

Interview of: Charles Gatton, Jr.
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Interview Date: August 23, 2005

August 25, 2005

Interviewee: Charles Gatton, Jr.
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Location: Gatton Farms-Bremen, KY
August 23, 2005

[Begin Charles Gatton, Jr.]

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Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Tuesday, August 23, 2005 and I'm in Bremen, Kentucky at Father's Country Hams with Charles Gatton, Jr. And Mr. Gatton would you mind saying your name and your birthday for the record if you don't mind.

0:00:16.8

Charles Gatton: Okay, sure; my name is Charles Gatton, Jr., and my birthday is July 8, 1952.

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AE: And can you tell us a little bit about--a little history of Gatton Farms and the ham business?

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CG: Sure, I'd love to. Actually--actually our farm has been in our family since 1840 and back in the 1800s my great-great grandmother, Susie, used to serve meat out of the family smokehouse and tea and that's what actually started our business. In the 1950s, my dad taught vocational agriculture and he decided that one of the classes that they would cure some country hams and the-the weather didn't cooperate with them and I think a flood came and they lost most of the

hams they cured and it was several years later before he actually started Father's Country Hams. And he named the business after his father; that's why it's called Father's. But today we do a full line of gourmet food products. We actually have 10 different flavors of gourmet bacon. We make dry rubs here also for cooking and through the ability of making dry rubs we can make the flavored bacons. But all the bacon we do are dry cured. It's all--everything we do is done the old-fashioned way. It's all done by hand. I oversee every batch of cure that's made personally myself.

I recently had surgery and they couldn't cure bacon until I was able to come over and watch it being weighed to make sure it was right. But originally we only had hickory bacon for probably about 30-some years and bacon is one of the number one consumed products of the world. So we decided that we would add the pepper bacon and a cinnamon flavored bacon, and we were being featured in national magazines such as *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Food & Wine*, *Cooks Illustrated*--about our bacons. So we decided that we would have three flavors. And I do a television show; started actually in year 2002 on *Home Shopping Network* and we've sold several thousands of pounds of dry-cured bacon on *Home Shopping* that we actually take a slab of bacon when we do the show and people don't know what a slab of bacon--you know they've never seen one before--before we introduced them to what bacon looks like before it's sliced.

But from that one of the buyers told us that we needed some more flavors and I guess she's responsible for us now doing 10 different flavors of gourmet bacon. And they're all dry-cured and it's all done by hand.

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AE: What do you think about all these different flavors of bacon and--and all these boutique bacons they call them?

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CG: Well I know it's--when my dad was living, we cured about 4,000 pounds of bacon a year and last year we did somewhere around 100,000 pounds of dry cured bacon and that's a lot of hand--hands-on operations because it's all done by hand and nothing automated about it at all. But I think you know--our biggest problem has been educating the public and whenever I do a television show, I buy one of the nation's top brands of regular bacon that has water-cured in it and we cook it on there and we show the difference in a dry-cured product like what you've seen today versus one that's got water injected into it, and there's about almost half the difference in size. I mean when ours is cooked, it's almost the same size it starts out at.

And one reason for that is [*Coughs*] excuse me--we hand-trim the sides of the bacon when it comes in so you're really just getting the center portion of it. And then another reason for that is we have about a 16 to 12 percent shrinkage in our bacon and that's meat--water lost out of the meat where the other people can pump enough water in that they have really no shrinkage. And then--and it's on the label; I mean they're very honest. Their--their label will say cured with water and salt where ours is going to say cured with salt and sugars. So we use no water in our production at all. And we're real proud of that; we're proud of being able to still do things the old-fashioned way. We're one of the--you know there's still not a lot of us out here that--that still does it the old-fashioned way you know.

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AE: Can you walk through briefly the steps that it takes to cure bacon and talk about those custom smokers that you use?

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CG: Sure; when we get our bacon in, we--we buy from one source only. We buy from Premium Standard Farms. We feel like we get the best quality meat. It's--it's shipped in fresh; we get it the same day... like if it's trimmed off it's here the next morning, so it's--and the same way for our hams that we get from them. Then from that we--we make our own cure; we use salts, brown sugar and white sugar in most of our cures and sodium nitrate and we hand rub each slab of bacon when it comes in. It goes in a cooler at 39-degree temperature; it stays in the cooler normally 10--10 days. I mean sometimes we'll get a weekend and we'll stretch that out a little bit but normally we--we keep it in the cooler 10 days, and of course we're USDA inspected so our regulations say seven days but we normally keep it 10 to 12 days depending upon how the--the days fall; so we don't have to--you know we don't have to have a meat inspector here. Then after that it's air-dried for 48 hours and we like natural ventilation. When--when the temperature is where we can we use natural ventilation. When it's hot in the summer time we run it through an equalization room at 55 to 60-degrees and dry it down so it doesn't come out of the 39-degrees straight into 100-degrees temperature.

From that after it's been air-dried, we have probably the most primitive smokers in the world. We're probably the--the only people that do this, but we actually have smokers that I

showed you earlier that are built on wheels and we build our fires outside and then when they get to smoking real good we roll them in the smokehouse. And one of those fires will last for 48 hours. So we use two smokers at a time to smoke our bacon and it usually takes two rounds of that. So normally it's 96 hours of smoking to get us the color that we're--we're seeking. I mean we would have the flavor in less time than that if we wanted to do a--a shorter version. You know we could--probably one smoking would give us the smoke flavor but we're after the color and the appearance of--of an old-fashioned quality product and that's one thing that as we've grown in the business, you know we've modernized by buying an automatic slicing machine, but we haven't changed any of the original methods that were done back before the days of refrigeration. I mean we can still say that our bacon has been tested--micro-tested and proven safe to be kept 90 days non-refrigerated. And we had to prove that--we made that statement to *Home Shopping* and their QA people said prove it and--and we did send it off to private laboratories and had it tested and at 90 days it was as good as it was the day it was packaged.

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AE: Can you describe a little bit the color that you try to achieve when smoking?

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CG: We're kind of looking for a--sort of a pecan color, kind of a deep--deep golden brown color is--is what we're trying to achieve. It makes it very attractive and it gives you that really smoke-
aroma flavor when you cook it you know. And--and we run into all kinds of experiences

especially with--with *Home Shopping*; you know they have 100 percent satisfaction guarantee and we run very low on that. We had no returns out of our own business, but even with their return system we run about a two percent return, which is extremely low for food for them. But you know our biggest thing is educating the people. People that aren't used to country cured products tend to think that country bacon is salty and you know we use a total different cure formulation to do our bacon and our hams to prevent it from being salty. But still if you're not used to salt then country bacon is going to give you that little salty kick that--that it's supposed to you know. But--but ours is not as salty as a lot of bacon.

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AE: And you were describing earlier to me about your combination of brown sugar and white sugar and how if you use too much brown sugar the rub won't take.

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CG: Well in our experience, you know we've--we've basically kept our recipe the same forever and we've worked with some new products for some private label--for some other people and we've tried to--we use a lot of--of brown sugar and white sugar in our cure and we've upped our brown sugar before and it--and it gets it so that it just doesn't want to lay on the--on the bacon the way that I like for it to lay. You know that's my--my biggest objection to it I guess. So I like to mix the two together, and that's what makes everybody's products--have its own unique flavor, you know ours versus somebody else; it's that--it's the atmosphere, the way it's done, the curing

process, actually the climate in different areas is different, so it kind of gives it a different flavor. You know our ham tastes different from other people's. Our bacon will taste different from others.

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AE: And how did you develop the list of 10 fancy bacons that you have? There's a vanilla bourbon and apple--

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CG: There's quite a story behind that one. We were featured in magazines all across the United States and I know *GQ* magazine had Jennifer Lopez as the cover but our ham house was the centerfold; so we were real honored with that one. But we decided that we needed--Dan Phillips was a big inspiration of mine. Dan wants to take bacon to space sometime and I'm sure he will. But we decided that since bacon was one of the number one consumed products in the nation when you look at all the other meats together that we should offer different flavors of bacon so that people wouldn't have to eat the same thing all the time. So back in the 1800s as I told you earlier, my great-grandmother was really huge on tea and we decided to develop a line of gourmet tea that would be like the best in the world and it took us two years to find the best tea pre-mix and the best flavoring company in the world and we make a line of tea in memory of great-grandmother because she's the one that started the whole thing. So we wanted to do

something for Susie and we made the first ever Splenda tea before Splenda even got popular; we had a sugar-free tea made with Splenda.

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AE: Was this iced tea or hot tea?

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CG: You can make it hot or iced either one. But from that I soon learned that I could take the same dry flavors that we make of the teas and turn it into any flavor of bacon that I can want to do by making a dry rub. And we also have 10 dry rubs that we sell to cook with, too that we've developed through our own tastes and--and experimentation here. We have an FDA facility as well as a USDA, so all of our seasonings and--and teas and all are done under FDA and our meat business is done under USDA. So after my father died in year 2000, we wanted to turn the business into more of a gourmet year-round food business instead of just ham, bacon, and sausage that we were for 50 years. So that's why we added all the different bacons. We do a vanilla bourbon, which is like a little bit of Kentucky; you know you've got to have a little bourbon and--and the vanilla just kind of gives it a little special flavor. We do a peach cinnamon bacon for the State of Georgia; it's their number one selling bacon--is peach cinnamon. It's like peaches and cinnamon right off the tree. We do an apple cinnamon; we had a lady that was going to do an apple festival in Georgia and I was walking through the office and they told her we didn't do an apple bacon. And I said sure; I said within an hour we'll have--we'll do her an apple

cinnamon flavored bacon and I went over to the lab and we mixed up our apple cinnamon bacon. So we do an apple cinnamon, a peach cinnamon, a blueberry cinnamon flavor for people that raise blueberries and like blueberries, and they're all made with dry rub. So we use no liquids to do our flavoring so when we--actually the--to make our flavored bacons we rub them a second time. After we slice the bacon, we rub the dry rub on the sliced bacon and then we vacuum pack it so it seals into the--to the meat and it--it actually penetrates into the meat so it's like curing it a second time. We do the pepper bacon; we do a Cajun bacon. That was quite an experience for us to do--to do a Cajun bacon. Being from Kentucky, even--I haven't found a Cajun bacon even in Louisiana, but we had to make a completely different dry rub than what we sell to do the Cajun bacon because if you normally would use a Cajun spice the bacon would be so salty you'd have to spit it out. So we had to develop a specific product that we use only for the Cajun bacon. We do a honey-barbecue bacon; it's got a little more smoked flavor, a little sweeter flavored bacon for people that want something just a little more smokey and a little sweeter, very--very outstanding in flavor; but they all start out as--as the base of--of the hickory bacon. Everything we do is a hickory bacon base. The pepper bacon is pepper before it's smoked. The cinnamon sugar bacon is--is coated before it's smoked and everything else is coated after it's smoked.

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AE: And then you also sell a cooked bacon also you said?

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CG: Uh-hm; we--as far as I know we're one of the few companies that will actually sell a dry cured gourmet fully cooked bacon product. We do the pepper bacon and we do the hickory bacon and the nice thing about our products is you know you--we actually have solar heating labels on the back of some of our products, so if you're going on a camping trip or whatever, you can place the product in the sun and let the sun warm it up and it's ready to eat right out of the package because it's cured; it's safe and it's been cooked to very high internal temperatures. We cook our products to--well the bacon gets over 200 degrees; so I mean we cook to very high internal temperatures and then we rapidly chill it down and vacuum seal it so it will keep very good. But our package--you know the big thing about our bacons is it's like two slices of bacon that you would buy that wasn't dry cured and you know the same thing with--we do a six-ounce package of fully cooked bacon but that six-ounce package of fully cooked bacon is equal to a tremendous amount of--of the fully cooked bacons you see on the market today because our slices are still thick and they're still nice, long, and big, you know compared to the other. We've even made bacon bits; we've taken the bacon and--and cooked bacon bits. Some of the products we do are actually more time consuming and trouble than they're worth, you know. But we try to offer different products. We do a cured pork loin that's very unique. We've even done a cured beef rib eye. We actually cured prime rib or whole rib eyes, trimmed off rib eyes, cured them, smoked them, peppered them, and cooked them--fully cooked and people would take them on hiking trips and they could put it on a rock and they could have the best prime rib they ever ate in their life right out in the middle of nowhere and so we've--you know there's--there's a lot of very unique products that we've made here at Father's Country Hams and Gourmet Foods that nobody else in the world does and we're real proud of that.

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AE: And tell me about your beef bacon that I've read about.

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CG: Okay; we--we take a--we do a beef bacon. We actually did the beef bacon for health reasons because there's so many people in the world that think that bacon is not healthy and it's one of the things I've done on--on *Home Shopping Network*. I just recently did a show a week ago--is I've tried to educate the world that bacon is not bad for you because if you cook bacon the proper way and you--and we like--I mean our bacon cooks great in a microwave for instance--even in today's busy lifestyle, you can stick the bacon in the microwave for three minutes, you can finish getting dressed and you walk out the door with a strip of bacon in your hand. You know that's life. But the--the fat and the calories literally melt out of the bacon when it's cooked; so bacon is really not a bad food for you. I mean it's a very healthy product for you to eat. But we decided to do the beef bacon because there were people that for some reason or another--religion beliefs or doctor's advice could not eat pork. So we take a trimmed off beef brisket and we use the same cure and the same technique but we--as we do with our pepper bacon, the same exact thing and then we--we sell it as--as a sliced beef bacon and it's very, very delicious.. Right off the grill it gives you a steak(y) type flavor; if you let it sit and get a little on the cool side it kind of would remind you of a jerky. So it's kind of in between the two--the two products, but if you're having it for breakfast and you cooked it for breakfast it's just unbelievable if it's hot, but you

know if it sits there it's going to give you more of a jerky type flavor from being you know cured and--and dehydrated like it is.

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AE: Well since you've developed your product line so much in the past five years or so is--with all of these specialty products is it now kind of--is it outweighing your country ham business or is there some competition there; how does that work out?

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CG: [*Laughs*] The bacon has kind of taken over--really. It was kind of amazing; my daughter was getting married in 2003 and we were doing the Fancy Food Show in Chicago and we were at Macy's for my wife--was looking for wedding dresses--and somebody hollers out Mr. Bacon, and you know it--they had seen me on *Home Shopping Network* you know; but actually now we do more bacon than any other thing in our--in our business. It's our biggest item, you know. And the thing that we've really educated and--and been so successful at is that we're really big in the gift basket industry in--in the gourmet shops that in the past thought that they--they couldn't use a food product in a gift and we have proven to them that you know you can put bacon in and everybody likes bacon. There's a new cookbook that came out recently and it's been out about two years now I guess that Sara Perry wrote; I'm sure you've seen it *Everything Tastes Better with Bacon* and that is literally--literally the truth. We make the Cajun bacon and you can take our Cajun bacon and wrap it around shrimp or scallops and I guarantee you can have the best

shrimp or scallops you ever ate in your life because the bacon will cook into the--into the seafood. And we--we did the first ever low-carb show on *Home Shopping Network* and we featured--we did a series of recipes and one of there recipes is a hot bacon dressing where you can save your--the bacon grease and make a dressing sort of like *Rafferty's*; it tastes very similar to that with Splenda and several ways that you could use bacon on a low-carb lifestyle. And I'm proud; I lost 60--about 65 pounds doing that show because it made me aware--on the way to Florida I studied about you know a low-carb lifestyle and that's one reason that we have 10 different dry rubs to cook with because all of them are--have zero sugar in them basically to cook with.

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AE: Wow.

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CG: And since then we also have a relatively new product out that's going crazy right now; we developed the same line of--of flavors that you can flavor your own coffee, your own ice-cream; it's like--at our home it's like being at Jerry's. Do we want chocolate amaretto ice-cream or do we want chocolate cherry cordial or what--and we have made these flavors with Splenda so that people can actually carry them in their purpose and if they'd like a black cherry Diet Rite there's a measuring spoon in the package. It takes a half a teaspoon and you've got a black cherry flavored Coke that's better than anything in the world. And we have, I think at the current time

we have--we took them to Florida and introduced them and people went so crazy over them. We introduced them in Cool Whip and everybody went so crazy over them that we came back and we just made our full line of--of flavors and all types of flavors.

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AE: So how do--how are those things developed? Do you have like a chemist here who--that's his job is to--

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CG: No, it's me.

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AE: It's you?

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CG: It's me, yeah. My wife was gone to Florida--she had a good friend that--she's an RN and she had a good friend that was literally dying and she wanted to go help take care of her. So we had been buying low-carb syrups for our own personal use and I went in--we have an FDA lab and I went in--in the lab and I decided that I was going to create a flavor--a dry flavor mix that

you could add to any kind of beverage or ice-cream or whatever and it's so new for us, we just introduced it in Atlanta last week and--and everybody has just gone totally crazy over it. But we buy--we're on allocation on Splenda because we--we were actually one of the first people to use Splenda and we get our total quota in every month that we can get, so you know we're prepared to do whatever we need to do. But we have several different flavors of that and I--I get a big kick; I tell everybody that our chocolate is better than chocolate and they kind of look at you because everybody is a chocolate lover. But if you've ever experienced our chocolate flavor it's--there's no comparison to it. So it is a lot of possibilities. We haven't really gone to the gourmet chef industry with it yet, but you can take our flavors and--and make any kind of recipe you want and make it low-carb and it's--it's just an--it's an amazing new product for us.

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AE: All this out of little Bremen, Kentucky?

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CG: Yeah.

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AE: What do you think your father would say about all this?

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CG: [*Laughs*] He would have mixed feelings on some of it I'm sure, but I think he'd be proud of it. He would think 10--10 flavors of bacon was a little extreme and I've made a promise to everybody that we're not--we're not going to do anymore. We've--we've only had one failure in all the bacons that we've tried and--and I can fix that today, but we tried to make--as--as a joke we do a food show in Atlanta and all the candy people are there in Atlanta said they're going to quit coming when I come out with a chocolate flavored bacon. So I--I attempted to make a chocolate flavored bacon and my--my dry rub for it--chocolate basically has a bitter flavor without a lot of sugar, and to put the amount of sugar I needed to make the chocolate bacon, the bacon was going to burn. But you could actually take our Splenda version of our chocolate and sprinkle it on your bacon and you can have the best chocolate bacon in your life. Your chocolate dreams are--are met because I've done it. But I'm--I'm happy with 10 flavors [*Laughs*] and--and I don't know what USDA would say about me making a Splenda version. I don't know if Splenda is approved for curing bacon. I--I--they would probably let me use it as a dry rub, but we're not--we're probably not going to go there, but we--you can do it yourself. I'll give you a package and you can take it home and make chocolate bacon.

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AE: Okay; [*Laughs*] that--that has to be tried.

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CG: Yeah.

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AE: Can't let that go. Well what is the future of Gatton Family Farms and Father's Hams?

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CG: Well that's a really good question I guess. We intend to work with the products that we have now. We probably will not expand anymore flavors unless somebody comes up and they want a--a black cherry amaretto bacon for a festival--yes; I can do it in a matter of--of 10 minutes I've got it, you know. Once we made our first dry rub, I can do any flavor imaginable. And the nice thing about it--it's dry; you know it doesn't add any water to it. It's not like adding a syrup or anything like that; it's a dry rub. But you know we've expanded our--our seasoning line; we've got some of the best seasonings in the world and we're selling them to gourmet chefs. We're private labeling for other companies on our spices, as well as our teas and our bacon, also. So we're real happy with where--where we stand? I guess our development in the--in the near future is going to be more into our retail side instead of the wholesale side. We have a lot of great gourmet places that we deal with but they don't understand when you handle a product, like if we cure a country ham, we do it the old-fashioned way and I mean old-fashioned. I showed you around; you know that ham is handled about 20 times before it leaves our plant by hand, and by the time we handle the bacon and it's dry cured and it loses its 12 to 16 percent shrinkage out of

it and it's dry cured and it's all handled by hand, we have a hard time convincing the wholesaler that our bacon is worth maybe \$7 a package or \$8 a package and they're selling something else for \$4 but yet, we're still cheaper than the cheap brand because we've got--it's worth twice as much because it doesn't disappear before your eyes. So that's a battle that we've had for years; we never really wanted to start out as being a wholesale, large bacon distributor because of the time consumption. We were one of Dan Phillips' first customers of--of the *Grateful Palate* and we--you know we don't turn down any new business, but I think you know in the future our--our goals are more toward *Home Shopping Network* and working more with our--our internet site ourselves; more direct sale to the customer is where we want to be, because now people from their own home--they don't even have to get dressed to go shopping you know. I mean you can be in your pajamas and you can order bacon from California on the internet and we'll ship it out tomorrow and in four or five days your bacon is going to be there and you don't have to go to the store and pack it inside, you know. And that's the nice thing about today and it's--it's an age that--my dad thought the internet was horrible. He couldn't imagine why we had a simple site at that time where now I think we have one of the best sites in the--in the meat industry. And it's going to get better because we've got a lot of new products to add. We've got to schedule a photo session next week to get some new products added. But--but we've been real pleased with--with our success and I've got a son that's 27 and at this point in his life all he wants to do is farm, and I kind of know how he feels because I used to hate the ham business myself with a passion. I had a farm supply business here and farmed and my dad would just tell you if you called up that we didn't have the product because he wouldn't ask me to make it, and that's when we just had bacon, ham, and a sausage. It was a simple life back then. But the--the ham business was actually created because we had a lot of tenant farmers that lived here on the farm. We furnished them a

house to live in and it gave them work to do in the winter time so that way we could offer them year-round employment. And now we've grown to the point where we ship out several boxes a day year-round; it doesn't matter whether it's 100 degrees and--and when we do the television shows we really stress that--that you know hey, if your bacon comes in and it's hot to touch, don't be scared; it's okay because we constantly you know have people concerned about in the summer time you know is it safe to ship the bacon. Well sometimes in our smokehouse it gets up to 100 degrees when we're smoking and it does--it just gives it more color and just makes it look prettier, really.

0:29:09.0

AE: Do you still maintain a considerable local customer base?

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CG: [*Coughs*] Excuse me; we don't have a lot of local customer base because we're so far out in the country. I'm surprised you found us. But we--at Christmas time we have a--a tremendous local--I mean it's like standing in line, kind of like you're at Wal-Mart you know. But the mail order and corporate is really big for us and that's--that's an area we really want to expand in--in our local area is corporate sales. We sell to a lot of companies that do corporate baskets--a lot. I mean a big portion of our business has been developed through corporate companies that do corporate work. But we've got one lady that works for us on a part-time basis that has taken a little town that is no bigger than Madisonville and has done a tremendous corporate volume just

in that one little town. So hopefully if I get to feeling better--I've had some surgery that you know I'm going to work maybe in the Waynesburg area and we're going to work more on our corporate level because being the producer of the products for us to do corporate gifts is more--more attractive than selling it to--to somebody else and them doing it. And of course we're not competing in an area--if we had somebody that was doing corporate gifts in Louisville or a certain area, you know we wouldn't go into that area and try to--to sell corporate gifts, but in areas that--that we're not working in then that's an area that I think we need to--to expand our business in. And it's really a fast production; it's like when we do a *Home Shopping Show* we may--at one time, the first show we ever did, we sold 6,000 packages of bacon in 10 minutes and they went into 2,000 homes and the orders had to be shipped in 24 hours, and we've gotten pretty good at it now. The first time it was--it was chaos and now it's just a--you know it's not a big deal to do--to do a show and do a large mailing like that. But you know corporate gifts are really nice for us because we can make several of them at a time and it's--it's a lot easier to do than filling--now you know people that used to be here complain because we have too many products, because it used to be a simple life when you just had ham, bacon, and sausage. But you know we have everything from a line of gourmet jellies to salad dressings to all the products we make ourselves. So we've grown into such a--such a vast amount of products that it's a little harder to fill an order today than it used to because somebody may want 10 different items on the list which is what we intended for it to do, but at Christmas time it does--it does make it a little more complicated to fill the orders.

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AE: How many employees do you keep here on a regular--

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CG: On a regular basis we try to keep two on a--on a full-time basis besides my wife and myself; we have had as many as 40 people here during the holiday seasons and it's--it depends on volume. I mean not--not necessarily on volume; it depends on the time of the year. You know if we're doing a *Home Shopping Show* and we get enough notice where we can do it--we can usually get by with three or four people. But we have usually a lot of the same people every year, so you know everybody is always wanting extra money at Christmas time and that's when we really crank up and get busy other than *HSN*--is from October through December is our--our busy time. And then after that we have our curing season, but you know it really used--used to be all--90 percent of our business was done from October to December and we wanted to change that and we have. I mean we're busy year-round now and we have made a big difference in adding the new products and--and all the different other products that we have also.

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AE: I know you have an appointment, but I want to ask you two more questions about--

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CG: Sure.

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AE: --the old days and if your father ever cured hams from hogs he raised?

0:33:28.5

CG: Yes, ma'am; we used to have hog killings here on the farm and we used--raised our own hogs. We had a hog--we had two hog operations where we raised our own hogs. And then when we went federal-inspected we had to buy from federal-inspected plants but we used to kill the hogs and the original smokehouse unfortunately--we tore it down to build my dad a new garage and now I wished it was here. We've got some smokehouses at some of the other tenant houses and there's one that I'm going to preserve because it's one of the original smokehouses that was done back in the 1800s but it's not here at this location. But we used--they used to build their fires and scald the hogs and--and do the whole process here and back in the 1800s. I mean that's what started the whole process, yeah.

0:34:16.3

AE: Did you ever experience that growing up; did they have their hog killings?

0:34:20.4

CG: I vaguely remember as a small child when we did hog killing. I can remember we used--it used to be a chicken house where the ham house is now and in front of the chicken house they used to have chickens here. In front of the chicken house they would have the--the pit to scald the hogs and--and they would have people come in for the hog killing in the fall of the year and that was before we ever started commercially. So the history goes back to 1840 is--I mean how far back it actually goes to actual proof of curing and preserving a meat on this family farm that has been in our family since 1840.

0:35:00.9

AE: Well that's amazing; that's a great story.

0:35:03.7

CG: Yeah.

0:35:04.3

AE: And a great future you've created.

0:35:07.1

CG: And hopefully when my son gets older he'll be more like me and he'll decide that--when my father died, we had a farm supply business and did a tremendous volume of anything from farm chemicals to animal health products to seed and was one of the larger distributors in this part of the--the State of Kentucky and when dad died we had to make a decision of what to do. And we closed down all the other businesses and we decided that we wanted to expand the gourmet food business. And we've--we've been very happy with our expansion and hopefully my son when he gets older will--I know--I know where he's at because I used to hate to have to walk across that driveway to sell somebody a ham because I was in--in the other business. But hopefully when he gets a little older in his life he'll--he'll carry on the tradition. If not I guess it'll--it'll just die out like some other things have. But we would never sell our--our business. There's been ham business that have been sold and still operated under the same name they were before, but we'll never do that. Whenever Father's ceases to exist it will--it will just stop; I mean we won't--we won't sell our--our formulas or labels or name or anything. It's just--it's just not something we'd ever do. You know we're--you know we're proud of our heritage and you know we're--we're going to keep it in the family as long as somebody in the family wants to do it and we have spent a tremendous amount of money since my dad died in remodeling and building cooking facilities and it seemed like everything was wore out. You know how the older people wanted to be so conservative and you--so we've remodeled all of our coolers and basically have a new plant even though we didn't change the bins that the hams hang in. It's still like a tobacco barn. **[Laughs]** It's still done by hand the old-fashioned way and we're probably going to change some of the methods that we've been doing. Instead of getting full semi-loads of hams in to cure at one time, we're probably going to do smaller batches of hams. As--as I've gotten kind of a little older myself and had the surgery, you know 600 every week sounds better than 1,200 at one

time, you know. So we're probably going to make some minor changes like that but usually when we get in bacon to cure, we get in 6,000 pounds of fresh bellies at a time to cure and it's all dry cured and you know that's--and we'll do that about every two weeks. So you know normally we're looking at you know at least 12,000 pounds a month and some months will peak more than that. It depends on--on the season and the weather, too, you know; but--

0:37:51.6

AE: Well, I don't want to keep you.

0:37:52.8

CG: That's--no; that's fine.

0:37:53.1

AE: That's it.

0:37:54.8

CG: And I'll show you where we do our flavors and stuff, too.

0:37:58.5

AE: Okay; well thank you, sir.

0:37:59.1

[End Charles Gatton, Jr.]