditions sort of get lost in younger generations. But that doesn't seem to be happening in this part of the state.

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SM: Oh no. I mean in this area, you know, I'm sure there's not anybody you're going to talk to that doesn't eat boudin. I mean it's just a big—it's—should I say that it's something that is eaten quite a bit from people in South Louisiana. So is like cracklings and those types of things. I guess just carrying on the tradition over the years, that's something that we're known for, and you know there's a lot of people that do it.

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SR: You don't make cracklings at—? You never have?

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SM: We did one time for—it's just cracklings is just a hard thing to, to do. You have to have someone that can—that really knows how to cook them and knows what they're doing, and it's

just—‘cause you can, you can ruin a whole batch quick if you don’t know what you’re doing. You know, you can burn them or you know just got to have somebody that really knows what they’re doing, and it’s almost a full-time job just to do that. So maybe in the future we might look at that. We did it at one time, but we kind of got away from it ‘cause it’s just too much—too much trouble I should say. And we just, the boudin is a lot easier and we just—you know, it’s not as time consuming. And it worked. You know, it worked for us.

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SR: Just a couple more questions. I was—I happened to be here for the Frog Festival weekend. What is the Frog Festival?

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SM: The Frog Festival is just a festival that Rayne has every year. It’s an annual festival, you know. All the—a lot of the cities around these areas, they each have their own festival, and Rayne has the Frog Festival.

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SR: And that—will I find frogs there?

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SM: You will find frogs there, but it’s a misconception. I think that people think that the frogs actually are raised in Rayne, and they’re not. It’s just, I think it just goes back years ago. I think

they would import frogs here or something, and it was—I'm not sure of the, the whole history on it, but that's how it became as the Frog Festival.

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SR: But did y'all grow up eating frogs a lot?

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SM: I didn't eat frogs. I didn't eat frogs. I mean, I've eaten them before but it's not something—crave for or, you know, go out to a restaurant. I won't order frog legs if I go eat out somewhere(s).

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SR: So it's not something that every Rayne native is eating for dinner every night?

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SM: No, not at all.

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SR: All right. Well—oh, someone just brought some boudin over. Thank you. Well I thank you for giving me your time.

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SM: Thank you for coming; appreciate you coming.

00:18:12

[End Scott Menard-Trahan Foods-Boudin Interview]