

SAM EDWARDS III
Edwards and Sons, Surry, Virginia

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Interviewer: Sara Wood
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[Begin Sam Edwards, III]

00:00:00

Sam Edwards: That will never happen again. *[Laughs]*

00:00:03

Sara Wood: Okay, are you comfortable Sam?

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SE: Yeah.

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SW: Okay, I wanted to start—so I'll talk to you—we'll maybe talk for an hour and then I was hoping to get some portraits and photographs.

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SE: Sure.

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SW: I want you to start by introducing yourself—well actually I need to do that, sorry. So it's January 23 [it's the 24th], 2014. I'm sitting here in Surry, Virginia with Mr. Sam Edwards, III. This is Sara Wood for the Southern Foodways Alliance. Sam will you—for the record will you please say hi, introduce yourself for the tape, and tell me who you are and where we are right now?

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SE: Sure, this is Sam Edwards. My legal name is Samuel W. Edwards, III. I'm President of S. Wallace Edwards and Sons Incorporated in Surry, Virginia. I am the third generation Ham Producer/Curemaster at Edwards. My grandfather started the business and my dad took it over and now I'm in the business. And I have children who are showing some interest.

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SW: And for the record will you tell me your birth date?

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SE: May 25, 1956.

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SW: I'm wondering if you could start by telling me a little bit about the history of this place, how it started, your grandfather, I heard he was selling sandwiches on the ferry. He was—

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SE: Yes, my great-grandfather came from the Eastern Shore of Virginia. He ran the mail boat contract, came—he lost the mail boat contract bringing mail from Chincoteague over to—to Norfolk actually. And when he lost the contract they moved to this area of the world. He started the mail boats up and down the James River and also ferry service—some in Norfolk, some in Jamestown to Surry, and further up the river to Hopewell in Richmond.

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My grandfather who was his son-in-law became a captain on the ferry that ran from Jamestown to Surry in 1925. Started selling ham sandwiches from hams that he had learned how to cure on the family farm, and it happened to coincide with the opening of the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, so tours were starting to come into the area from all over the country. And that was kind of the thing that opened us up and for him to go into the ham business. And 1926 was the first, I guess, invoice that we could find where he was selling the produce wholesale to Crossroads country stores and restaurants and that kind of thing.

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The first year I think he did fifty-five hams. From that point forward he built two and then three small smokehouses and then the plant kind of was built around those three small smokehouses. That location is still in downtown Surry. We moved to the location we're at now in the—starting in the 1940s and has grown that business to the most recent addition in 1997.

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SW: And just for the record what is your great-grandfather's name?

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SE: Captain Albert Jester.

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SW: And you mentioned that your grandfather was using—he was curing using a family recipe. Where did that come from and what was it?

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SE: You know the family recipe in—in that day, he was born in 1896 and growing up on the farm you did things to exist so when you slaughtered the animals in the winter and you put the hams in the smokehouse in salt and, you know, used the seasons to cure and age the product and it wasn't again to sell because you might have sold a few maybe but generally speaking it was to feed the family, and they had a family of eight. So it was imperative that they used the farm animals to survive.

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The story I've been told is that his father died at a young age when my grandfather was thirteen. So more than likely most of what he learned about curing meat came from his uncles and his mother about you know how to—how to cure hams, bacon, and sausage like he did on the farm. And we still had portions of that original smokehouse from the 1800s. Of course that tradition—even though we've been doing this for eighty-eight years—this is our eighty-eighth year—what—what my grandfather taught me and my—my dad learned from him and passed onto me, my dad used to always say it, we're still always learning little things about the process and what we can do to make it better and from the raw materials to the—to the wood, to the—to the times and temperatures that you have to adjust to because Mother Nature throws you a curve. So you're not—you're not just applying step one, step two, step three. You're using your sense of touch, taste, and smell and eyesight to make decisions on tweaking that curing process.

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So when, you know, the question was where did he learn it from? He learned it from his grandparents—or I mean excuse me—his parents but it was a learning process all the way through his lifetime, my father’s lifetime, and my lifetime.

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SW: I think it’s interesting because I wanted—there was—I think I’m jumping ahead to a question. I wanted to ask you a specific question about the cure process. But I guess before—since we’re talking about this I’m wondering if you could kind of talk a little bit more about that. I mean for one I wanted to know from you what you think curing hams here in Tidewater, Virginia, what sets that apart from, say, a ham that’s cured in Kentucky? Like what goes into a Tidewater, Virginia ham here at Edwards? And I’ll ask you that first because I have a second question.

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SE: Okay, well—well first of all I think if you look at the globe you’ll see that Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina is between the latitudes, uh, that produce well-cured meat. If you look at Italy and Spain and Germany which is you know in that part of the world they’re known for their produce. They have dry-cured meats. We have the same weather patterns here. What makes—why is that Virginia ham became known for hams so early on was when the settlers landed here in Virginia which is only four miles from where you and I are sitting, again to—to exist they had to learn how to cure meat. And there’s an island in Surry called Hog Island, directly across from Jamestown Island where the settlers that came from England brought the—the pork or pigs from England and put them on this island because of its natural barriers. And

they were allowed to forage in the forest and they could survive. And then whenever the settlers needed a pig they would row across, slaughter the animal, bring him back, have a big barbecue, dry-cure the rest.

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Now I'm speculating a little bit there, but **[Laughs]** that's the story that's been passed down along with the American Indian, the influence that they had on dry-curing wild game. They are actually doing a dig in Jamestown. They just found the original fort, believe it or not just up, I want to say in the last ten years. It was less than—the beginnings of it were less than a foot below the surface but they just assumed that the James River had swallowed it up because the—the banks erode over the course of time. Well as it turns out it didn't. So—so it's—to go over there and see the dig and you can actually see and they're beginning to determine what their diet was based on the dig.

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And of course you can see, if you go down to the deepest a lot of wild game, skeletons. You get up a little bit further and then you start to see pork, chicken, beef, and of course the history is not just from Jamestown, that fort was used all the way through the Civil War so you can see each layer—the diet and—and get some idea of how they lived.

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So to answer—try to answer the question, to go full circle on this, why is it Virginia—what is it about Virginia that's different? I—I think it's what we learned in the region and there are some nuances that are different in the natural environment of Kentucky, Tennessee, and

North Carolina that everybody had to make adjustments to the curing process so that the meat would be preserved and safe to eat. Why do we smoke meat in Virginia and in North Carolina, that's kind of rare? I have no idea. I have—I have never had an explanation to it. I do know that smoking has a preserving benefit. There are nitrites in smoke. And again through trial and error you have to assume that people kind of figured that out somehow.

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I've always been told you know you go to these foodways events over at Colonial Williamsburg and they refer to how they hung the hams up, not necessarily in smokehouses in the very beginning but near the fireplace. So the smoke would come up from the fireplace and maybe they noticed, "Hey these—these hams don't spoil nearly as quickly as the ones that aren't—that don't get a little bit of smoke." Who knows?

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Of course, I think what has the biggest impact on the flavor profile from region to region is the natural flora and natural bacteria that's good bacteria that's in each region produces its own unique flavor profile—even so much as even in Virginia thirty miles away the—the—the good bacteria in each smokehouse or ham house gives each ham, each company its own unique flavor profile. And as long as you're consistent and good with—and understand the curing process and you target that flavor profile that's what draws people to you because they know your ham is going to taste like that—whatever that is.

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SW: Is that hard to maintain? I mean obviously you—you have—your family has for so many years but I just wonder with the process—I mean—.

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SE: You know again this goes back to my training and growing up in the business. It's not hard. It's not rocket science but there is this attention to detail that you have to—to do and that's as simple as just walking into the—the salt cooler or the—we call it the equalization room or springtime rooms, the smokehouses and the aging rooms, and applying what you know again through your sense of taste, touch, smell that, “This needs to be a little bit dryer. It needs more smoke. It needs more air flow.” That's kind of a very subjective process, so when I walked around our smokehouses with my dad or my grandfather, I don't recall them ever going, “This is not the way it should smell,” but they would always go, “This is how it should smell. So you need to target getting this appearance, this—this—this aroma,” and what I try to do and I think my dad actually got me on this track was once—when a room was right and—and again using your senses, we tried to measure scientifically what is right? What—what is the humidity? What is the air flow? Even to the point of starting to swab the environment to see oh, what are we getting there?

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The bacteria thing, good bacteria is you know is fermentation. That's been pretty consistent but we do have—we really do have to pay attention to the—to the air flow and the smoke and the temperature and the humidity in each one of these rooms on a daily basis. It didn't change a whole lot and might not change for thirty days but you do have to pay attention to it

‘cause in Virginia the weather can change on a dime and if you’re not paying attention to it, it comes back to haunt—to haunt you. And my goal is to teach others, not just my family—other family members, my kids, but also key players here so that they’re also looking and thinking about that all the time.

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SW: And I wanted—I wanted to ask you this before I forgot but could you talk a little bit about your memories of your grandfather and what you think he brought to this and the same with your father because you mentioned earlier that you—you kind of have to just go—you put your own thing into it. And I’m wondering what you saw your grandfather doing and then your father and you.

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SE: Well it’s no question, my grandfather—the impression that I made upon him, he wanted every ham, every ham ‘cause we weren’t—he wasn’t—the company wasn’t as large as it is and we’re still small relatively speaking. But I mean we’re talking about two or three employees and every ham even when he was at—at and past retiring age if he was in the smoke house picking out the ham he would always—we used to mark the end of the boxes with a blue crayon, write the weights. He would put a blue crayon check mark on the hams that he picked ‘cause he knew—‘cause as we check each one of these hams we take an ice pick and we stick it in the center of the ham and smell it and the hock end of the ham. And first of all, you check them to make sure they hadn’t spoiled. Every once in a while you’ll get one, but you can also depict—you pick up the aroma that, “Wow that’s really got a—that’s going to be a really good one,” so those—he would put the little blue check mark on it. So if someone came in and said, “Look my

daughter is getting married this weekend and I need one that's really going to be great," he would go look for the blue check. So that's the part I remember about him—and him talking about in this kind of really deep slow voice about the importance of—of not cutting corners and—and quality and—.

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So when my dad came along what I remember the most about him and we—we're—when I was growing up it wasn't that my father was bringing me to the plant or the smokehouses because he wanted to teach me about this process. It was a necessity meaning we need another body in here to help us do this work which at—you know twelve, thirteen years old I'm—I didn't [*Laughs*]*—*he was snatching me out of the James River when I was out there fishing or skiing or whatever and bringing me in here to go to work. That—that didn't go over so well.

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But through osmosis, you do it enough and often enough you don't realize what you're learning because you're doing it. And I—I think he saw that as a real benefit to me. Hard work certainly you know—it wasn't like digging ditches but it—it was—it was a lot of physical labor. And so I went away to college and I got a business degree and a lot of the guys I was graduating with were—were either going into grad school or going off to be the next new Wall Street(er). And the economy tanked the year I graduated, interestingly—tanked—

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SW: What year was that?

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SE: Seventy-eight [1978] and it was twenty-one percent interest rates—crazy, you know kind of like what we’ve just been through and not quite as severe. So those that couldn’t get the jobs you know they went back to grad school and my—my parents said, “Great! Go back to grad school. But that’s on you, you know that’s—that’s your dollar.” And so I said, “All right, well I’m going to come back and work here for a year or two ‘til the economy gets back on track and I’m going to apply my trade and money in banking and I’m going to—.” Well before you know it, two years, five years, and my father eventually got me out of the 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the plant producing physical labor part to so how can you grow the business? How can you better manage the business side of it, and not just the nuances of curing and making sausage and bacon and ham correctly but more efficiently? And then I was applying my brain a little more and less of my back and I began to see how I could contribute to this company.

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SW: Do you think that—I mean that—I don’t want to say that—that was his plan but the idea was to get you to learn every—from the bottom of the ladder and work your way up and so you fully understand it before you start making those kinds of decisions?

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SE: He’ll say yes. Now I really think it was we needed somebody here. I don’t think it was—I mean it was obviously a benefit. I mean I know my son jokes with me about how I know where the breaker switch is for the fan blower at the top of the room in the warehouse somewhere. You know I just—it’s those details that you pick up over the course of time. I’m getting to the point now though where my memory is not so good, so [*Laughs*] I’m beginning to forget the stuff

I'm—I learned last week. But I can still remember where that switch is to turn the—the exhaust fan off in the warehouse. That kind of thing that you pick up and—and I truly think though that I guess observing—. Dad wasn't teaching me so much but I watched what he did. And it—when I would ask him about why he tweaked that aging room or that smokehouse or—and other employees too that were here that—that knew to get the smoke flowing better through the smokehouse you had to open this damper and shut that damper and you know you—you have to do it. And that's—if you do it enough eventually it sticks.

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SW: Could you talk a little bit about—a little bit about—I guess this is a big old fat question but what are some of the things that you learned from your father or your grandfather that you carry with you today here, and how do you balance that with the idea of coming up with new—new products or innovation?

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SE: Well one of—one of our newest products really is us going full circle back to a product that my grandfather—with some tweaks to it. The flagship product that we had in this company was the Wigwam Ham and it was a year-old country ham. That was the standard in 1920. You just—you aged country hams for a year, that's what you did.

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And so I'm listening to our customers and I saw this trend over the course of time where—and my dad let me learn this lesson too—I wanted to grow sales. So how do we grow

sales? Sometimes you have to lower the price. Well if you lower the price, the quality is going to suffer somewhere. But you know it's just a little bit.

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So we go out and the first year that dad let me go out and do this so to speak, we increased sales by thirty percent. But at the end of the day we made just as much money the previous year when sales weren't thirty percent higher. So obviously I lowered the price too much and didn't leave enough in there to be worth all this extra work.

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But going back to the how do you balance that with new products and old products? I guess between my—my dad and my grandfather the importance—people talk about this all the time, the importance of quality but in our case I really think we realized that we will never be the price leader, lower price. We'll have to be—make the best product we can make consistently.

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The latest product that we came out with is what we called a Surryano Ham. And a Surryano Ham was, in my mind, an attempt to get the raw materials, fresh hams from the breeds like my grandfather used to buy and my father used to buy—Berkshire, Red Wattle, Tamworth, Gloucestershire Spot, Big Blacks—. And so we—we taste-tested the fresh hams on a griddle and cut a slab right out of the center of the ham and taste-tested—blind taste-test and we picked our top three and said, “Okay, well if they're starting off with better fresh pork then the end-product has got to be better.” So and—and again you have to remember, if you're going to cure a ham for a year to eighteen months the results of what you're doing takes decades to figure out.

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And so over the course of time and we met some new people that are really focused on raising animals, you know I used to kind of downplay the idea of humane treatment and the impact it had on pork but I've learned and I've seen that hogs that are under stress don't produce as good a pork. You tasted the difference, see the difference, and so I'm onboard with it. We've been onboard with it and now we're trying to buy more and more hogs raised that way. And I'm not talking about just one little thing changing like the farrowing crates. I'm talking about truly measurable stress-free environment, antibiotic-free, kind of going back to, "So well would they have done this 100 years ago?" And if the answer is yes then we're going to try it. And some things are good, some things aren't so good but we're figuring it out slowly but surely.

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So if you start off with the right fresh pork, salt, the ingredient that we use. We've stuck with the same brand that my—my grandfather used. We are testing other salts like Mediterranean sea salt, but at the end of the day the curing process and the aging, the—the length of aging coupled with all those little things has given the Surryano ham anyway the credibility and the flavor profile that we're looking for. And chefs seem to appreciate it and they're substituting that ham in place of an imported prosciutto or serrano ham which you know people like—other people in the country ham business that our size—Nancy Newsom, Al Benton, Rufus—all of those guys recognize that the importance of competing with the Europeans coming into this market. And it—I forgot, I think it was a statistic I saw last year there was nineteen million pounds of just prosciutto imported into this country last year.

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Well, to people our size nineteen million pounds is an endless market. To the rest of the pork community some of the larger packers, nineteen million pounds is a half a day's run. So but for our market it's a great market to go after, so I'm thinking that all we want to do is get these chefs to—to give us a chance, to let us cut against those—those imported products.

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So ironically me going back—maybe not ironically. Interestingly the fact that we're going back to the roots of where the product that we—my grandfather and father made has given the American country ham more credibility or—or appreciation by American chefs and European chefs for that matter. I mean there's plenty of guys that are from Spain and Italy and Germany that are—their background is that and they're trying the American-made dry-cured ham and go, “Wow. Let's—this is a great idea.” And I think—I think all of us in the—in the US struggle with staying true to the consistency. You can't say, “Okay, well eighteen months is our target but man the people are calling like crazy. I got some twelve month olds. Let's—let's get them out.” You can't do that. You just—you just have to be—hold fast to it and say, “Look, I—I'm out. I don't have any this—this month. Think of us earlier next year.” *[Laughs]*

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SW: Sam while we're talking about some of this stuff I wanted to ask you if you could talk about—I mean you mentioned some breeds but could you talk about what types of breeds you use? Where did they come from and what—what are they eating?

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SE: All right. So, right now where we're getting the certified humane, pasture-raised, antibiotic-free pork a big portion of it is coming from Missouri. If you look out my office window right now there's a hog farm within a half a mile of here that is raising Berkshires for us. And the breeds we're getting from the Midwest are Berks, Red Wattles, Tamworths. They're our top three but occasionally I'll get some Gloucestershire Old Spots, Mangalitsas, Durocs. For whatever reason I haven't been a big fan of Durocs. I mean when we taste-tested the ham—the bellies are great. The Duroc ham though for my taste was not the same as what—it wasn't what I was looking for. And the Duroc pork chop is great too but the ham for us just didn't work.

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So it—with those breeds we focused on them being pasture-raised and they're fed on grain to supplement the grass that they're on. They're typically more mature at the time of harvest than a typical commodity hog would be 'cause it just takes longer to get to market size. And then the guy that's here locally—half a mile from us, the last three months before harvest we actually provide peanuts, thirty percent of their peanuts is peanuts, here—Virginia Peanuts, number twos, you know ones that don't make the grade for number one peanuts. And that's what we feed these Berkshire pigs. And then the impact it's had on the flavor profile, the peanut-fed hams in my opinion has been the—an oilier texture. When you're dry-curing a ham for eighteen months if you're not careful you can get it too dry and it gets—it's just not—you've—you got to have a—a heavily marbled ham and you've got to have these breeds that are heavily marbled. If you take a super lean—lean generation pig, modern pig, and you age it that long it's like the—jerky. I mean it's just too dry and—

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So in the '90s [1990s] we kind of figured that out. We—that's when that lean generation pig was really hitting the market and that's all you could buy. And—and I was getting on the phone and calling up [*Laughs*] packing houses all over the country and said, "Look. I need some fat pigs. I need some fatter pigs, not totally fat but fatter because these are just—." You look at a—a side view of a—a ham cut through the middle and it was just all red lean meat and like a quarter of an inch of fat around the outside. It was crazy lean.

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And of course people were complaining about the pork loins too and they were saying, "Oh it tastes like cardboard when you cook it." And what do they start doing? They take bacon and over-wrap the pork loin to give it a flavor. And I'm—you know I'm not going to solve that problem but I can see what was happening, so that's when we discovered—.

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By happenstance this guy from Brooklyn calls me, Patrick Martins and he is—he helped start the Slow Food movement here in this country. He—he was mentored by Carlos Patrini in Italy and—. So anyway he came to the states and started the Slow Food movement. One of the spin-offs of that Slow Food movement for him was how do we save these rare breeds, breed specific animals from turkeys to chickens to pork to beef? Pork for whatever reason is what he kind of hung his hat on—turkeys and pork.

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So he could find the chefs to buy these rare breeds—everything but the hams. And he was a little long on bellies and a lot long on trimmings. So out of the blue he just calls me up one day and say, “Do you—would you like to start buying these from him?” I said, “Sure, send them and I’ll try them,” and you know I liked it. I liked it because we were—that’s the direction we were headed just again coincidentally.

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Next thing I know you know a year later or eighteen months later I’m really liking what we taste and see. “Patrick, can we get more?” And I think at the time he might have had five farms and now we’re up to about twenty. And to be honest with you I think we could do another twenty farms. So we’re trying to coordinate with some guys down in Alabama, Jim Myers and Nick Pihakis this Fatback Pork [Pig] Project but I think we’re probably a year to eighteen months away from really getting that—we’re hoping—I’m hoping that they’re going to do it because I—we can use more of that type product.

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SW: And do you—I mean do you have a favorite breed in terms of when you eat ham or you know something that you think is the most delicious?

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SE: I think—I think Berkshire is the one and—and I—I may be tainted in my outlook on that but I can remember going to a restaurant and a chef friend of mine cooked a—this was phew—fifteen years ago, cooked a Berkshire pork loin—pork roast and a regular side-by-side, same

oven, same—same seasoning and everything. And he cut them in front of me and I tasted the Berk and I was like, “Wow. That against the other—the lean generation,” and I just went, “Wow, that is incredibly different.” I mean it’s like eating a dry piece of toast with no butter and *[Laughs]* one dipped in melted butter. I don’t know. It was incredibly different.

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SW: Can you kind of—I know this is strange but can you describe the taste of it like what—that taste that makes it so good?

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SE: Well the fresh pork and this—this flavor profile translates through to the dry-cured ham, I think—it’s just got a richer taste to it, a buttery taste to it. When you eat our eighteen month-old ham and it’s taken us a while to convince our—well not convince—to train our crew how to debone a Surryano ham because you want to leave the fat on and, you know, heretofore we’ve been you know trimming the fat off of our regular country hams down to about a quarter of an inch on a finished product. And the star fat in the middle we told them to cut out but this we—we want to leave it in there. You serve it, the Surryano uncooked. And, as a matter of fact, I had some guys from Parma, Italy here yesterday. And they cut—we cut the ham for them to taste-test and they were you know impressed, not just about how the—the ham tasted because of the curing process but because of the effort that we make to keep that perimeter fat and marbling in the ham itself and they know how important that is. It gives you the richness and buttery taste that you’re looking for in that finished product.

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And the meat was shiny, not because it was wet, but because of the oil coming out of it from the texture of the meat—the meat itself which I don't know how to describe it other than smooth, rich, and buttery.

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SW: And could you talk—I want to make sure I have you talk about this before I ask you a few more questions—can you walk me through—slowly walk me through the curing process here? I mean and maybe—this is a two-part(er), how you do it today and how that's changed since say your grandfather cured?

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SE: Well first of all we're duplicating the seasons—winter, spring, summer, and to some degree fall. In the case of the Surryano ham we go through two years. So we kind of follow the temperatures from cold to warm to cool to cold again and then back through the whole season again. So the hams are put in salt for about thirty days. Well, first of all we put them in salt for five days and we re-salt after five, and then we leave them in salt for the balance of time. Depending on the size of the ham total time in salt: twenty-six to thirty-four days. So if you have a fourteen to seventeen-pound ham, twenty-six days. If you have a twenty-six to thirty-pound ham, closer to thirty-four days.

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We wash the excess salt off. We hang them in stocking nets, cotton nets, and put them on racks and we go into a room at fifty degrees and eighty percent humidity.

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Now, you know, going back to the day when my grandfather did it the major difference is Mother Nature was providing the humidity and the temperatures. I'm talking about in 1926. So as with other foods that you make if you're relying on Mother Nature you can say, "Oh well, 1926 was a great year. Twenty-eight and twenty-nine not so much," you know, because Mother Nature messed with you. So what I think my dad and you know my grandfather started but my grandfather—or my dad finished and perfected was the ability to control the rooms better. When I came along going back to that teaching about—by my father and grandfather was this is the way the room is supposed to smell and look and feel, meaning to your face almost or your hands. I in turn then said, "Okay, well, let's measure that. Let's figure out what—what percentage humidity is that and—and what—what—you know get a wind meter and hold it up when you—you got your fans blowing just right. What is that air movement?" so that I could—wouldn't have to rely on such a subjective point of view, which I guess maybe that's what I brought to the table.

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But my dad's effort to go in a temperature controlled environment in the 19—late 1950s and into the '60s I don't want to say he was the first to do it in the states but probably pretty close because most everybody was still doing atmospheric curing and aging at that point other than the coolers. You know the coolers, the salt days, yes, you had to control that but from spring and summer most folks were relying on Mother Nature to do it.

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So you—I guess the difference between the way my dad and—and—and my grandfather did it, dad said, “Look, I’m not going to let Virginia mess me up. I’m going to figure out how to do this year-round,” and—and if it weren’t for that I’m not sure we would be in the business today because you couldn’t—we couldn’t grow. We couldn’t—if you had to rely on the four seasons to make hams and you—once you get past a certain season, okay well you can’t—you can’t put down hams again because spring is gone you know. So that’s what my dad brought to the table with the same footprint, you’re able to cure hams 365 days a year. And again, we’re still fine-tuning that process and trying to figure out how to be consistent in these rooms where we cure, it’s not only standing in the middle of the room having the right wind velocity and the right humidity but you have to be able to stand in every corner of the room and get that same consistency to make sure that every ham tastes as close to the same as—no matter where you—whatever part of the room you’re getting in. That’s really hard to do. That’s really hard to do.

00:40:07

SW: I wanted to ask you this earlier and this also may sound silly but what does—you were talking about how your father and your grandfather were saying well this is how the room should smell, this is how it should feel on your face. Could you describe that? What—when does it feel right?

00:40:23

SE: Well the smell is very easy to tell. I mean it’s—it’s a—it’s a—I’m not sure if I can verbalize it but it—it—when the ham, when the room is right and again it depends on what stage you’re at but let’s just say hams that are aged fourteen to eighteen months and you walk into the

room, the smell is of—you can smell the smoke and you can smell the—a little bit of the saltiness is still in the air but I also get kind of an apple-y sweet smell to the room.

00:40:59

That's what I'm getting at. And some rooms still have their own personality, so I know that room one, let's say, is—it produces consistently and easier really good hams. Room number two is a hard to control room. You really have to pay attention to it but you can get the same quality and the same flavor out of it, but you really got to pay attention to it. I don't know if it's the layout of the room or the—because they aren't—they're not all the same size. And now that I know what I know about room one, believe me any new rooms we build are going to be just like room one because I want to duplicate that. You know, I'm sure there's somebody in Italy who has been doing this for 500 years that knows exactly what I'm talking about and knows exactly what size that room needs to be and the air velocity and the temperatures but we're—we're—we're just you know good ole country boys trying to figure out how to do it [*Laughs*] and it's taken us eighty-eight years to get there. [*Laughs*]

00:42:12

SW: I'm wondering if you could talk about—I had Rufus do this yesterday but when—when we say the term *country ham* what—how do you explain country ham in your terms?

00:42:23

SE: You know I—people ask me that all the time, including my son. My son struggles with—conceptually why we name the hams what we name them and we've got country—. Well first of all you've got dry-cured country ham, you've got country ham, you've got, in our case, Virginia

ham Virginia ham, Virginia country ham, Surryano ham. Well all of those are country hams. All of those is a category of country hams. And the analogy I make to that is one of the most confusing products to buy for me is a mattress. You walk into a mattress store, at—there's no description that tells me that I can tell—that tells me that's the mattress I want. You know firm, soft, Tempurpedic or whatever the brand may be, so country hams, we lack an identity within the industry. And—and country ham producers being the people they are, they don't want anybody to—to tell them what the standard of identity is going to be.

00:43:30

I think what it boils down to in a sense is like pick the wine industry. You buy Chardonnay from X, Y, Z Company in California and one in Missouri and one in Virginia, they're all Chardonnays but they all taste different. You buy it because you like the way that guy does it. And I think that's true with country ham guys. The problem with the general industry—general consumer who doesn't really know about country hams at all and has—and has had it before and they go, “Wow, I really like that,” so they buy it that one time and say, “I—I had that in a restaurant and it was outstanding.” But then they buy it again at a roadside pancake house and it tastes nothing like what they had at the other restaurant.

00:44:19

They're all country hams but they're uniquely different from—depending on the producer, not to say there aren't some producers that produce hams that are very, very similar, but there's still a wide variety and flavor profile of appearance and smell and smoked, not smoked, so again I think the—I think the prosciutto folks on the other hand though have—have—are much more rigid about the standard of identity. Parma hams have to be cured and—

and aged in Parma and they have minimum standards about the pork—fresh pork, how the pork is fed, what the maturity is, the trimming of the ham, the aging of the ham—that kind of thing. So, they were willing to let that standard of identity be developed and enforced and whereas, the American country ham producer—not so much.

00:45:19

SW: And you were talking about that earlier in terms of you know you were talking about prosciutto and Serrano. I mean when did that start coming into the states and becoming so popular? Is there—was that—?

00:45:33

SE: Well, I think that's been—well they've been coming into this country for a long, long time. I think for—for generations, country hams were an original thing, stayed Virginia, south over to the Midwest, Missouri. I don't—I'm not too sure about Mississippi, Alabama. I mean, I know they eat country ham down there and they're familiar with it but I think they're—that region of the world is too hot too long, too much humidity too long. If they brought country hams down they brought it from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina and Georgia because the environment was right, again going back to the—prior to temperature controls and electricity.

00:46:23

So the prosciutto market started to develop when—because of the web, mail order, chefs that—that were trained in the South and went to New York or LA or Denver or Chicago or Dallas. They took their skills with them and their—their food with them. And then you—I think

Southern food is riding a wave of real interest right now and country hams are a major part of that.

00:46:55

I think we have, in true American form, they are taking country ham and crossing it with Vietnamese or—or—or Chinese or German or—and it's this mixture of cultures that can take that same product from Virginia, a country ham and use it in those dishes in a different way that people are—are just blown away by it. So, as long as the products that are indigenous to the South historically are being considered by these chefs I think Southern food—at least country ham has a—a good future.

00:47:46

If we say, “No, you should always serve country ham in a steak fried with red eye gravy and biscuits,” which I’m—I’m a big fan of and I still hope that you know gazillions of people do that, I’m also great—really interested to see the—the chefs from you know from Charleston to New York utilizing these country hams in a way that—that gives us some credibility. And I don’t even want to use the term just as good as prosciutto or Serrano. I’m saying ours is in a lot of ways better certainly when it comes to the flavor profile that you’re going to get and sometimes unbelievably more cost effective. I mean, I’ve seen some of these Spanish hams come in here at \$1,500 a-piece. That’s crazy. I don’t know who wants to—I mean I’ve eaten it too and it’s good. Don’t get me wrong. But there’s a lot of country hams that’s in my opinion that are just as good if not better.

00:48:51

SW: When did you start feeling that in terms—I wanted you to actually talk about—talk about the—the range of your—like who your customers are because I know you’re proving to chefs but you know I wonder if there are people who just walk in town, in Surry who walk into the ham shop. I mean can you talk about your—your different types of customers and also when you started feeling the popularity? You know, you were talking about people incorporating the Southern food thing and—and incorporating country ham.

00:49:22

SE: Well, there is no question that if it weren't for chefs that Southern food wouldn't have gotten out of the South. You know, I hate to even start naming names of chefs 'cause I'm going to leave somebody really important out but there are some chefs that starting back in—as early as the '80s [1980s] in Virginia that have national recognition all the way through the South to—to Charleston, Nashville, and—and New York, people that are indigenous to New York. They kind of figured it out. If it—if it weren't for them we wouldn't have gotten out of the South. So how do we get our products out there? We have a store here in Surry in front of our smokehouses. We have a store in Williamsburg. And we have a catalog and web operation.

00:50:24

The catalog was really how my grandfather got in the business. He was doing direct to consumer in 1926. You know, people would write him a letter. He'd ship the ham. They'd send him cash or a check in the mail, sight unseen and didn't know who they were. And I can remember doing that when I first got out of college the same way. We would ship the ham and they would send us a check.

00:50:52

Don't ever remember having a bad check or somebody not paying us. To grow the business however we had to focus on being a little more aggressive and create four color catalogs, mail them. Web is a whole different animal. You know it's—it's outselling the—the printed catalogs now and you know my son is involved with—and others here in the office—are involved with keeping that booming. And if it weren't for that I don't know where we would be. I mean we—we've always been in a seventy-five-mile radius and fortunately for us we're within ten to twelve miles of a major tourist area and people come to Florida they get oranges and when they come to Virginia hopefully they're going to buy—they think about ham, Virginia ham in particular. So we've been fortunate from that standpoint to—that with Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, Virginia Beach, Washington, DC—all that that's a tourist related marketplace for us has been a real plus.

00:52:00

SW: Could you also talk a little bit about—I heard about the teepees and if you could talk about the teepees and how they started?

00:52:08

SE: My—my grandfather's tip of the hat to the contribution that the American Indian made to curing. Because the story that he had always been told was the American Indian taught the settlers how to dry or cure meat because when they came over there were—and there's some debate on this now—were they soldiers or were they men of fortune or—or debtors that were sent to North America to [*Laughs*] survive and establish England's footprint here? And if you go back to the history books they tell you that the—the lean years or the number of years that they

almost didn't survive and if it hadn't been for the American Indian during those lean years to feed them and teach them how to grow crops and cure meat then they wouldn't have survived.

00:53:08

So my grandfather, his flagship product he called the Wigwam Ham. And again, you have to keep in mind that he was a ferryboat captain at the time and grew up on a country farm, ferryboat captain. He's passing in front of Jamestown every day, dozens of times a day. So the culture and the American Indian and the contribution that the Powhatan Indians made to the survival of the first permanent English settlement, the cornerstone of democracy in this country, I mean we're like the—Jamestown is like the Athens of Greece. I don't understand why it doesn't get more play than that but it's the first democratic form of government in this country.

00:53:53

So he's thinking about history all the time. You know what else can you do? You're going back and forth across the river. So when he built his smokehouses he designed the roof so that it looked like the top of a teepee. Even though teepees are not indigenous to Virginia—we're more like Quonset huts—and he put these wooden sticks coming out of it and it looked like the sticks at the top of a teepee, he made the door in the shape of a flap like you'd see on a teepee. And I've got those—those doors in the store in Williamsburg off of those first smokehouses from the 1920s. They're on a wall—hanging on a wall on display. So that was his—his marketing concept, along with the fact that he painted the—after he had three smokehouses built he painted the—the letters “H-A-M” on the—on the side of the smoke—on the roof of the smokehouses [*Laughs*]. So as you're riding down the road you knew what they were you know, come in and buy some ham.

00:55:02

SW: It's pretty clever. Could you—wait, what do we—?

00:55:07

SE: That's— [*pointing out the wigwams in a photograph*]

SW: Oh that's—?

00:55:08

SE: That's the first one right there.

00:55:10

SW: Oh wow. Now that was—

00:55:12

SE: See—see how the door is shaped like a flap right here?

00:55:14

SW: Yeah, yeah. Oh my goodness. Do you have memories of—was that being used when you were—?

00:55:21

SE: Yeah, but they had built around it. You know you could still—and you can still see them today. We just don't own the building. We sold it to a local nurseryman in town and he uses it to hang—he grows poinsettias inside of this—'cause it's a dark and kind of cold environment with

all that concrete. And he hangs—he told me he was going to hang and dry herbs up in the smokehouses because you can hang them and the air flow through the smokehouses made a—they're kind of smoky but [*Laughs*] it works.

00:56:02

SW: And Sam, could you talk a little bit more—I wrote some of these down, I was reading about some of the other products that you were talking about—Surryano and you mentioned the Wigwam. You guys also do sausage. There was something called the Jowlciale [I slaughter the pronunciation].

00:56:17

SE: Jowlciale [He pronounces it correctly].

00:56:17

SW: Jowlciale.

00:56:17

SE: That—Jowlciale was our again tongue in cheek, the Surryano got its name as I'm talking to a chef at Union Square Café in New York over the phone and I'm trying to describe to him how you prepared this ham, because he was talking about how intense the flavor was and he was going to try to cut it into steaks and fry it up like you do regular four month-old country ham.

00:56:41

And I said, “No. No. You serve it like you would a prosciutto or Serrano ham and we’re going to call it,”—I said this as a joke—“we’re going to call it Surryano, play on the town.” And unbeknownst to me he put it on the menu that way—a Surryano. And then other chefs watched what Union Square Café does. They saw it and the phone started ringing, “Where can I get some of this Surryano?” And so I decided well maybe we better keep using the name. Everybody thinks that I was trying to do it as a knockoff of a Serrano and I said, “No. I want to promote the great American country ham.” I can’t help what happens, you know other people kind of dictate what happens. If I had just kept my mouth shut and tried to quit being a smart mouth *[Laughs]* you know that wouldn’t have happened.

00:57:34

I’m always joking around with people and people never know when I’m serious or—or—or joking around I guess. So anyway that’s how that got started. I forgot the question now. What were you asking?

00:57:44

SW: Oh if you could talk about some of the other things that come out of this place.

00:57:47

SE: Oh yeah so the Jowlciale, so again because we—that was a tongue in cheek and then of course in the South we call the—the pig cheek cured, hog jowls. And it’s typically used—you slice it like bacon. You serve it like bacon and it’s quite a bit fatter or use it as a seasoning meat. Well in the Italian world they call it Guanciale, so and I went to—when I went to New York and

I saw these—these hog jowl—cured hog jowls in a specialty food store and in restaurants and I saw the prices on them and I went, “Wow, that’s crazy that people are willing to pay that. It’s hog jowls.” At that time it was considered a byproduct of the pig. It since has grown into this crazy pricy thing too, but—. So again tongue in cheek I said, “Well we’re going to call it Jowlciale just so we can put our own little,”—we cure it a little different and we aged it. The problem with that was nobody knew what it was. The people in the South, “Jowlciale. I don’t—I’ve never heard of that.” And of course the Italians in the Northeast go, “What do you mean? It’s not—it’s not Guanciale? It’s Jowlciale?” So we shot ourselves in the foot on that one. Nobody—now we’ve got a product that nobody knows what it is so we’re going to go back and either call it Jowl or—or we’ll probably going to call it Jowls instead of the other Jowlciale number.

00:59:12

So the—we make fresh sausage patties, links, natural casings. Interestingly enough in the good ole days—and I can still—my grandfather’s garage is still up in Surry in front of the old smokehouses, to make sausage in the 1920s and ‘30s he would—he would back his car out of the garage. He had a concrete floor in it and pull the meat grinder out and grind—make sausage in the garage, wash everything up, push it to the side of the garage and drive the car back in—in the good ole days.

00:59:48

And then inspection came along and they were okay with that. They said, “But we want you to pour coves around the edges so that the meat doesn’t get trapped in the ninety-degree angle of the curbing.” And I thought [*Laughs*], “It’s okay for you to park a car in the—in a place

that you process meat. But you want them to pour coves.” Well they did it. But again that was in the very, very beginning stages which I’m sure in that day a lot of people got started the same way.

01:00:18

So when we evolved into the building a separate facility to cure meat and dry-cure meat and smoke sausage and whatever the way it worked was you got your orders on Monday. You ground your sausage on Tuesday. You shipped your sausage and whatever sausage you had left over we would stuff in the hog casings and smoke it over the weekend, so it was a way—‘cause we didn’t have freezers. So you had to cure it in a sense so that it wouldn’t spoil.

01:00:45

So what started off as a byproduct is now our number one seller in sausage but—by far. It’s—it’s just—it’s got a really unique flavor. It gets kind of a—a Lebanon, I call it a Lebanon bologna bite to it. It’s a little bit—a country twang but it’s the fermentation of the sausage is what it is. And it—and the fermentation came from the fact that you ground it on Tuesday and you kept it in the sausage vats ‘til Thursday or Friday to stuff it. So just that three or four days of—of fermenting the good bacteria will take over and create this—this kick. And even after you smoke it if you leave it in your refrigerator for three or four weeks it gets even more-twangy but it’s—scientifically I don’t know what’s going on. I just know it tastes great.

01:01:40

SW: Sam I just have two more quick questions for you and then I'm going to open the floor up. Can you talk a little bit—we—I mentioned this earlier, but could you talk a little bit about how changing regulations have affected Edwards?

01:01:55

SE: Well, you know when—when my grandfather and father were in the business my grandfather um, told my dad and I remember him repeating it to me, because you have to remember businesspeople at that time there were no regulations or very little regulations. And over the course of my grandfather's life it got more and more tighter. You might see an inspector once a year and then it was once a month and it was you know every day—every week and then every day. And the—the—and I can remember my dad's period of time when I was in the business growing up in it and you would see one inspector that would come in and say, "I want this wall painted." "Okay, we'll paint it, okay."

01:02:51

And then the next—in other words, it may be cinder blocked, not painted and they want it painted. And the next guy would come in and say, "No, I don't want it painted. Take the paint off. I don't—paint can pee, therefore I don't want it on there." So we'd take the paint off. And this would go you know back and forth, not just the painting issue but other issues. So it was a very subjective way to apply food inspection, I thought.

01:03:18

Well when HACCP [Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Points] came along in 1999 everybody was—I mean I was, I was scared to death about what all this was going to mean. And it was a tremendous amount of change and documentation and paperwork, and we have one person now that that's all they do is HACCP. But the good news is we now have everything in writing, documented, step-by-step what we do, approved, so then this subjective nature of an inspector coming in because he had a bad morning—here are the rules. The rules are in front of you. They're—they're straightforward. They can't be—I use the term *capricious* and *arbitrary*, they cannot be that way anymore. It's just—you know it's in black and white.

01:04:09

There is—there are a few gray areas left but still, generally speaking, I think it's been a good thing. And it also—we're—we're—our records, the—the good, the other really good thing is we know now because the records we're keeping that at any given time if someone in the public sector comes back and says, “I got sick from your product,” we can actually—we actually have the documentation to show that the temperatures that we processed the meat in, the amount of salt, the amount of sugar, the amount of this, that, and the other that we put in it, and it left here in—and we test the product. I mean we send it off to labs all the time. The likelihood of it coming out of this plant that way in—in excellent conditions are very, very high.

01:04:57

Could it be mishandled once it leaves here? Sure. There is no documentation that—once we deliver it to our customer that it got handled correctly. So that's been the benefit of USDA [United States Department of Agriculture]. We still—we just had our three-year review with the

inspectors coming and—and inspecting the inspectors. That was—and they came in December—the day after Thanksgiving and stayed through January the fourth, which is absolutely our busiest craziest time. So they were asking for, “Can I see page seventeen?” And it was just—you just don’t want to have to deal with it then.

01:05:34

So timing is not always the greatest and I wish they were a little more flexible from that standpoint but you know they always find something, you know as long as we agree and we’re moving in the right direction and improving our food safety I don’t have a problem with it. Occasionally you’ll get a guy that doesn’t know the rules and we have to set him straight but generally speaking they know what’s going on now.

01:06:00

SW: And you were—I wanted to ask you about this because I have read some—in a story how there was—something happened, I think it was at a food conference or maybe it was an event and somebody made a jab at you for putting cooking directions on dry-cured ham.

01:06:14

SE: Oh yeah.

01:06:15

SW: Could you talk about the idea of the—I mean the way people in the South think of ham, do you think people cook it when they shouldn’t be cooking it? Could you talk a little bit about that phenomenon?

01:06:26

SE: Yeah. Well, all right along that line, again this goes back to USDA rules. I knew that the chef was absolutely right and he was referring to our Wigwam ham. The water activity and the curing and aging process gets the water activity so low that the pathogens can't survive. But the USDA, you know, their goal is to put you in a cubbyhole of regulations. And we don't fit. We're not pork loins and we're not pumped city hams and, we're just really unique in a narrow, narrow niche and they haven't quite finished writing all the regulations yet on—on what we do.

01:07:04

So they have to put us in one of those cubbyholes to make us fit. So at the time the USDA said, "You have to have cooking instructions on there." And so we would put cooking instructions on it. So this chef was up in front of all these other chefs and people in the food and wine industry and talking about how Edwards puts cooking instructions on the back of this wonderful year-old, well-aged ham and how great it is eating it raw, and I agreed 100-percent. But USDA made us put it on there. And of course as he's saying—and I'm walking into the seminar about the time and I'm kind of sort of picking up the conversation as I'm walking in and he said, "And that moron put cooking instructions on the back of the bag." And I'm walking in and I look at the chef and he looks at me and goes, "And there is the moron!" and points to the back of the room **[Laughs]** and everybody turns around. And I'm just standing there kind of blind—I felt like a deer in the headlights kind of thing—oops.

01:08:07

So we always—I got a big kick out of that—now. I wasn't so sure about it then. **[Laughs]** And that chef and I are good friends, so that's why he could do that and get away with it.

01:08:18

SW: And I wanted to make sure I had—I know you talked about—we had talked about curing but in terms of the—the mixture, the salt what do you—is it just salt that you’re curing with or what—what is that mixture?

01:08:31

SE: Well, in the case of ham we use salt and sodium nitrate. I want to—I want to go back to one more thing, you said do you think we cook ham when we shouldn’t be cooking it? No, in my opinion hams that are three months, four months, and even six months-old or twelve months-old like the Wigwam ham like that guy was referring to, I said, “If you cook it correctly,” slow and—and in Virginia for whatever reason most of our hams, ninety-percent of the hams that we sell cooked, we cook in a water. It’s a slow overnight process, low and slow. It does help to rehydrate the ham and then you slice it paper thin.

01:09:13

Now, I know when I go into other people’s facilities they’re selling their hams—their uncooked hams whole. People—I’m not sure how they’re cooking it when it leaves, but more and more people are buying the hams sliced into steaks raw. They get it home and they fry it, that’s just how they cook it. And—and in Virginia at least to the customers we sell to they buy it from us cooked in water. We do all the work for them or our directions refer to cooking it that way. Is it right or wrong? It’s safer certainly for a ham that’s four months, eight months, twelve months-old. I think once you get past you know twelve, fourteen months depending on the size of the ham, the water activity is low enough that pathogens are not an issue. And again, we’re talking about pathogens that would be a problem for the two percent, people that are immune

deficient, small children, pregnant people—pregnant women [*Laughs*—pregnant people—pregnant women, you know you don't want to—it's like brie cheese, you know stuff like that. There's certain things you don't want to eat because they're—the bacteria content in them could make you ill, which is you're immune deficient it's not the thing to do.

01:10:29

SW: Do you put any sugar into the—the cure mix?

01:10:33

SE: Only in the sausage and the bacon. The hams we don't. I know a lot of people do and we go back to again it goes back to that—that—the Surryano ham or the Wigwam hams—any of the country hams. When you walk into the room if the hams have the right amount of fat content I think sugar is in a sense redundant. If you've got enough fat in the meat that—that chemical breakdown that happens during the aging process lends itself to a sweeter ham.

01:11:06

One of the comments that we get about our hams is the Edwards ham is not as salty. Some people accommodate that by adding sugar which masks the saltiness, but I think it's because we control the salt going in by being more aware of how many days we leave the ham in salt based on size. The salt will only go in so fast, so we control the amount of salt going in by the days in salt.

01:11:39

Some people say, “Well, if you only put five pounds on there, it will only absorb five pounds.” Well that’s true but sometimes five pounds of salt doesn’t entirely encapsulate the ham which if the certain parts of the ham that the salt goes in and it needs more behind it that part of the ham could get off-color, off-smell. So that’s why I’d rather encapsulate the ham in salt and control how that salt gets in it through time versus amount.

01:12:18

SW: Sam, I don’t have any other questions. I guess I just wanted to—the last question I had for you is more of an overall question about what does it mean to you to be here today where your father was, your grandfather was, and—and how does it feel to—to see how each man has put his mark on this and—and what it’s like to carry that forward?

01:12:43

SE: You know, I don’t think about it that much really. I mean it’s—it’s a—you know it’s what I do growing up in the business. I know if I really stop and think about it how special that is. Any business that’s been around for eighty-eight years that’s not a bank or an insurance company is pretty unique. *[Laughs]*

01:13:09

And you know the—I know you know everybody—every kid wants to make their parents proud and even though my grandfather and father both said to me, “Don’t feel like you have to do this,” as I tell my children. But the long and short of it is you get more—I don’t care what job you have I guess—you get real pleasure out of it especially when your name is on it and you

have customers that come up to you and tell you, “You know, that made our Christmas,” or “I want that—I just want to let you know how great the service was.” And I try to make sure that whoever else works here that was intricately involved with either a good service issue or dealing with maybe a problem that came up, you know it always makes you feel good to hear back customer feedback. And at the end of the year you’ve made a little bit of money at the same time.

01:14:14

SW: And how many hams would you say every year that you—come through this place?

01:14:18

SE: Right now we’re doing about 50,000, 55,000. That sounds a lot to some people but there are several ham producers in this country that produce well over 1,000,000 pieces a year. And there’s quite a few that produces hundreds of thousands. I would say, Edwards along with about another six or eight other—maybe not even that many anymore are in the same size bracket, you know somewhere between 30,(000) and 60,000 and then it kind of jumps up into the hundreds and then in the millions.

01:15:07

You know, I have misconceptions about how big a lot of these guys are. Some of them I think are really, really big aren't and they're really, really, really small. And some that I've never heard of before when I walk in their plant I go, “Holy cow, you guys—I mean literally millions of country hams.” And I'll be honest with you, some of the guys that are doing millions of country hams are doing a really—for that many hams—incredibly consistent job. They're still

not able to do what I call that really niche(y) eighteen month-old. I mean they'd have to have a building you know the size of a major municipal building to do that kind of work.

01:15:49

I just—ultimately I wish for the entire country ham industry that—that Americans would hold in high regard the ham producers in this country as they do—I've been to Spain and when you walk in—I mean I don't know, they've got thousands of ham producers there but they must eat ham breakfast, lunch, and dinner—it's an iconic product for Spain and Italy. And they're held in very, very high regard.

01:16:19

I can remember walking in to restaurants with the local ham guy and the place would be packed. And it was like a sea would open. People would just open up and he would just walk right through and they'd put him in the table, the—the prime spot in the restaurant and I'm going, "Wow. That's—I was really impressed by that." Whereas you know in the states we're just a—you know we're butchers. We're—we're meat guys. I like to think that someday the appreciation level would get just a little bit better.

01:16:55

SW: Have you ever had a day where it's come close to that?

01:16:57

SE: Oh no, no, no, not—not like what I saw in Spain, nothing, nothing. I mean I'm—I'm thrilled to death that people like SFA is doing what they're doing because I think it's not just

hams. It's—it's you know any—the history of the food and where it came from and the misconceptions about where it came from and how it got here, you're—the whole function of it is very enlightening.

01:17:26

Certainly it's educating me. And I—you know I'd like to think—well first of all, it is very nice to see, again I hate to keep mentioning, I don't want to mention any chefs' names because I'm afraid I'm going to forget somebody but it is really cool to go to a major restaurant in Charleston or—or Richmond, Virginia or New York and—and see—of course Edwards Country Ham on the—or Virginia Ham on the menu but anybody's country ham and—and call it a country—the Great American Country Ham. That is really what I'd like to—to see continue to grow.

01:18:11

SW: Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important, something that I didn't ask you that you think is important for people to know about Edwards and Sons, or anything we talked about?

01:18:23

SE: No, not really. No, you—you hit all the right questions. There's no—you left no stone unturned.

01:18:36

SW: And where—where—what's your family's lineage? I meant to ask you that but where—where are your grandfather's people from?

01:18:43

SE: Well the—the furthest I've ever been—and again this is very—a nominal look was back to the 1800s—early 1800s and that's from Surry and Alawite County, which is the next county over. Now my grandmother's side of—came from the Eastern Shore, which was Captain Jester. Now my mother is from Pennsylvania. I don't know how that got stuck in there. I don't know how we—how that happened. We kid her about that all the time.

01:19:20

Now my daughter is getting ready to get married though and she's marrying a guy from New Jersey so—. [*Laughs*] We're moving the Mason Dixon Line a little bit.

01:19:29

SW: Well thank you for doing this Sam. I really appreciate it.

01:19:31

SE: Sure, yeah. It was a pleasure.

01:19:33

[End Sam Edwards, III Interview]