

Larry Pierce & Brandon Pierce
Nahunta Pork Center - Nahunta, NC

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Interviewer: Rien T. Fertel
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[Begin Larry Pierce & Brandon Pierce — Nahunta Pork Center]

00:00:02

Rien Fertel: All right; this Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is the sixth of December 2011, just before 9:30 in the morning. And I'm continuing on the North Carolina BBQ Trail. I'm at Nahunta Pork Center. I'm saying Nahunta correctly, right? All right; Nahunta Pork Center in the unincorporated kind of area of Nahunta, North Carolina, sitting down with two members of the Pierce family and I'm going to have them introduce themselves.

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Larry Pierce: I'm Larry Pierce. I'm General Manager of the Pork Center and part owner and my birthday is October 8, 1958.

00:00:44

Brandon Pierce: I'm Brandon Pierce, Larry's son. I do whatever he tells me to do, ten, fifteen, 1984.

00:00:54

RF: So, Nahunta Pork Center what is it exactly? What—what do y'all do here?

00:01:02

LP: We are primarily a retail center. We process only pork and we do our own slaughtering. We do our own processing of fresh-pork products, country-cured products, salted-pork products and smoked products. And so we have a large variety that we provide to the consumer. We do have a

few wholesale accounts but they're very few. We do not have any type of salesmen on the road. We don't go out and solicit wholesale trade. If someone calls and wants our product we do furnish some restaurants but we don't put it in any grocery stores. We have a few small vendors that use our product along with their vegetables where they have truck farming, but as far as grocery stores we've never got into distributing on that level.

00:01:50

RF: And so, you're retail and slaughterhouse. How long has the family been doing this?

00:01:57

LP: My father started the business as a buying station for livestock for hogs in the mid-'50s and he expanded that into a slaughtering operation in the late '50s and then in 1975 he opened the retail center. So we've been actually in business here at this location since 1955.

00:02:17

RF: Nineteen fifty-five; tell me a bit about your father, his name, his background before he— before he started the—.

00:02:24

LP: Okay; my father's name is Mack Pierce and he's seventy-nine years old. He's been working all his life as his—as his hobby is this business. He started the business, like I said, in the mid-'50s and he was also farming at that time. During the later part of the '50s and '58 when he

opened the slaughtering business he continued to farm on this location with corn, tobacco, cotton, and his whole family had been in the farming business during that—during that era.

00:02:58

RF: And so, did he—was he born, did he grow up right here?

00:03:02

LP: Yeah; he grew up right here in Nahunta and the whole family did, as well as when I was a child I grew up here and we all lived in this—on this site, the home place here until—until about the late '70s. Well, actually the mid-'80s we—when we actually—I moved away and then my father built a house in the—in the early '90s and—. But up to that point we actually lived here at the home place.

00:03:29

RF: And, so his parents were farmers, your grandparents?

00:03:32

LP: They were. They farmed right here at—at this site and run a general store, a sawmill, and a cotton gin right here on this site.

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RF: And tell me more about this area, this site; where are we?

00:03:44

LP: We're located in Northwestern Wayne County. We're about thirteen miles from the larger city of Goldsboro. We're about fifty miles from the State Capital of Raleigh. And this area is an unincorporated area. We're right out in the middle of the country. We rely on a lot of billboards to get people to us for—for shopping because you don't just drive by us.

00:04:09

RF: And that's how we found y'all is through billboards over and over. [*Laughs*] How did Nahunta get its name? Where does that word come from?

00:04:20

LP: It's my understanding it's a Tuscarora Indian name and it means *Black Water* and it's a—there is a Nahunta Swamp that runs all the way through this area for about I guess all the way to the—to the river. And I guess that's how it ended up with its name of the *Black Water*.

00:04:38

RF: Do any stories that your father told you about growing up here stick out in your mind?

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LP: The—primarily it was a lot of hard work and that's—that sticks out in my mind, how hard it was to—to do the farming during the time that he was growing up. I remember a story he told about a—a real poor tobacco crop they had and it was just really hard to make ends meet and they just—year after year they just stuck it out and, you know, continued to farm and you'd have

good years and you'd have bad years but they—. There was a lot of hard work and a lot of sweat put out—out here before all this business was ever built to what it is today.

00:05:22

RF: And did his family raise hogs too?

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LP: He raised hogs and he showed hogs for—at the fair and for 4-H events and things like that. He grew up doing that. They had cows, mules, and a full—a full complement of farm animals here but not a real large production but it was just a farm of medium size.

00:05:46

RF: And so you were born here and you grew up here?

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LP: That's correct.

00:05:52

RF: And what are your earliest memories of growing up on a farm? Or maybe let's do hog-centric; what's your earliest memories of—of growing up around pigs or—or having them around?

00:06:02

LP: Well, as I was growing up I would have some pigs that I would raise and then I'd sell them back to Daddy and he would slaughter them and that's how I actually got into that end of the business. I—I raised bulldog puppies also here to make a little money for myself and would sell them. But that's kind of—I did truck farming with—we did corn, we did tobacco, and I always drove the tractor for the croppers and all that, so I was right in the middle of the farming while I was growing up.

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RF: Did you show pigs also?

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LP: I never showed pigs. I primarily just raised them for slaughter.

00:06:45

RF: Did you ever grow attached to pigs? Were they pets when you were young or were they just seen as—as soon to become meat to go to slaughter?

00:06:56

LP: I just raised them for the meat.

00:06:58

RF: So, '75 is when the retail business opened; tell me a bit between—a bit more about what was going on between '55, I think it was, and '75.

00:07:10

LP: Well, during the mid-'50s when Daddy first opened the business he was a buying station, so he would take and buy hogs from the local producers and send them places like Frosty Morn and Swift & Company; during the night he would ship them out. He'd—he'd haul them his self. The next day he'd buy more, ship to them at the end of that night. Then again in the late '50s he started slaughtering hogs for the local farmers, where they would want two or three hogs slaughtered. He would slaughter it for them and then they'd come pick them up and then they'd process them and cut them up and make sausage their self.

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And so, that's how he got his start. He would during the early '60s he started delivering to grocery stores and selling to them. But as they—time progressed and—and meat cutters became really less and less in the grocery stores they wanted more boxed meats and they didn't want the whole carcass. They wanted something that they could open up a box, take a band saw, cut up a pork chop or rib and be done with it. So at that point he realized he needed to change his operation to some degree, so he opened up his own retail center.

00:08:17

RF: And between the '50s and '75 when he was doing all that slaughtering for farmers and—and groceries how much of the work was he doing himself, how many employees did he have, and what did he do exactly?

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LP: He was the primary butcher and then he had about four or five other people that were employees here. But he would stay on the slaughtering floor every day; that was his job to—he would actually run the hogs up, shoot the hogs, scald the hogs, and—and then they would go around the line for evisceration and but he—he was on the kill floor every day.

00:08:55

RF: And you just gave us a tour of the kill floor. How was the kill floor different then say fifty years ago?

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LP: Much smaller. We were probably doing, you know, where we were doing at that time probably maybe twenty hogs a day and today we're doing, you know, 100 to 150 a day. So it—it has increased in size. But the basic concept is still the same. You slaughter the hog. You put them in the vat for de-hairing purposes and then you take the insides out and push them to the cooler, so the basic concept is still the same.

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RF: Were the—were the tools different? Were they less mechanical or I don't know how to—?

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LP: I think mechanically we were basically where we were at then. The—the biggest difference was the way you have to handle the hogs prior to slaughter. The humane handling laws have come about in the last few years to be very, very strict and so we use a different type of

slaughtering methods now where you were just using a twenty-two caliber rifle to slaughter them. And now we use a captive bolt stunner which is a little more efficient to render them unconscious.

00:10:09

RF: And is—how were the State inspections, the Federal inspections then; how was it different until now?

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LP: The—the State and Federal laws have just evolved over the years to be very strict. We—everyone has to come under the laws of the HACCP [Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points] plans now which means that everybody has a plan of how they do everything. You do a lot more paperwork now to—to reach your end means. The sanitation is basically the same other than you got a lot more documentation of what you're doing.

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RF: And what sort of documentation do you mean?

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LP: Any—from the first step of the hog touching the ground here to the time it reaches the consumer everything is documented from his health in pens to his condition as it's hanging in the cooler to how you process it as far as sanitation in your processing area to how it's ground, the temperature it reaches at different points during the process, right on through the cooking process

—everything has to be documented now. And—and before where your inspector was viewing the situation and everything was—basically had to be cleaned, now it has to be documented point by point of what you're doing.

00:11:33

RF: So how many hogs do y'all slaughter a day?

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LP: We'll run about 100 to 150 a day; sometimes a few less, sometimes a few more but overall we'll run 100 to 150 a day.

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RF: And who—who supplies these hogs?

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LP: We have several local producers that supply us and then we have a number of livestock markets in the area that we draw from also.

00:11:57

RF: Who you buy it from?

00:11:57

LP: That's correct.

00:11:59

RF: How many farmers are—do you deal with, about how many?

00:12:04

LP: Well, up to about three or four years ago there was about a dozen of them. But now as the environmental laws have gotten more strict and they've had to actually come up to different standards themselves they've actually become less and less and we've had to rely on more of the bigger producers. And so we're probably down to now to about five or six producers now, about half of what it was up to about three, four, or five years ago.

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RF: So you—you're seeing—are these small farmers that are disappearing or smaller production farmers?

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LP: That's correct. They just can't afford to come up to the environmental standards that are now set.

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RF: Is it—it's just too expensive for them to change?

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LP: That—I think that's my—that's my understanding.

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RF: What breeds of pigs do y'all process—do farmers bring in on average?

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LP: We don't specify a certain breed. There—now the genetics are so mixed they—they go more by the genetics of a certain hog that has been bred over the years. There's just no way of knowing what a certain breed is now that we're using, but we just specify we want a good quality hog. But there are a lot of mixed now; the genetics are mixed.

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RF: Right; good quality means healthy?

00:13:22

LP: Healthy, good fat to lean ratio, just a good yielding hog.

00:13:29

RF: And so from when it is killed, I guess—I don't know what the word y'all use is—to when it's hung how long is it on the floor? What's the process?

00:13:40

LP: Okay; they are—they're brought into the slaughtering pen and they are of course rendered unconscious at that point and from there until they reach the cooler it takes normally about thirty minutes. They'll—they'll go into the—once they're rendered unconscious they're bled out. they go into the hot water bath where they stay about five to seven minutes to loosen the hair up and

the hair is removed by the de-hairing machine and then they're put on the table for complete cleaning, hung up, eviscerated, inspected, and rinsed out good and then they go to the—to the cooler. They're hung in the cooler overnight for chilling and then they're processed the next day.

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RF: Okay; so the next day you start cutting them for the store?

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LP: That's correct.

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RF: Let's talk about that. How many—well, how big is the store, first? It's—it's a very big store.

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LP: Yeah; we—we have about 200 running feet of display area where people can come in and just do their shopping and all. And then, I'm not even sure how much square footage we're talking about in our processing building, but we're able to—to do all of our processing in one building as far as taking and processing the fresh product. And then we take it to another building for salting and curing and so that's done in a completely different operation but still on the same site here.

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RF: And how many cuts of pork are on the floor in the displays?

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LP: There's probably about forty different fresh cuts displayed and then you have your country cured, you have your salt pork, and then you have your smoked pork, so there are a number of items but it—it'll probably run about forty fresh cuts.

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RF: So and maybe we could get your son in on this question too; you showed me a picture in your office of the original building and how small it was—the original retail store and how big the retail store is now. What does your father or your grandfather say about the changes in just twenty—just what thirty-five years, right, just over thirty-five years? What—what does he say about how the *[Laughs]*—the enormous changes in the size of the store? Did he ever think this would happen back in 1975? Is he surprised?

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BP: “It ain't like it used to be.” *[Laughs]* That's—that's what he's constantly saying every time I talk to him: “It ain't like it used to be.”

00:16:06

RF: Is that a happy “It ain't like it used to be” or an “Oh my god, I can't believe what happened?”

00:16:10

BP: Well he's obviously very—very successful and he's, you know, proud of his accomplishments but I don't think he ever really thought it was going to be this, you know—to

this magnitude, the customers coming from all surrounding states to buy from the town of Nahunta.

00:16:31

RF: And you were telling me; I mean you have customers from surrounding states but also from all around the world that come here to tour this place and to buy?

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LP: Yeah; we've had international tours that were sponsored by different agricultural groups in North Carolina. They will bring them in to tour North Carolina facilities and—and they always ask can they come here because we're not really small, we're not really large; we're just a medium-sized family operated business that did start very small and from very humble beginnings and we're still trying to just meet the needs of the people that have—it's our customers that have made us successful and we don't ever forget that.

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RF: At what point did—or did you ever remember a point where you and your father thought—where—where you and father thought, “Wow, maybe we're—we're—we're here to stay? We're more than just a slaughtering facility and a small retail business that we will attract a lot of customers and that we don't have to do these other things because you do not repackage your food for grocery stores.”

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LP: Yeah; I think the whole concept was a very original concept for the time. My father has always been very progressive in his thinking and he's never sat still and said, "Well, you know, I'm going to just hold back and just see if—if things will happen." He's always been very progressive and always wanting to move forward.

00:18:08

And whenever he had the idea of converting a tobacco barn into a retail center no one believed it would work out here. You know, who is going to drive out in the middle of the country and buy sausage from you, you know? And it's not going to work. Well that was a challenge that he just accepted at that point that he was going to show that he could meet the challenge, it would work; he just needed to have the right—the right niche and he—he's got a niche. He found the niche and—and it's still a—a novel concept I think.

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There have been a number of people that have visited our place that have tried to do the same thing we've done and to this day it hadn't worked for anyone else that has visited with us. They—and it can work but it just takes a long process; it don't happen overnight and it—it's just a matter that people started coming here. We—we did a lot of advertising when we first opened and it—it drew a lot of attention and now we do—we still advertise right much but not on the—not on the magnitude we used to. We have such a—a client base now from word of mouth that people again drive from all over the Eastern United States to visit with us. It's not unusual to—on Saturday morning to see a dozen cars from all different States at one time sitting in the parking lot.

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RF: When is it busiest here and—and what does the retail store look like when it's at its busiest, when it's packed?

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BP: Saturday mornings through Saturday afternoon—early Saturday afternoon is definitely our busiest day. Like he said, you have people from all over the country especially the East Coast driving from Maryland, New York, New Jersey, or from Florida and it's definitely a different mix of people but it's—it's hard to walk around in the store it's so busy.

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RF: And the Holiday season which we're in the middle of now what is it like here during the Holiday season?

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BP: Hectic.

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RF: Does it get a little crazy? I imagine—

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BP: Very hectic. [*Laughs*]

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LP: Yeah; and different times of the year dictate different products. You know, as we had discussed earlier today from about Easter through New Year's barbecue pigs are a big item. But from about the end of October through December you have an influx for sausage and country hams. So you—you just have a different period of sales for different items throughout the year.

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RF: And these recipes for the—for the bacon that you do, the sausages, the—the salted country hams, the barbecued pork where do they come from?

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LP: The sausage recipe was actually my grandmother's recipe. Now we have the recipe pre-mixed now for us commercially so that we don't have to mix it by hand every day, but it was her recipe that we used to develop our sausage recipe.

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RF: And what was her name?

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LP: Her name was Alma Pierce. We called her Mama Alma. And—and she had—she made sausage for the curb market which she'd make sausage and go sell it where everybody would gather in Goldsboro and sell their different items that they raised on the farm. She'd sell—she'd sell sausage and eggs and collards and things of that nature. And that's how they actually got through some of those tough years when the tobacco crop wouldn't make and things like that.

00:21:48

RF: And you were going to—the bacon or the ham?

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LP: There is a—there is a recipe that we use for our bacon, our ham-curing; it's not anything that's—that's real specific to—to us. We do have our own ham-curing procedures that we use that is a little bit unique because most of your commercial hams today are only seventy-two to ninety days old, where our country hams are anywhere from six to nine months old. And as ham ages it takes on a unique taste and it's—we don't age it as long as the Italians age the prosciutto but it gets to be a more flavorful ham as it ages.

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RF: You just mentioned—this is question maybe you'll want to answer later but I'll ask it now. You mentioned Italian prosciutto. Do you taste pork products from around the world? Do you get to even travel or—and taste pork? Do you get to go to conventions? I know there's conventions where pork—meat conventions.

00:22:51

LP: There are conventions but I don't fly. *[Laughs]*

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RF: Oh, you don't fly, so you don't go? *[Laughs]*

00:22:53

BP: This is as far as we go. [*Laughs*]

00:22:56

LP: I'm limited to the conventions that are within driving distance. [*Laughs*]

00:23:01

RF: So what do you get—do you try things; maybe do you ship things in to taste or what do you think about pork products elsewhere?

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LP: Pork products—there is a difference in pork products, of course, the way they flavor them regionally. As we talked about earlier today as our barbecue in Eastern North Carolina even versus the difference in North Carolina Western barbecue, but I have—I have tasted different areas of different pork products. Again I prefer Eastern style—way we do things but that's the way I grew up. I will tell you this: The fresher pork is the more flavorful it is as far as fresh pork. Stores normally have to depend on getting their pork either off of a truck or at least being delivered weekly or whatever and then some of it is pre-frozen. It has to be thawed. But we do ours every day; anything that's not sold on our retail center in thirty-six hours from the package date we'll freeze it and that way it stays fresh. We sell it to the consumers frozen if they desire it at a reduced price, but it's never held out for a week or two and then frozen. It—and then it don't dehydrate because once pork dehydrates you lose your flavor.

00:24:19

RF: And you sell whole hogs to—who do you sell whole hogs to?

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LP: Primary—our primary customer is the individual customer for whole hogs. We—we sell quite a few whole barbecue pigs each week. Our biggest time of the year for that is right around football season and when they're doing a lot of tailgating or Mother's Day. Mother's Day is our biggest pig day. For Mother's Day we sell a lot of barbecue-style pigs.

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We do have a few restaurants that we sell whole pigs to but again, we don't concentrate on that market.

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RF: And who are some of those—the restaurants?

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LP: Well, we have Wilbur's Barbecue is one of our bigger restaurants that we use—that uses our product. We have Allen & Sons Barbecue out of—up near Chapel Hill. We have Big Ed's Restaurant there in Raleigh that uses our product. So we have some of the—Pam's Farm House use our product in Raleigh. So there are a number of your regular country restaurants. We have no chain restaurants that we try to cater to though.

00:25:23

RF: When people come here to pick up a whole hog do most of them know what they're doing? Have they done it before? Do they know how to prepare a—the barbecue grill and do they know how to do all that? Or do they have to ask you sometimes?

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LP: Well, sometimes they have to ask us, but barbecuing is kind of a thing around here that people have done ever since they grew up doing it, you know, so they—they know how to do it and we sell to a lot of people from childhood that—that started doing it then.

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RF: Did—did you do whole hogs as a family? Did you do pig-pickings back in the day?

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LP: Oh yes; yes. My father, he'll take—he'll cook some pork on the grill or a whole pig or whatever. Yeah; we've—we've done it right here onsite.

00:26:12

RF: And how do you remember doing it? Did you dig a hole in the ground? Was it laying bricks to form a pit?

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LP: Well, most of the time people had their own barbecue grill, you know, made out of a barrel a lot of times, a fifty-five-gallon barrel or a diesel fuel barrel that they—that they had. They'd cut

it in half and, you know, clean it out good and then make a barbecue pit out of it. We used to here at the Fire Department we did barbecue pigs every year for fund-raisers and we had our own barbecue pit and where we could lay, you know, twenty out at the time on the barbecue pit.

00:26:48

RF: And you mentioned that—that people here are kind of tied to—to hogs and eat a lot of pig. Why is that; why do you think it is? Why do you think North Carolina and not just barbecue but pork products are so closely linked?

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LP: Well, other than that's just the way it's always been [*Laughs*] I really don't know. But North Carolina is the second largest pork producer in the United States and so I guess just from that point of—we—you know, we have a lot of hogs and that's just a commodity we eat.

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RF: And let's talk a bit about changes in the industry. What changes have you seen in the past twenty, thirty, forty years in—in—whether that's the farming industry or the retail pork business?

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LP: Well, a lot more regulations. That's been the biggest thing that I've seen that has affected our markets is a lot more regulations which has caused a lot of people to reduce their size of herds. Some go out of business, as we've said before, and it's just—even now it's causing really a strain on the market and hog prices have gone way up because of grain prices have gone way

up. You know, so it's caused a—a trickle down effect for the consumer, so over the past several years we've seen an escalation and particularly the last two to three years in pork price and because of, I think, a lot of regulations that have come about.

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RF: And what about pork consumption; have you seen changes? Do people eat more or less?

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LP: It's my understanding on a national level pork consumption has gone up over the last ten years considerably.

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RF: Do you remember when the—the slogan “It's the Other White Meat” came out and what it did to your business if it did anything?

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LP: I remember when it came out. I don't remember the year but I remember it very, very much so when it came out. And it did—that was—everybody that came in said, “I'm ready—I want to see ‘The Other White Meat.’” You know, everybody knew that slogan. And the Pork Council did a real good job in promoting that and it became a national slogan.

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RF: So earlier in the day, earlier in the morning you told me you use every part of the pig except —. You told me—or you don't have to tell me—. What's the slogan, or I saw the slogan somewhere, maybe online?

00:29:12

LP: We use everything but the hair.

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BP: From the rooter to the tooter. *[Laughs]*

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RF: Is that right—that's what—

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LP: I'm not sure exactly, but some people say we use everything but the squeal and then some people say, "Well that's been sold to some of the car companies is the squeal." But—but yeah; we basically we use about everything. We—we don't use the hair but we do sell the other byproducts out of the hog, the—the intestines and all are sold to a rendering company and so, you know, everything is used but the hair.

00:29:48

RF: So, in our country right now kind of the new thing in the food world is sustainability, so you—you use every part of the animal. But it sounds like y'all have been doing that for decades

and decades and decades. What do you think about that? Do you hear about that? I know there's a bunch of sustainable butcher shops opening up in urban areas in New York and San Francisco and even in New Orleans, we're, you know, close to getting one. So what does that mean; what do you think about those places?

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LP: [*Laughs*]

00:30:21

RF: That treat this as something new?

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LP: Yeah; I—I don't know. Like I say we've always done that so I don't really, you know, understand the real concept that they're looking at because we've always done it and I don't see anything new about it. So other than the organic part where they're raising—they're trying to raise hogs organically now and—and more natural but that's a real challenge because the livestock is easily getting diseases and without medication I realize, you know, you can't have the medication but they withdraw the hogs from the medication before you can slaughter anyway. And so, you know, you're very limited on the numbers you can produce without medication. And so, that has been a real challenge to the farmers. In fact there were several farmers in the—up around I think in the Midwest of North Carolina that tried and they were going to—the State was going to build a slaughterhouse just for them and it all fell through. And it actually I think ended

up hurting those farmers financially because they—after they did the hogs, they had nowhere to carry them.

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RF: Have you run into any organic hogs? Have you processed any?

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LP: I have not.

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RF: I mean but you would if a farmer—?

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LP: If a farmer had some, yeah, but—but again, those—the land-raised hogs sometimes are a different—their—their muscle/fat ratio is different sometimes and you got to be careful that you—you have a consistent hog, you know, to—to produce the meat you’re looking for. So, you have to be careful about it too.

00:31:58

RF: And what do you think about this new wave of—of heritage breed hogs? Have you run across that? Do farmers bring those in?

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LP: I'm not sure what you're talking about.

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RF: Oh just—just farmers trying to raise breeds that might no longer be around, that aren't as hybrid breeds, so things like Mangalitsa and—?

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LP: I'm just not familiar with that.

00:32:23

RF: Doing these interviews across the State a lot of people have mentioned and gentlemen who have been selling barbecue or doing barbecue for—for half a century have said that they've seen changes in the pork itself over time. Do—have you seen those where that's fat content and muscle content?

00:32:47

LP: Yeah; pork has gotten a lot leaner almost to the point sometimes that it's—it don't have the flavor and enough fat content to—to give it what you need for tenderness. Fat has a role in the animal and now there are some breeds that are so—and the genetics have come about not necessarily in one breed, but the genetics have come about in the last few years that the hog has gotten so lean that it's—it's a tough meat, the muscle is tough and there's very little flavor to it. So they've had to go back and re-engineer their genetics to almost put some fat back into the genetics.

00:33:25

RF: And what do you think about that as a retailer, as someone who has to deal with customers who—?

00:33:32

LP: Well, I have customers from one end of the spectrum to the other. Some of them, they know exactly that they have got to have some fat there for flavor and some of them say, “I don’t care. It’s got to be healthy. I don’t want any fat.” And it’s so funny that you have one—a person that will want a real lean piece of meat but they want a thick piece of fatback to cook with and you can’t have both. You’ve got real lean meat, you don’t have thick fatback, so it’s—it’s so funny sometimes how people will—will ask you for one thing on one end of the spectrum and turn right around and want something on the other end of the spectrum.

00:34:05

RF: Hmm; and—and do you—what changes do you foresee in the pork industry in the next years? Do you see it heading somewhere else? Is it going to stay the same and that’s both farming and consumers’ tastes?

00:34:18

LP: Well, I don’t really know as far as consumer taste but I can tell you that if—if the government don’t get out of some of this environmental—and I agree that environmental regulations are important, but if they don’t quit restricting so much of the farmers, what they can do, we’re going to lose a widespread part of our industry. You may see a hog shortage and we’re

already seeing some of that now in North Carolina. There's a moratorium now. You can't build any new hog houses and so some of the larger producers have had to move out West to produce hogs. And so, we really need to be careful that we don't become the cleanest, hungriest nation in the world.

00:34:59

RF: Well, what have you see happen to some of your farmers, like some of the closest people you've dealt with who have had to leave the industry?

00:35:06

LP: Well, I know that some—there was two or three that have retired in the last year that just could not come under the standards financially to—to have new lagoons lined and built and they just could not meet the new environmental standards that were set, so they've either retired or found public jobs. And again that hurts our industry; I mean the—you know, when you—when you don't have anything to eat the public jobs don't be that important.

00:35:34

RF: And—and the—the producers that raise the most amount of pigs, the kind of—the big businesses, do they slaughter their own hogs?

00:35:45

LP: Most of them do not. I mean—I mean, you have Smithfield that—Smithfield Packing that does one end of the spectrum to the other and they—they have their own farm and they slaughter

their own but most of your producers, you know—unless they're something compatible to Smithfield, they—they raise the hogs and then they sell to your slaughtering facilities.

00:36:07

RF: So would you—well, let's talk about legacy. So your—your son works here, so this is third generation. What do you think—well, what do you think this business means to the family? What does the family mean to this business?

00:36:29

LP: Well, it's our livelihood of course and so it means a lot [*Laughs*] to us. But I—I'm hoping that if this is what the next generation wants to do for its—its occupation that it's a viable business and continues to be viable. We continue to—to try to meet the needs of the consumer. We hope that we're meeting a need that—that they'll appreciate us enough to continue to come see us. And—and I tell our—our employees that, you know, again you don't drive by here, so you may not always have the cheapest price that they're paying at somewhere else but you need the best quality and the best service. And then they will pay the price you need to charge to have the very best product.

00:37:18

RF: And—and just a question on prices; I've heard a lot that pork prices are at their highest now. That's what the barbecue—some of the barbecue restaurants have told me. Is that true? Have you seen the same here?

00:37:29

LP: Pork is historically the highest it's ever been and generally we are—if you compare apples to apples we're normally about ten to twenty-percent price-wise below a grocery store. For instance, our pork chops, we don't mix end chops in with our center chops to reduce the price. So we can sell to the consumer a little cheaper than your grocery stores can because we are not the middle man, we are the end man. We have the slaughtering facility and we have the processing facility. But—but historically prices of pork are at their highest.

00:38:03

RF: And do you see them coming down? Do you see them—or where do you see those prices going in the next few years?

00:38:07

LP: I think they're going to stay basically where they're at or—or get a little higher. It depends on what it's going to cost to feed them. And again, grain prices have got extremely high over the last year and it—everything is on a global market now. If a—a foreign country buys a lot of our grain and we don't have the supply here to feed then prices of grain is going to go up. If the grain is happened to be embargoed for some reason by government then your prices may go down, because they need to move the grain and feed it to the hogs. Your fuel that's being produced by—out of grains now has cut the amount of grains used to feed the hogs, so that means that prices have gone up for the grain because you have fuel being made out of it instead of it all going to feed now. So everything depends—again a global market depends on a lot of different variables.

00:39:02

RF: And you—you talked about kind of consumers and community and that we're in a place where it's not really a place. You can't—it's hard to drive by. I mean we found this place by seeing all the signs that—that are really big and everywhere and really eye-catching. They're great. So but what does Nahunta Pork Center mean to kind of the larger community or you consumer base? What—you know, what does that mean to them?

00:39:29

LP: Well we—we employ about sixty to seventy people and that is in itself something that contributes back to the community. But also you—we have an establishment that people I think enjoy coming to—to visit with us. Again, we have a place in Raleigh but we have people that drive from Raleigh to here because they want to get out of Raleigh and come into the country and just use it as a day to get away. On Saturdays we serve free samples. We'll serve barbecue sandwiches or ham and sausage biscuits and people will just come in. They'll get them something to eat. They'll enjoy their day and they'll just use it as a day out, kind of like going to the amusement park.

00:40:11

RF: And tell me just a bit about the place in Raleigh.

00:40:15

LP: We have a place at the North Carolina State Farmers Market and we have our own little building out there. And we have the same products as we do here but just on a limited basis. It is

an outlet. We wrap everything, package everything here and then carry it on a refrigerated truck to Raleigh and display it up there. We're open up there Wednesday through Saturdays.

00:40:35

RF: So it's like a—it's a Farmers Market in a way?

00:40:37

LP: It is a Farmers—there are other buildings out there that have the produce and the—the different things that the area farmers will carry in and sell and we have our own little building set up out there ourselves.

00:40:49

RF: It's interesting that you got an in with this Farmers Market and your grandmother also kind of sold pork, right—sausage at a Farmers Market some time ago?

00:40:58

LP: That's right. It's sort of ironic. We're just on a larger scale.

00:41:04

RF: So just one or two more questions; we—we *[Laughs]*—we live in a—we live in a day where people are obsessed with their—with food and—and it—it's cool to know where your food comes from and, you know, the Food Channel and us, we're traveling around North Carolina studying food. What do you think about that just this kind of—this—this new, you know—I don't know food culture, liking food, and knowing about food?

00:41:36

LP: Yeah; it's—it's kind of funny that we have some young people will come in sometimes.

We'll—a kindergarten class or an elementary school will come in, they have—some of them have never been out on a farm. Even they live in rural North Carolina, they don't know what a pig is or they know what a pig looks like from a book or seen it on TV but they never really realized until they walk in the building and see that pig head sitting there in the meat case, you know, this is real, this is where my food comes from. And it's sort of like, you know, it's a different culture now that—that kids are not—they really don't understand what it takes to get food to market. And I really think that's a problem from our environmentalists. Some of them grew up not even realizing what it takes to get that food to the table. And yeah; they'll go into a restaurant and eat and enjoy it, but they don't really realize that, yeah, these—the environment needs to be protected, but what does it take to get it from that footprint out on the farm to what you have as a meal on the table?

00:42:40

BP: If I might comment on that; my—my girlfriend actually grew up in Florida and had probably never seen a live pig before until I brought her out here to the premises and she said, “They're ugly and they stink.” **[Laughs]** I don't know what she was expecting but—

00:43:01

RF: Maybe a cute pig like you see in books.

00:43:00

BP: Yeah; I guess something like that.

00:43:03

RF: I mean if you could do just one thing or two things to change the way young people think about the farm and think about animals about where food comes from, which are really important things what would you do? What would you suggest?

00:43:19

LP: Well, you know, just like the Pork Council did “The Other White Meat” for several years as—to get that as a logo, you know, we really need as an industry I think to—to educate people better whether it takes using the social media, TV, whatever it takes—to really show them what it takes from farm to the table because there’s just not enough education in that area. And used to in high school when I was growing up, as a boy I had to take Home Ec. You know, we took Shop half a year; we took Home Ec the other half. Now there’s kids that probably have no idea, you know, how to go to a kitchen and prepare food. They—they don’t even realize what sanitation is. We’re so restricted here as far as our sanitation standards and what we—standards we have to meet, but yet when you go to the consumer end at home, kids don’t realize that you can’t take raw meat and put down on the counter and then come and take something that’s fully cooked and put right behind it without sanitizing. They’ve never been educated and, you know, so there’s a lot of things that are being lost because of computers, things that are really being lost that are needed for basic living.

00:44:32

RF: Okay; I think that's a good place to end. So I want to thank y'all very much.

00:44:36

LP: Thank you.

00:44:36

BP: Appreciate it.

00:44:39

LP: Woo.

00:44:38

[End Larry Pierce & Brandon Pierce — Nahunta Pork Center]