

Interview of: Ronny & Beth Drennan
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Interview Date: August 22, 2005

August 26, 2005

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Interviewee: Ronny & Beth Drennan
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[Begin Ronny & Beth Drennan]

0:00:00.0

AE: This is Amy Evans on Monday, August 22, 2005 and I'm in Cadiz, Kentucky--Western Kentucky at Broadbent Hams with Ronny and Beth Drennan in their office here at their home location here off of Interstate 24. And could I have both of you announce your names and also, if you don't mind, for the record--for history's sake get your birth dates also?

0:00:29.8

Ronny Drennan: Ronny Drennan--April 7, '58

0:00:34.1

Beth Drennan: Beth Drennan--June 5, '59.

0:00:39.2

AE: Okay; and could y'all give me a little bit of history about Broadbent Hams and how y'all came to be in the business?

0:00:47.4

RD: Of course. Broadbent Hams--the original family started the business in 1909. They actually went under inspection--federally inspection in 1966. And they had basically been a farm-oriented family all the years and they did mail order and had a gift shop here at the plant here and then they built a new gift shop a few years back. And in 1999 we bought the business from the original owners. At the time we bought it they had a mail order business, the gift shop, and one wholesale customer that they sold to. And since that time, we've promoted more in the wholesale business and the mail order business to try to grow the business both--in both areas.

0:01:41.4

AE: What made y'all want to buy the business?

0:01:44.2

RD: A good friend of ours that had--he was actually the broker I guess for Mr. Broadbent had just come to us and told us it was an opportunity that we should look at. Of course growing up in west Kentucky we had always heard of Broadbent, so you know it wasn't something that was new to us and it was just something that we thought would be a good business to try. So that's--

0:02:09.9

AE: What were y'all doing before?

0:02:12.1

RD: We were in the furniture business at that time. We made crafts and furniture.

0:02:17.2

AE: And y'all just left that behind and got into ham and bacon?

0:02:22.8

RD: Yeah, yeah.

0:02:21.9

AE: Was there a learning curve involved or is it--

0:02:24.2

BD: Huge learning curve, yeah. *[Laughs]*

0:02:27.5

RD: Yeah; there was a big learning curve, you know but of course we had--you know Mr. Broadbent was still around you know so if there was anything that we needed to know he was always willing and welcome to help us in anything that we needed.

0:02:39.9

AE: What was his first name?

0:02:41.8

RD: Smith--Smith Broadbent, III.

0:02:44.5

AE: Okay; and did he--do you know how his business grew when he began it and was it just a family producer and they--

0:02:54.2

RD: It--when he first started the business he was--they were going to cure the hams and make the hams and they were going to be the B&B actually started out to be Broadbent and Bingham's which at that time the Bingham's owned the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. And he was going to be partners with them and they was going to be the ones that promoted the ham you know and--and

sold it and Smith and them were going to be the ones that cured it. But once they started through a series of tragedies that some of the Bingham's got killed and illnesses and past--you know that sort of come by the wayside over the--and the Broadbent's bought the business back out--their half from the Bingham's, but it always stayed Broadbent's B&B Food Products. But that was the original intent--was it would have been Broadbent & Bingham's and they would have been the ones that did the--you know promotion you know because they had access. They had the newspaper and all that to--to get the name out. And so--

0:04:05.2

AE: And just being in here this morning, I wonder how much the interstate had to do with their retail business. Would the interstate have come here in the '50s or--

0:04:15.2

BD: No.

0:04:14.2

RD: No, the interstate probably didn't come in here--

0:04:16.8

BD: It would have been late '70s--'79.

0:04:19.8

RD: Late '70s or early '80s.

0:04:22.5

BD: Or early '80s--something like that when it actually opened.

0:04:24.5

AE: Okay.

0:04:24.6

RD: You know but of course I'm sure the lakes--you know being close to Barclay Lake and the land between the lakes had maybe helped their you know retail sales over the years being you know right here at Lake Barclay.

0:04:39.3

AE: And what year did Broadbent--Broadbent Square open with the retail across the--

0:04:45.8

RD: It opened in the '80s. I don't--I'm not sure what year they opened that there down there but it was in the '80s.

0:04:52.6

AE: Do you know when the Cracker Barrel came to town?

0:04:55.7

BD: Cracker Barrel, it came--

0:04:57.7

RD: It came in the '90s.

0:04:58.5

BD: It came after we came didn't it? No, it came maybe the year before we came, so that would have been '98 or '99--something like that.

0:05:06.6

AE: Has that been a big competitor for Broadbent retail facility over there?

0:05:13.1

RD: No, you know I don't think so; I think you know they sort of carry totally two different lines of--of items, you know and maybe it's even helped because you know Cracker Barrel draws so many people off the interstate a lot of times. But I don't think it's you know hurt them in any way.

0:05:32.7

AE: All right; well let's talk about what you do here. Coming from the furniture business, what--what did you have to learn first and what was the hardest to learn and--and what do you do on a daily basis?

0:05:44.5

RD: Gee, of course--

0:05:49.2

BD: We had to learn everything. *[Laughs]*

0:05:51.3

RD: Right; of course we had people here that--you know curing a ham or bacon is not really hard. You know it's--once you--of course I did it--my dad cured hams when we were kids at home and--and bacon. Of course we do it on such a much larger scale that it's--but you know the hardest thing I guess for us you know you can't teach somebody how to go through a Christmas season in the--in the mail order business and all. You just have to go through it yourself you know because we'll get here and we'll have all this product stacked everywhere and people don't want to work. They say you ain't--you know we got more than you know--and you're getting three weeks within Christmas and you'll tell them there won't be nothing here and then it goes out the door in three weeks, and they just can't believe it. And that's probably the hardest thing is the three weeks before--trying to plan for them three weeks to have everything you know here where you can get to it and get it out the door so that you don't make people mad or ruin their Christmas when their gift don't get there. That's the hardest thing for us.

0:07:07.8

AE: Yeah.

0:07:07.6

RD: But you know curing bacon--ham or bacon, you know we're talking about bacon so you know it's a very easy process. You know when our bacon comes in we actually hand-rub it; we'll mix our sugar and salt and we use some sodium nitrate in our--in the cure, so we mix all that together and then when the bellies come in we just lay them on the table and start rubbing them one at a time and then we'll stack them on the shelf.

0:07:38.8

AE: So you outsource the pork? Do you get that from somewhere else?

0:07:39.2

BD: Yes.

0:07:41.4

RD: Uh-huh; we--

0:07:42.8

AE: Where does that come from?

0:07:43.6

RD: All of ours has been coming from Premium Standard Farms in Milan, Missouri. And that's because we're so small, a lot of the other companies don't want to talk to us. They won't--they won't deliver to us because we don't take a truckload at a time. You know that's the downside of being small but this company has been very good to us and they took real well--good care of us, so we have stayed with them.

0:08:08.9

AE: Did Mr. Broadbent use them also?

0:08:12.0

RD: He actually used--back in the last years they had some places at Louisville. It came through Premium Standard but it came through a little broker and over the way it evolved, we've sort of directly went to Premium Standard and it's saved us some money by going you know directly to the--to them instead of going through a small broker, and he sort of went in a different direction and didn't sort of--quit delivering fresh meat.

0:08:42.9

AE: Did he ever raise his own pigs?

0:08:44.4

RD: When they originally started the business, they did intend to raise their own hogs and they raised some of their own hogs when they first started the business.

0:08:52.3

BD: Well for several years--Smith has a twin brother, Bob, and Bob raised the hogs and Smith then did the curing; he took care of this part. So they did that for I'd say until sometime in the '70s--late '70s or early '80s. I'd say they did it for quite--for quite sometime.

0:09:11.4

AE: Uh-hm; and has Mr. Smith passed?

0:09:13.2

RD: No; he's still living.

0:09:13.5

BD: No; he's still living--he's 66 years old.

0:09:16.0

AE: Is he here in Cadiz?

0:09:19.2

RD: Uh-hm.

0:09:19.7

AE: Oh, well maybe I need to look him up. [*Laughs*]

0:09:21.8

RD: Well he was here this morning. He's fixing--he's fixing to leave town.

0:09:25.3

BD: He's probably gone because he was supposed to be in Nashville to catch a plane at Noon.

He's going to his daughter's for a week who lives in Seattle, so he was supposed to be in

Nashville at Noon. So I'd say he's left already.

0:09:33.2

RD: He come in and asked us to pick his mail up for him while he was gone. *[Laughs]*

0:09:36.6

AE: Well that's great; you still have a relationship?

0:09:40.6

RD: Yeah; he's in the--he has offices across the hall from us. We lease the building from him.
So we see him lots of times every day.

0:09:47.4

AE: Yeah; well and so this area in Trigg County has the Ham Festival and all that and--where
are y'all from originally?

0:09:56.9

BD: We're from Caldwell County; that's--we live about 35 miles from here. That's--we live in a
town called Fredonia. It's a little town--population 400; so that's where we've always lived so we
still live there and drive back and forth.

0:10:11.6

AE: And you were saying you grew up curing bacon or with that experience in a--in a community, in a family or--can you talk about that a little bit on a smaller scale what that was like?

0:10:22.7

RD: Well of course I was raised on a dairy farm and of course we had hogs and cattle and you know and everything and there was six kids, so you know he always killed his own hogs and we never got to eat the ham because you--he could sell the hams for so much more money and then buy bacon or something like that for that many kids. So I--I guess I was grown before I eat country ham much because we just didn't get to eat it at home. That's what he sold at Christmas and we got the--he bought bacon because it was a lot cheaper. But you know he--he would kill six, eight, to ten hogs, you know which back then seemed like a lot but to what we do now that's--you know that's nothing. But--and of course it's altogether done different, you know; when they put it in the old salt box and leave it and keep it covered up you know and--now we do it where we hand-rub them and try to put the right amount of salt where--that they don't get over salty and try to control it and we can control the temperature you know. Growing up like that you had to do it when it was cold because you wanted your average temperature to be down in the 30s and keep the hams where they wouldn't spoil and over the years you know after they come out of the--they'd call it the winter time--that would be about 38 degrees and they'd go through what we called spring and we call it equalization where it would be somewhere around 50 degrees for a

while and then when it warms up to the summer when they call it summer sweats in ham, you know.... So we control ours with the temperature; we start out at 38 and we go to about 50 and then we go up into the 70s and age all of our hams and we think we can get a more consistent flavor by controlling the temperature and the--and the humidity than just going by the temperature outside. If it gets too hot or too cold or something you know we can change--you know the flavor, so we think that you know--feel like we can get a more consistent flavor by controlling the temperature and the number of days that we keep everything and cure that way.

0:12:37.7

AE: So can you talk about the steps of how that happens here, like when you get the pork in and then--

0:12:46.6

RD: On hams--when we get hams in we actually--we hand-rub them and stack them on the shelf and then 10 to 14 days we go back and redo it. And of course we use a mixture of salt and sugar and dry honey and sodium nitrate and we'll leave them in salt a total of 38 to 42 days depending upon the size of them, we'll bring them out and wash all the salt, take any excess, you know slime anything that's on the--we'll wash all that off and we'll hang them in stocking nets on racks and then we'll put them in what we call an equalization and we'll leave them there approximately three weeks and they're in that and it's 50 degrees--45 to 50 is what we like to keep the room and we try to keep a lot of air circulating and try to keep the humidity down. To dry the ham is what

we're trying to do and then pulling the salt equalization the outer edge has got more salt and during equalization it's pulling the salt towards the center of the ham. And then after that we will bring them out and put them in aging and we keep our aging room anywhere from 75 to 80 degrees all the time. And we will leave them in there; we've got to leave them 35 days at 76 degrees to be certified to--for curing them. And after we--the 35 days that we certify we will actually smoke them and then we will put them back in the aging room until they're at least six months old and most of the time our hams are about eight to nine months old when we sell them. We don't sell any before six months but we try to keep them about nine months old.

0:14:41.0

AE: How many can you have in the aging process at a certain time?

0:14:46.9

RD: Well let's see; we've got about 8,000 or 9,000 there right now.

0:14:51.2

AE: And where is that facility?

0:14:53.2

RD: It's just up the road from us. And that's--we do all the curing of the bacon and hams and all there.

0:15:02.2

AE: And now the flavors of your bacon; I saw you have a sun-dried tomato bacon and Maplewood cinnamon and--

0:15:09.3

RD: Uh-huh.

0:15:10.2

AE: How did--how did those get developed?

0:15:11.8

RD: When we bought the business we had--hickory was all we had and we decided to try a peppered bacon and it did real well for us, so--and then we had a large maple syrup company that we was making--wanted us to make bacon for them but they wanted something with maple because that's--that's what we did was maple syrup. And so they asked you know if we could smoke it maple or something so we come up and we--I said well we could try it. So I got some

maple dust from a company and we smoked the bacon with maple dust, sent it to them, and they liked it. So that's how our maple smoked bacon--and so we knew we would have extra because of just doing it for one company we had ended up with some so we put it in our catalog and you know surprisingly on the--especially north, it has gone real well. Of course, northern people are more used to maple syrup and stuff and I guess--and they like the maple smoked better than the hickory.

0:16:22.2

AE: Where is the syrup company that approached you initially, where are they located?

0:16:28.5

RD: They were in Vermont at the time and since then they were a mail order company and now they have gone out of--they closed their mail order; a larger company bought them or something and they've done away with their mail order but we still sell the maple bacon and it's--you know it sells real well now for us.

0:16:48.2

AE: Do you have any idea how they heard about you to approach you about making it?

0:16:53.0

RD: We had a mail order--our mail order marketer that worked with us that helped us in our mail order, he actually done some work for them and he recommended us--recommended us to them.

0:17:08.8

BD: They--the bacon they were using wasn't shelf stable, so they were--when they shipped it they automatically had to Styrofoam and dry ice. And ours is shelf stable so it could be shipped without the Styrofoam and dry ice, so that's why he originally recommended it to them because it would be you know less cost for their customer. Well a Styrofoam box is about \$5 a piece, you know so that would just lower the cost of the product going to the customer and so that's why--that's how he peaked their interest.

0:17:37.0

AE: Hmm, and so let's talk about your sun-dried tomato bacon. How did that come about?

0:17:42.5

RD: That was her idea; she just--she said that you know everything about--that you read they were putting sun-dried tomato bacon or seasoning on it and so she, you know said she wanted to try it, so we called--I called the seasoning company and got them to send me some sun-dried

tomato seasoning and we tried it and it never has took off as a big a seller as--as some of the rest of them, but it--

0:18:12.7

BD: Well it's the newest, too; it hadn't been out there as long.

0:18:17.5

RD: It's the newest, but it gets a lot of--creates a lot of interest. People just you know don't under--but it--it does have a good taste.

0:18:26.6

AE: Uh-hm; do y'all like to eat bacon?

0:18:27.1

BD: Uh-hm. [*Laughs*]

0:18:29.5

RD: Yeah.

0:18:28.7

AE: [*Laughs*] Your own bacon I presume?

0:18:30.6

BD: Yeah.

0:18:31.7

AE: Do you have a favorite style bacon or flavor?

0:18:34.4

BD: Well it depends on what we're doing--what I'm eating it--for breakfast most time we'll either the hickory or the maple. Now if it's sandwiches, I definitely want the pepper or the sun-dried tomato and both are good in salads, too--the pepper or the sun-dried tomato are both good in salads; so--

0:18:48.1

AE: So did y'all's retail experience really help when you came into this business and is that really what--

0:18:54.7

RD: Well I thought because what we did before was pretty seasonal, too. We worked all year for the Christmas season, you know and I thought what we did before that--when they were trying to explain to us the seasonal part of it, I said well I understand that because that's what we've always done. But yet it--it wasn't the same was it? It--because this one's all in three weeks. It's just so--so wild for that three weeks that it's a lot harder--that part of it than what we did before. The rest of the year is a lot easier but that part is harder.

0:19:29.0

AE: Did Mr. Broadbent, did he have when he was still running the operation--did he have a presence on the internet or is that something that y'all did?

0:19:36.5

BD: No; he didn't. That's something we did.

0:19:39.6

AE: And has that changed your business considerably?

0:19:41.7

BD: That has really grown you know and it--it seems like now we'll get more orders a day on the internet than we will on the phone, you know which is a big change.

0:19:53.1

AE: And is that--is that your role here? Do you--what is your role here?

0:19:57.0

BD: My role is whatever needs doing that--that's sort of both of our role; whoever doesn't show up that day or whatever we need more of that's what we do. I pay the bills and do the payroll; I do that every week and then wherever needs filling in that's where--probably the rest of the day I'll package bacon because the bacon slicer took his mom--his grandmother went in the hospital and they needed to go home and get his mom and take her to the hospital; so that's probably what I'll do the rest of the day. So that's sort of the way we fill in--just wherever.

0:20:29.2

RD: But you know--of course I make sure everything is cured, you know.

0:20:32.3

BD: Yeah; that's his part.

0:20:33.3

RD: So you know but we do have the product here and then pretty much oversee the slicing and the packaging and the shipping and that all the orders go out because that's--if they don't go out right you make somebody mad and it's costly because you have to redo it, so you know most of the time I fill a lot of the orders myself and then the guy in shipping double checks to make sure I did it right; so that's pretty much like you know--and then if somebody don't show up you never know what I'll do in a--in a day's time.

0:21:09.7

AE: How many employees do y'all have?

0:21:12.4

RD: I have to count because we started hiring seasonal employees from now until Christmas.

0:21:20.9

BD: We've got nine right now plus us.

0:21:25.1

RD: Pretty much we'll have about five year-round and then between now and Christmas we'll get probably about 15 or 18.

0:21:33.9

AE: And then your year-round employees, are the mostly responsible for managing the curing area and--

0:21:39.3

RD: Well they're--some of them they'll work back here. Most of them work in the slicing and packaging and a couple of them will work with me in the curing part--part of it.

0:21:51.3

AE: And then the curing is that still the same as Mr. Broadbent did it?

0:21:55.1

RD: Uh-hm, yeah; we use the same recipes that they always used.

0:22:02.0

BD: He had a really good product; that was the one thing the company had going for it when we bought it--was he had produced a really good product.

0:22:10.1

AE: What do think sets this product apart from any other hams or bacon?

0:22:14.7

RD: I think--of course I think we're still one of the few long cured hams; I think that's part of it that sets it apart is you know we--we cure them longer and give a little different--and the same way so many places have gone to adding water in their bacons, you know water added and what you buy in a grocery store is pretty much water added. You know when you throw it in a frying pan and you think it's grease, but it's the water shooting out of it. You know being dry cured you know we take the water out of it. I think it's just--for a lot of larger companies, you know they've gone more to dollars and cents maybe than quality. And you know we're still trying to stay with--with quality over dollars and cents.

0:23:10.0

AE: Do y'all have children of your own?

0:23:10.3

RD: Uh-hm.

0:23:11.2

BD: We have two children. Our children are grown. Our daughter works for Cracker Barrel; she's a retail manager for Cracker Barrel and lives in Chattanooga and our son, he works at Fredonia where we live. He got married in June, so they're--they're both on their own.

0:23:27.3

AE: Do they not have any interest in being in the--in the ham business?

0:23:31.4

RD: No.

0:23:32.3

BD: No--no; they don't. *[Laughs]*

0:23:34.3

RD: That's not all bad.

0:23:37.2

BD: No, the--they have interest in the product. Or, when my son first got married I stocked his refrigerator you know--with him some good bacon and one day just a week or two ago we started out to leave for work and they live in an apartment next to us and our daughter-in-law opens the door and waves at us and we backed up to see what she wants and she says we're out of bacon. So I think she thinks we're going to stock it forever and I did restock them. *[Laughs]*

0:24:04.0

AE: You're nice to have around then. *[Laughs]*

0:24:04.8

BD: So that's--that's their interest in our company. *[Laughs]*

0:24:08.1

AE: Well let's talk now about all these awards that y'all have received in the Fancy Food Show and y'all won best new product. Was that it was?

0:24:17.7

BD: No; it was the outstanding meat pate and seafood.

0:24:20.5

AE: Okay.

0:24:20.9

BD: We won that twice for our pepper bacon.

0:24:22.0

AE: For the bacon, yeah.

0:24:23.8

BD: Uh-hm; we won it this year and we won it in 2002.

0:24:27.7

AE: And how--what do you think you can attribute to that kind of success? I mean that--that's a really important award.

0:24:32.8

BD: Yeah; we were amazed. [*Laughs*]

0:24:36.5

RD: No; I--of course I don't really know exactly how their judging works, you know but it is--I guess of all the shows we've ever won, you know because I know they have a lot more than one judge that it is especially in the gourmet food industry it gives you a little recognition that sort of you know--I guess it's probably the most prominent food show that I know of out there. And so I don't know; I guess the Lord just blessed us is all I know, because I don't know of anything that we did personally--you know other than make--we just do the best we can at what we make and--

0:25:24.5

AE: Well and surely I would think that staying small and having it be more a hand-crafted product is what really sets it apart from other producers and people--

0:25:32.9

RD: Yeah; every package that's put--that we do out there is put in by hand, you know even--we do have some machines you know that vacuum it, but every package of bacon is somebody actually sticks a hand in a package and puts that package of bacon in and the same way with our ham. So you know it is you know small and you know we've sort of--you sort of try to find your niche in the market. You know there's a lot of big ham companies out there that you know we can't--we could actually buy hams from them cheaper than I can cure them myself but it's not--it wouldn't be a Broadbent Ham. So--and that's what you know people when they--when they call us you know even though they pay more for it that's what they expect and that's what we try to give them, you know and we work hard to keep the consistency year in and year out the same.

0:26:35.3

AE: Do y'all have a lot of local customers that buy your product?

0:26:39.2

RD: Yeah; of course we--since we don't own the gift shop, you know the local customers that come in down there, we don't see them but we have a lot of Kentucky that we sell mail order to. And then of course we have several of the local groceries, you know here that we do sell to.

0:27:04.6

AE: And y'all sell sliced and slab bacon; is that right?

0:27:09.6

RD: Uh-hm.

0:27:07.5

AE: And what--what's the price on a slab of bacon, just pepper bacon?

0:27:14.5

RD: The average--about a four and a half pound slab will run average of about \$16--\$16--\$17.

0:27:22.4

AE: How has that price changed over the years; do you know?

0:27:27.6

RD: It hasn't changed up until this year. This year belly prices have gone up quite a bit and--

0:27:38.5

BD: Well it was actually last year and then they leveled off a little bit.

0:27:41.4

RD: It started last year, I guess--last fall and they've gone up some. We haven't raised the price probably much as--as the market went up because you can sort of price yourself out. And then of course gasoline is going up so much this year; you know I don't know what that's going to do to the--in the long run, if it stays, I think you'll see food prices jump or--or the quality somewhere in some of it--some--you know they've got to make up for all this price increase somewhere so if they don't pass it onto the consumer, you know I don't know where it's going to go.

0:28:22.8

AE: Uh-hm, no telling; well what about these other awards that y'all have been winning and I also want to talk about the State Fair that's going on this week--right now and y'all are going to be participating in that?

0:28:38.9

RD: Uh-hm; of course we actually--that was actually--the ham show was last Thursday and we won four--four out of six classes of that, which--including grand champion which--and this Thursday the ham will be auctioned for charity at the Kentucky Farm Bureau Breakfast.

0:29:03.8

AE: Okay.

0:29:07.0

RD: And you know the State Fair, it's always you know--it's probably--there's a lot of ham shows in the country but I guess the Kentucky Ham Show is the elite ham show. Of course, it's only open to Kentucky producers and but you know when a ham brings--you know last year the ham brought \$60,000 you know at the auction and so you know and the year before that--you know it's brought as much as \$250,000. So you know when--when you get into something you know like that--that part of what you've done goes for charity you know it's--you know we're not--we're so small well there's no way we could ever give anything but you know when you produce the ham that sells for \$60,000 you know you had a part in it even though--and so that's--that's part of it you know just the atmosphere of being there and seeing something auctioned, you know to go that high.

0:30:13.8

AE: Do y'all--both go and represent the company at all these shows and everything?

0:30:19.7

BD: Uh-hm, yeah.

0:30:20.1

AE: And what do people come up and tell you about the product that you make?

0:30:26.0

RD: Well at a lot of the shows, well like--well at the State Fair, a lot of the people that come in there don't you know--they're just--they don't know too much about it. They're just sort of at the fair and come through on the--we actually work--the Kentucky Ham Producers have a cookout trailer that they sell sandwiches during the State Fair and actually a different producer will run it every year--or every day.

0:30:56.8

BD: Or every day.

0:30:57.8

RD: And on the first day we have always run it and we have a lot of people say that's the day they come because we know we're there and I'm sure maybe some of the other producers have the--

0:31:09.5

BD: Everybody has their own following and--uh-huh.

0:31:11.4

RD: The same thing you know; you know I feel like we make a good outstanding product and I know the rest of the ham producers do, too, or they still wouldn't be in business and--and they're all our friends, so you know I'm not going to say anything bad--bad about them, because you know we sort of help each other, you know. You know even though in a sense you know we're competitors you know and make the same product but we still try to help each other you know if we can.

0:31:39.1

BD: Kentucky probably--I guess Kentucky and Virginia probably produce the biggest amounts of the country ham. Kentucky has quite a few ham producers in it and we have an Association for the Kentucky Ham Producers and that first day of the fair is really ham day in a big way. You have a breakfast first thing that morning and country ham is one of the things served at it; it's an opening day breakfast. And then they auction off the 4-H ham during that opening day breakfast that we--we have the 4-H students come to our plants and cure. And we started that; the Ham Producers started that four or five years ago. The first year it had 40 hams in their competition and this year it had 317; so it's really grown and we judge those hams. We have two categories, smoked and unsmoked; some of the country ham producers in the state don't smoke hams, so like Ronny and I judge the unsmoked category because none of the hams produced at our plants are in that and then those people judge the smoked categories, but that room, the--the cloverleaf room they call it, the 4-H room, it was amazing this year with all those tables of hams, you know. They were just--it was just amazing seeing all those kids and all those kids give speeches and then at the end of the day they have an awards ceremony for those kids and they give them awards on their speeches, they give them awards on their hams, and then they give overall awards, and then all the kids that participate their senior year of high school they're eligible to apply for a scholarship and we give a \$750 scholarship every year to--you know a child that has participated over the years. And so that goes on--on opening day, too, plus the country ham competition. So it's just that first day of the fair has country ham all over it; it's a fun day for us--it is.

0:33:29.7

AE: Uh-huh; I bet.

0:33:29.6

RD: And if you win grand champion it's even more fun.

0:33:34.5

BD: [*Laughs*] Yeah; this year was real fun. And then next Thursday will be fun, too, at the Farm Bureau Breakfast where they auction it--it's a lot of fun, too.

0:33:44.6

AE: Did Mr. Broadbent--did he have a big list of awards and trophies?

0:33:52.8

RD: Yeah; he--of course he had always--he had won the State Fair more than any of them his self over the years. And he had did back several years ago--they used to have one somewhere in Tennessee that he had actually went to in--

0:34:10.3

BD: It was in Memphis; it was the Mid-South State Fair.

0:34:13.4

RD: And--but in the last--over the last few years he had actually you know--he had so much-- you know he had you know 4,000 or 5,000 acres of farm ground. He owned motels and he had a seed business and he had this and so he was just--you know he had more to do and so he sort of-- you know the ham business was always sort of one his favorite things. It was his you know pet. I guess it was more of a hobby to him than--and so you know and the last several years he didn't work it--you know he'll tell you he didn't work at it as hard as he did 'cause he had so much you know going on at the--

0:34:54.2

BD: So the last several years State Fair was the only thing he entered. But he had won seven times; when we bought he--he had won it seven times, which like Ronny said was more than anybody else and since we've bought it we've won it four times, so now it's up to eleven.

0:35:10.6

AE: That's quite a reputation y'all have out there.

0:35:15.3

RD: And then of course the American Cured Meats Association--when we bought this we didn't--he never entered it and we didn't know--again, in 2000 I guess or--it come to Nashville and we read it in the paper, you know about it, so we entered it you know and thought well it's in Nashville; we'll try it. And that year we won the smoked and the unsmoked and we've won a grand champion in every year except once since then and I--we said our ham--this was out in Lake Tahoe or somewhere where we just called up a guy that we thought--a customer because we couldn't go; you have to hand deliver them, and we asked him if he would take our hams and he said sure. So we sent him two hams, but they always send you scores back from what you did and that year we never did get no scores, so we're not sure our hams got--whether they got there or not. So we didn't win but we didn't--

0:36:13.0

BD: We didn't get score cards back so we don't--

0:36:13.2

RD: But we didn't get a score, so--

0:36:15.7

BD: --even know if they got there.

0:36:16.2

RD: So we don't even know if they got there.

0:36:18.3

AE: Your customer may have kept them for himself.

0:36:21.1

RD: But he could have--but you know something else could have happened, you know—but--

0:36:25.2

AE: Well when they judge your product is it basically on taste or is it--there's also a visual element involved to it or how does that work?

0:36:32.9

RD: At the--now at the ACM Convention--American Cured Meats Association it is always on-- well you know they look at it you know outside--the color, the confirmation, you know how fat to it, lean, you know, workmanship; then--then they do cut it and taste it and they--they grade on

1,000 points and 400 points is actual taste. So you know--so at the American Cured Meats, a lot of it is taste and what--now at the Kentucky State Fair they do have a cut class for what they call you know for taste and they--you can win, but that class is not considered in the grand champion ham, the first four classes, and it's all on looks, confirmation, color and workmanship and aroma, which aroma is the number one--is worth more points than the--

0:37:38.2

BD: Because if it has a really good smell--

0:37:41.0

AE: It's going to taste good.

0:37:41.3

BD: ... it's going to taste good, so that's--that's how they judge that.

0:37:44.0

AE: What is the workmanship category? How does that--

0:37:48.1

RD: Well we trim the hams. I guess the best thing I could--I could show you--

0:37:57.1

BD: He'll have to show you some he--he chose from for the State Fair.

0:38:00.7

RD: You know I can show you what a ham looks like before and you know we--you trim the fat off, you know; you don't want too much. You--and--but--we'll pull out a ham here in a little bit and I can show you the difference of how--and--but that's the biggest thing on workmanship.

0:38:20.1

AE: So how did you learn to do that? Did Mr. Broadbent teach you? Is that--

0:38:25.8

RD: Well the first--I don't--I guess that's where the wood business come in [*Laughs*] to carve, you know. The first year of course he--the first year he--we was here he helped pick out some hams and he--and so you know I went to the State Fair. We didn't do very good--not that he did the hams or anything but--and the judge was there and the guy that had won, you know he won

about everything. So I just asked the judge what made a good-looking ham, you know. This was--he was a meat scientist from the University of Tennessee and I thought well he knows what he's talking about. And so I picked his brain while I was at the first State Fair and he told me what he thought was a good-looking ham. So the next year I come back and took what you know Smith had told me and what he told me and combined the two and trimmed the hams accordingly and--

0:39:32.0

AE: Can you share what some of that is or is that more of a signature--

0:39:35.2

RD: Well I don't--you know most of it you know just an overall good shape of a ham, you know more of a square bottom--not too much of the face showing you know with a little fat on it, you know. Some of them cut it off a lot more than we do, and you know just make it look nice and neat, you know. That's--was pretty much--it's--it's hard to tell somebody; you know in my mind I--if I see a ham I know it's either a good-looking ham or--or not to me, but to tell somebody you know it's just hard to tell them what a good-looking and you know when I go to pick out hams for the State Fair I just start walking up and down the racks of hams and if one you know--I told somebody at the State Fair it was like a woman, if you're walking by the woman and you turn around and look at her the second time that's what the ham has to do. It has to make you turn--make you turn around and look the second time. **[Laughs]** And they understood that. **[Laughs]**

0:40:46.4

BD: [*Laughs*]

0:40:47.9

AE: All right, whatever works; I'll buy that.

0:40:50.3

RD: If a man, you know--if a man makes you turn around and take a second look then you know--that is what a good-looking ham--you know if you said--

0:41:02.6

AE: All right; well that's good to know, a little subtlety of the craft there.

0:41:07.4

RD: I guess that worked because I told the judge at the State Fair that and we did well with him.

0:41:14.4

AE: Is that--at these competitions is part of it your rapport with the judges and--

0:41:21.7

RD: Well most of the judges--we have a different judge every year, so you know the judge at the Kentucky State Fair this year I had never even heard of or never met him until--until the fair was over. And we've won at the Kentucky State Fair, you know the four grand champions and all we've never had the same judge twice, so you know that tells us--and at the American Cured Meats Association if we've had the same judge twice, you know I don't--you know a lot of times we don't even know who judges them. And so--I you know--to me to win consistently with different judges tells you know that our product is--we're keeping you know a good consistent product you know out there.

0:42:12.5

AE: Something you said made me think of the place where you get the hogs that you cure. Do you know what they feed the hogs that they raise?

0:42:23.7

RD: She does because she called them, but I think they're basically just corn-fed.

0:42:30.3

AE: Okay; and does that make a difference? Is that something that concerns you about your product about--how you cure it and what they eat?

0:42:35.8

RD: You know it could--you know if--there is some feed out there that if you fed the animals it could take a different smell to the meat you know but that--but that has--they have--you know they what we're looking for and they pretty much have stayed you know--we've never got anything bad from them. But you called Premium Standard and asked them what they fed didn't you before?

0:43:08.2

BD: Yeah; well I asked if it was--now let me think what I did. Oh, I called and asked if there was any way to get an organic ham through them and there wasn't; that was not a possibility. I think that's what I asked instead of what they actually fed them.

0:43:31.5

AE: Is there a call for that more these days--organic raised pork?

0:43:36.5

RD: I don't know as much as the organic--as I think that there might be some market for the nitrate free you know and probably after Christmas we will probably work on a nitrate free ham and bacon for next year just to see if there is--how big a market there is for it.

0:44:03.5

AE: Have you heard about some--and this question comes from your participating in the Fancy Food Show about some people who have done some unusual and interesting things with your bacon?

0:44:16.8

BD: As far as bacon goes--no. And now the country ham, we have a lady in Covington, Kentucky, Tousey House Restaurant is the name and she does some real unusual things with the country ham very different from--she has one mixed drink that she puts a big lump of country ham in and she--she just has all kinds of unique things she does with it. She takes--she starts with just the center cut chunk of meat and I think she deep fries it and then--and I've not had anybody else deep frying country ham but she deep fries it like you'd deep fry a turkey and then she chunks it off and uses it in all kinds of different things. So she's got--that's one--that's one that stands out when you ask that question.

0:44:59.9

AE: Interesting yeah.

0:45:01.5

RD: You know of course the guy that's head of Zingerman's, Ari [Weinzweig] or whatever, he--
he used--

0:45:11.5

BD: I printed off what he used for you [, Amy].

0:45:12.0

RD: He used our bacon in a talk in Dallas. He was doing something and--

0:45:18.8

BD: It was a chef's convention of some sort.

0:45:20.8

RD: Yeah; he used it and I don't know just what all he said but he called and we give him--you
know he talked a long time about our bacon, you know the bacon the way we did it and I guess

he was giving a talk on dry cured bacon or whatever and he--we sent him samples and he used some of that in his--his--doing his demonstration there and we thought that was pretty unusual you know. And of course he actually come by here and toured after that you know. A few weeks ago he come by here and toured the plant and--and a lot of that come about because of the Fancy--you know meeting him through the Fancy Food Show, too.

0:46:01.6

AE: What do y'all think the future of Broadbent Hams is?

0:46:06.9

RD: Well we're just going to keep doing what we're doing and we hope you know that we're--we're growing more in the gourmet end and I think that's where our line is--is in the gourmet end, but I don't--you know foresee us being a product that's going to be in every Wal-Mart and every Kroger because you know a lot of times they're looking for price and there's a lot more ham companies out there that's a lot cheaper or selling--you know bigger and they can sell cheaper than we can. So--so I think we're sort of you know--want to continue on the road that you know--hopefully to make the best product we can and--and stay in the gourmet you know--of course, we--we have been in--Stonewall Kitchen has used our bacon and our ham in their catalog and they're a very high known gourmet product, so--and we've been in *Dean and DeLuca* and then [Zingerman's]--have had some talk with them about using in some of their catalogs, so you

know--and we do some private labeling for some other companies in the mail order business.

0:47:32.2

BD: Williams and Sonoma right now sampling; hopefully we'll get that. We don't know; that's not worked out yet but we will be in--in Stonewall Kitchens and *Dean and DeLuca* this year because we've got--we've got purchase orders for those, so we know we'll be in those.

0:47:46.5

RD: And you know we've had contact with Harry & David's over the year; they tried our product and you know we have never sold to them yet but you--you never know when they might change and--

0:47:59.6

AE: So how do you think all of that will change the business here in Cadiz? I mean will you have to expand considerably or is what you have right now workable?

0:48:09.5

RD: You know it just depends--you know at some point in time we would have to expand if--if sales continues to--

0:48:14.0

BD: If it continues to grow.

0:48:16.9

RD: If it continues to grow.

BD: We've already expanded though once since we bought it because we--we leased the Dulin Country Ham Plant now at Hopkinsville. We leased that two years ago, so we expanded our--and we slice bacon there; that's all we do there is slice bacon. So we've already expanded once since we've bought it which really--that really gave us a lot more space.

0:48:40.4

AE: And what do you think the business means to the community here?

0:48:43.8

RD: I don't know; you know not actually living in Trigg County, you know we don't get a lot of--you know we hope we've brought a lot of good name and publicity to you know Trigg County and people. We hope we're proud of what we've done in the name but you know--but we don't--not being--living right here in--in Trigg County we--you don't hear as--as much.

0:49:11.8

AE: And the retail outfit across the highway, already somebody else owns and operates that?

0:49:16.0

RD: The original Broadbent family still owns it--owns that, uh-huh.

0:49:19.7

AE: Okay; and can you tell me a little bit about the Trigg County Ham Festival?

0:49:26.2

RD: The Ham Festival--it's a three-day event that draws an enormous crowd you know. For such a small town it's amazing how many people come for the Ham Festival. On Saturday they have actually a farm show or a ham show for farmers that you know cure hams--local people that cure hams and--and--but that's you know getting fewer and fewer. Some of the older farmers are

beginning to have passed away and you know it's something that the younger generation is not doing as much and that's where the 4-H. I guess one of the biggest highlights is the--is the big biscuit, the country ham biscuit. We own the oven and the last several years the FFA has used the oven to cook the biscuit and put the ham on it for their fundraiser. And this year some-- there's another organization--the FFA is not doing it this year and I'm not sure just who is going to do it this year, but it's--it's a ten and a half foot in diameter biscuit; it's huge you know. And it will come out you know about--about--it will rise to about--and then they'll cut it in squares and put country ham under it and sell sandwiches.

0:50:51.5

AE: And the biscuit oven is what y'all own?

0:50:53.9

BD: Uh-hm.

0:50:53.3

RD: Uh-huh.

0:50:54.9

AE: And how did that--how did that happen?

0:50:58.2

RD: In the early--middle '80s, Smith wanted something that had never been done, so he come up--he had this guy that had worked for Ford Motor Company or something and they designed this oven and he built it here on the--in this farm. At that time you know it was the world's largest biscuit and he started it and every year since then it's just been--just recreated. You know it was a drawing crowd and I know--oh, I guess three years ago or something it rained here and I mean it come a monsoon. There was no way no people--and people come from St. Louis and all to see this biscuit and I mean of course you couldn't cook it the way it was raining.

0:51:52.7

BD: It wouldn't rise, you know. [*Laughs*]

0:51:53.1

RD: And they were just--the Ham Committee got all these calls that they were just--because they had drove from so far and didn't get to see that biscuit. So they come to us and said you know no matter what next year they was going to cook the biscuit. I said that's fine; you know whoever--we get the oven out and make sure it works and--but it's--it's different.

0:52:18.2

BD: We--something interesting--Smithville Foods did a ham--a big ham and biscuit two or three years ago.

0:52:27.1

RD: Two years ago.

0:52:28.1

BD: Anyway theirs is in the Guinness Book of World's Records, you know as the largest because it weighed more than ours and that was--that was pretty unique in itself though because we got so much publicity out of it you know. We--it--they--they immediately started pairing the two off and well I ended up on a talk show in California two different weeks in a row and I know they just roll laughing probably--the whole talk show at my accent because they would repeat things. I'd say something and they'd repeat it exactly the way I said it and I knew they were making fun of my accent but we got lots of catalog requests out of it and you know the whole thing got a lot of publicity out of the two of them. But one thing they asked me on the talk show was they said well how much beer does it take to wash down that big biscuit, and they had gone online so they were looking at the picture of it you know--whoever I was talking to and I said well we're in a dry county. And they said you're in a what? I said a dry county. Well what does that mean? I said well it's illegal to sell alcohol in our county. Well they got a hoot out of that;

they couldn't... and then when I told them you know we park that in the shed and we pull it out of the shed and take it uptown, they made a lot of fun about that shed, so--but it was fun. And like I said, it got a lot of interest.

0:53:35.1

AE: Uh-hm, I bet--I bet; it's a good story. It's a really good story.

0:53:38.3

RD: But we got asked a lot to compare us to Smithville, you know these people from--I guess it was a newspaper somewhere out in that area said what--how would you compare yourself to Smithville size wise? Of course Smithville is probably the largest... I said well everything we would sell all year long would be just a really bad day for Smithville. And they said you are small. You know and--and you know I know Smithville on their biscuit, they put you know 500 pounds. It wasn't really an eatable biscuit because it probably stood this tall. They had a picture of it and they put it--cut it and put it together and threw it away because it was so--so tall, but then they'd give you know whatever it cost to do it, they'd give that much in ham to the--to a rest home. But you know there's no way we could throw 500 pounds of ham away; we'd go broke, you know. So that was--but you know ours--theirs was an eight and a half foot in diameter biscuit but it was a lot taller and weighed more.

0:54:51.3

AE: A heavy biscuit does not sound like a better biscuit.

0:54:53.7

RD: It really wasn't you know--when you see the picture of it, it really wasn't an edible biscuit because it was--you know stood that tall and you know--and ours is actually a biscuit, you know. It's edible and but it draws a lot of interest at the Ham Festival.

0:55:13.2

AE: I bet; a nice little novelty for y'all to keep going. What's your favorite thing about Broadbent's Hams and your business here?

0:55:22.1

RD: I don't know. My favorite thing--I guess you know we're--we're--you know we're small enough we still are you know--we can still have a good relationship with all of our employees, you know. It's something that they all get along good and we come in, you know--we all work together but we're all friends and you know when you get in big companies a lot of times the owners don't know who's working in the back and all and you know when we--when I pick out a ham everybody here has--I pick them out and trim them and all but I line them up out there and everybody here smells them, so everybody has a hand in it. You know I want them to feel like

they're part of what we've done, you know. They feel good about--when we win they're happy you know because they've--you know they've had something to do. They've all give me their opinions, you know and it all--so they feel like they're just as important as we are.

0:56:24.2

BD: And they are because without them we couldn't do it. *[Laughs]*

0:56:28.2

AE: Yeah; are there some employees here that have been here for a long time?

0:56:32.7

RD: We've got one lady that's been here ever since we've been here and she worked for the Broadbent's a few years before and then one of the guys that worked here, he worked for the Broadbent's on the farm for several years and then he--he worked in and out of the ham business some because he--and then he had quit and then so he come to work for us now. And then the other guy, he's been here probably four or five years; so--

0:57:04.3

AE: Well do y'all have any final thoughts about ham or bacon or think of anything I didn't ask you?

0:57:11.4

BD: No.

0:57:11.6

RD: No; I don't--I don't know of anything. I'll just get two hams out here and show you what we were talking about.

0:57:19.1

AE: All right; that sounds good.

0:57:21.9

RD: And--but I don't--you know the process is--is just--is pretty easy.

0:57:27.8

AE: It's all in the recipe--would you say that?

0:57:32.8

RD: Well I--you know I--the recipes, I'm sure everybody has a different recipe, you know. If every ham producer uses some little something different you know--who--who's to say that it don't make a little difference, you know I don't know. Everybody will do something a day or two apart different, you know and--or a temperature two degrees different, you know and with the whole scheme of things, you know it--some of that may make a huge difference you know but I don't know.

0:58:11.2

AE: But then I would imagine consistency is kind of tricky to maintain; is it?

0:58:17.7

RD: Well we do basically everything the same way over and over. And I'm sure they do--you know the other competitors do, you know because we use the same amount of cure every time. We keep the coolers at the same temperature and we do everything basically on the--the same day you know of number and that way you should have more consistency I think you know if you do it that way. But you know when you put salt on a ham you don't know what's going--it's just you know--

0:58:52.7

BD: The one thing, everything being hand processed like it is--is if you--if there's an odd smell in anything you know when you slice it open you know it and when--you know when you go to package it you're going to pick up on it, so typically anything that has an off-smell you know it gets canned. We don't take a chance on--on it going out and the--the--everything being by hand that's an advantage. Where if it was by machines sliced and automatically packaged, you know it could look good but you wouldn't know what it smelled like and you'd miss that.

0:59:30.2

AE: All right; well I appreciate it.

0:59:33.4

[End Ronny & Beth Drennan]