



Leonard Brown

Brown's Farm

* * *

Date: June 29, 2023

Location: Brown's Farm, Water Valley, MS

Interviewer: Sarah I. Rodriguez

Transcription: Sharp Copy Transcription, LLC

Length: 1 hour 8 minutes 32 seconds

Project: Oxford Community Market

0:00:00

Sarah Rodriguez: This is Sarah Rodriguez with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is June 29th, 2023. I am here in Water Valley, Mississippi. Do you mind introducing yourself for the recorder? Tell us who you are, and what you do?

Leonard Brown: Yes, I’m Leonard Brown, and I really operate the Brown’s Farm, and we grow a series of herbs, livestock like the goats and the chickens and the cattle. And, we do some fruit trees like the pears and the persimmons, along with a few others.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you go back and tell me where you grew up, and who you grew up with?

Leonard Brown: Well, I grew up—

Sarah Rodriguez: And where you were born.

Leonard Brown: —on this farm, with my parents. Which is, right here, this is the— basically this is the area. This is not the exact house, but anyway.

0:01:02

Sarah Rodriguez: Is it the same land?

Leonard Brown: It’s the same land.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, okay.

Leonard Brown: Yeah, same land. So it’s very familiar to me. [laughs]

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah! And you were born around here as well?

Leonard Brown: I was born here. I ended up going away for a period of time and then came back, and assumed the responsibility of trying to maintain the farm and trying to promote it where it’d make it productive. And also other things have offered [sp] itself [sp] to—like we’re doing somewhat of a little bit of a tour, tour business. We also have areas where we’ve had some campers to come out, from different times. So we’re trying to promote that.

0:02:00

So basically we're trying to make it a fun and recreational type location. We do [rooster crowing in background] lots of wildlife. We have a wildlife program, and we have—most of the people that’s involved in that are from mostly the Memphis area, the Memphis, Tennessee, area. But anyway, it’s a lot of work out here. It’s enjoyable. From time to time we get people that like to come out and look around and see what we have here. Like yesterday we had probably—we had over 40 people from five different states that came in, and they were—somewhat impressed. So I think they enjoyed it, and in fact, some were asking about the possibility of coming back. So, this is what we do.

0:03:00

But you maybe can ask me any detailed information.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. Especially because you grew up on this land, could you tell me a bit about what it was like [rooster crowing in background] growing up, who was in your family, siblings?

Leonard Brown: Well, it was my dad, my mom. My grandparent was here. And it was five children.

Sarah Rodriguez: Where are you in the line?

Leonard Brown: I was the number three. [laughs]

Sarah Rodriguez: Right in the middle.

Leonard Brown: [laughs] Yeah. So, anyway, we actually lived off the land. [rooster crowing in background] My dad—we actually grew produce. We grew—everything that we used basically came off the land. In fact, the house that we in right now came off this land. It was—all the trees were cut and the lumber was made. So we lived off the land, and he sold produce in Grenada, Mississippi. So we was able to—

0:04:07

Sarah Rodriguez: That y'all grew here?

Leonard Brown: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, we've had I'd say a good life. And it's been—on the farm, it's a lot of hard work. [laughs] It's quite a bit of hard work. But, you know, you gotta like it. And anyway, we did okay. He grew livestock, like the cows, the—in fact, at that time, he had chickens, had hogs. And all type of produce, like the watermelons, peas, okra, tomatoes, carrots, beets, just about any—I can't even remember them all—cantaloupes—just about any vegetable that you would find in the grocery store was grown right here.

0:05:12

They did a lot of canning, so we had food for the winter. We had the [rooster crowing in background]—we had everything that was—even when we processed beef or pork or what have you, it was canned also. So we had our meat. We had just everything that they have in town. [laughs] So, we basically lived off the land. Of course, right now, I'm not doin as many—much

of the produce. I more or less specialize in the herbs, because that’s a very important part of people’s diet, is the herbs.

0:06:04

Sarah Rodriguez: Did y'all do herbs growing up as well?

Leonard Brown: We did a very few. We might have done sage. As I can remember, sage was the major one. We did quite a bit of apples, peaches. We had a big peach orchard, about five acres. So we did that. We had all the fruits. We had people that came here and purchased fruit from all over the county, by the bushels. [rooster crowing in background] So, anyway, the other minor items, like I said, like the okra, the peas, and tomatoes, we did quite a bit of that because we had more manpower to do it. I don’t have as much labor.

0:07:00

I’ve got one person that helps me. But those things have to be picked and marketed at a certain time. If you don’t, they go bad. Well, like the herbs, they will constantly produce, and you just clip them, and you can throw it away, they gonna produce more. But like the tomatoes, you can have a big investment; if you don’t pick—they only gonna produce so many, so if you throw away half of them, then you can’t regain that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you tell me a bit about also who—you mentioned there was more manpower as you were growing up, when your parents were working on the farm.

Leonard Brown: Yeah, my brothers and two sisters, my dad and my mom, so we—plus, from time to time, he would get different people in the community to help do things. So we had much more manpower than I have.

0:08:04

So I try to limit what I can do. So it’s working out. It’s working out. So I do the farmer’s market in Oxford, and I’m probably the only one that specializes in major herbs. You know, we have some other vendors do two or three, but basically I produce more than most of the vendors. So it works out. And then, like I said, it doesn't take as much manpower, too. It takes some power, some hours to do it, but it’s not like you’re gatherin 100 watermelons, maybe two bushels of tomatoes, you know, and then once you get those harvested, then you've got to market it in a reasonable short period of time.

0:09:05

So that’s basically it. Like I said, the farm is really [rooster crowing in background] self-sustaining. We got a good water supply. We got runnin springs. We got a well that’s where we get our water. And we do have some springs that run year-round, you know. If we didn’t have the well, we could use the springs. But we got—course we do have the community water system going through, but we're not on it, because we run water [rooster crowing in background]—the bill would be huge [laughs] with the amount of water that we use out here. But we have plenty of trees to make lumber. I do have a mill where I can make my own lumber, and we have all the trees that you need.

0:10:01

It’s approximately 400 acres in here. So we have all types of wood to do the mushrooms. And so the resources is here. It’s plentiful. I’ll put it that way. So basically I tell people that you could survive on this land if you—even if you didn’t have grocery stores or what have you. You could

actually survive, if you would know how to go out here and collect certain foods that grow natural. So I know how to do some of it, [laughs] not all of it. But you know, you got trees that you can do your house, your barns. You got natural nuts and things that’s growin natural. In the summer you got your grapes, your wild grapes. You got your muscadines.

0:11:07

Sarah Rodriguez: Where did you learn this information about how to use the land and what foods—?

Leonard Brown: It was somewhat—I saw my people do it, and—

Sarah Rodriguez: Like your family and your community?

Leonard Brown: It’s kinda like a pass-down deal. I’m doing things on a little different order than my parents did. But basically we got the—the basic structure came from what they were doin. I’m not growin the big fields of cotton or corn or potatoes or watermelons. I’m not doin that. I just grow a small amount of those, more or less for personal usage.

0:12:00

Like I said, we doin much of the same thing; it’s just like on a little different order. But the basic structure is here. We didn’t have a wildlife program when they were here, but I’ve had that set up, where it’s kind of organized, and it’s somewhat productive, and it provides recreation for—yeah, that’s another thing. We’d like for the land to serve as a—to sustain you as well as be recreational. So we have that incorporated. [rooster crowing in background] You have a lot of music with the chickens. You probably can hear them! [laughs] So they give a lot of natural music.

0:13:00

Basically, it’s—it’s here. We're just constantly trying to improve it. [rooster crowing in background] It’s quite a few things that we want to do here—do on the land, to make it more attractive to people. And it’s getting there. It has been kind of a slow process. Because many times, financing was an issue, getting the financing to do certain things. So sometimes you have to put a little money in and [rooster crowing in background] do a lot of work. And then if you constantly keep doing that, you'll see the results down the road somewhere. So that’s where we are right now. So we're throwing a little money in, and throwing lots of work in [laughs], and then we will—you don’t see, when you own the farm, you don’t see [rooster crowing in background] a cash benefit every month, or maybe—it depend on what you're doing—you may not see it in a year.

0:14:05

You may not see it in two years. Three years, you may not see it. But you try to do the immediate goals. You have goals, short-term and long-term goals. So we do have long-range things that we're trying to do, and then we've got the short-range things that we're doing. So it sort of balances out. So, that’s where we are right now, at this point.

Sarah Rodriguez: Awesome. You mentioned a bit canning to have food for the winter. What was food like in your home growing up? Who was preparing it, and what kind of foods did you have?

Leonard Brown: Well, my mom and grandmama did that. But we had everything that you would have—you know, like the canned [rooster crowing in background]—everything that was growing out here, like the tomatoes, the peas, the beans, the okra, the carrots, the beets.

0:15:03

I can’t even remember everything. But they even canned—they even canned the beef, that they would slaughter beef, or the hogs, or whatever, they canned that. So everything was in—they had what—a room that had shelves around the walls, and they had everything—it was sort of like [laughs] in the grocery store. On this shelf you might have beans, and next peas, and—but anyway, it was—it was pretty. And then whenever you needed something, you could always go and get the same thing that you could have gone to town and gotten. And on top of that, the income was produced *from* the sale of this to the people in Grenada.

0:16:04

Sarah Rodriguez: Your father mostly sold in Grenada?

Leonard Brown: Yeah, yeah. Everything that was produced was sold. He didn’t sell the canned items, but he sold the raw items that was produced. So the other part was canned. So we had the—

Sarah Rodriguez: Did you ever go help him sell?

Leonard Brown: Yeah, I did.

Sarah Rodriguez: What was that like?

Leonard Brown: It was exciting. [laughs] It was exciting, and in fact, I learned some sale techniques from him, so I’m using some of his techniques today.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, wow.

Leonard Brown: Yeah, he would go about two times a week, on Saturday. and I think it was Wednesday. I think it was Wednesday and Saturday. But he carried truckloads.

0:17:00

And course we would gather the merchandise on Friday, then he would take it on Saturday. Then we’d gather it on Tuesday, and then he’d take it on Wednesday. So it was kind of a routine throughout the summer. And he planted things in sequence, you know. Like the peas, he’d plant—maybe peas two or three or four weeks apart, so when these were going out, others was coming in. So he had it down—

Sarah Rodriguez: Sounds like a science.

Leonard Brown: —like a scientific thing, to make sure that he had merchandise all across the summer. So basically, it was really we made the money during the summer. And in the wintertime, he did have like sweet potatoes, so he would do those, like the sweet potatoes, and I don’t know what else, but—oh, turnip greens.

0:18:11

Turnip greens [laughs]. And cabbage. You know, had the cool season crops. And course he did have fall tomatoes. So he had it where it was pretty much year round. And so that’s what we—that was our goal. I really didn’t think that I would be doin some of what he was doin, at this point in time, but—

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up? If you had an idea?

Leonard Brown: I didn’t really have too much in mind, expectation. [laughs] Kind of like children today, you know? Didn’t really have any specific goal.

0:19:04

But anyway, I didn’t think that I would probably be doin the agriculture part once I got grown, you know. But anyway. So I gravitated back to it, so now, I’m more or less doin what he was doin. [laughs]

Sarah Rodriguez: It’s funny how that works out.

Leonard Brown: It is. It is.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you tell me a bit about your time—you said you moved away for a little bit?

Leonard Brown: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: What were you doing during that? What was that like?

Leonard Brown: Well, I went to school, went to college, and that took a little period of time.

Sarah Rodriguez: Where did you go to school?

Leonard Brown: I went to Alcorn, and then I went to Tuskegee. Then I started working at a job in Montgomery, Alabama. So I worked there for I think about nine years.

0:20:01

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember around what years you were there?

Leonard Brown: It was during the seventies. Then I came back here, and started helping to get back into the farm business. Because actually, my brother and my dad and all, they were kinda overworked on the things they were doin. So I came back and joined in with them, and got the farm goin a little bit—I wouldn't say better, but we started doin a few other things. Because my brother had two businesses in Water Valley, and that was taking quite a bit of time.

0:21:07

So I came back, and I’m glad I did, because I was able to set up, get quite a few things in place, get the forestry part going. I got that. And doin some improving the pastures. So I set up quite a few projects—well, I wouldn't say that many different projects, but in different areas on the farm, I did quite a bit, and got it to where it’s at the point where I wanted it now. So it’s at the point where the trees are growing well. The grass is doin better. We just need—need, really need—a little more money to put into it. [laughs]

0:22:01

We need a little bit more money, to—because it takes—like you need fertilizers. But we do a lot of things. Just like we do controlled burning. Well, I do that, because I kinda know how to do it. But if I had to hire that done, it would cost quite a bit of money. It’s pretty expensive to do that per acre. So that’s one way I manage the timber.

Sarah Rodriguez: Is because you know how to do it?

Leonard Brown: Yeah, I know how to do it. So I do quite a bit of that. Because I had people yesterday asked me, “How do you manage it?” Well, you actually take certain skills that you have and do some things that otherwise you would have to pay. And then when you pay to do it, then they may not get to you, because they're so backed up.

0:23:04

They may not be able to get to you this year, or maybe next year, so they put you on a long waiting list in order to get burnin. And that’s key, for the wildlife. It’s key for the growth of the trees. So burning is a—so Smoky the Bear was a little bit wrong when he was out there stompin out the fire! [laughs] So actually the fire is actually a good management tool. And then when you burn, you actually get different species of plants that will come up that might never come up. So, sometimes it takes that heat to make them—the seeds can lay there for years and years, and once you burn, you'll come back and you'll see different plants that’s good for the deer, or turkey, or what have you, that’s popped up out of the ground.

0:24:03

So that’s a good technique. It’s also good to control bugs and insects that would kill the trees, like the pine beetles and that type thing. And then it also helps to take out some of the smaller trees that absorb some of the water from the big trees. So it’s a very good management practice. You could go in, and with an expensive machine, cut the small trees down, but at the same time, you creating—it’s a big amount of money that you would have to spend. But it’s a dangerous thing, but you've got to use safety tips in doing that. So I’ve been pretty successful so far.

Sarah Rodriguez: Did your parents do that as well?

Leonard Brown: They did it. They did some. They probably didn’t do as much as I’ve done. Then they may have. But they did some.

0:25:03

Sarah Rodriguez: Did you learn from them how to do the controlled burn?

Leonard Brown: I really didn’t exactly learn from them. I noticed that they would plow around the area, but I didn’t—right now, I take the wind in account. If the wind is blowing from the south, then you would want to start your fire from the north side. If the wind is blowing from the north side, you would like to start it from the south side. Which means, that’s going to be a slow burn back—so if you burn from the north, so the wind coming from the south; you burn from the—you light the fire in the north, so then it’s gonna burn slower. Because the fire is actually—the wind is actually pushing it this way, so it’s gonna burn slower that way.

0:26:02

And then, once it gets back so far this way, then you can set the fire with the direction the wind is coming from, on the south side, and it will just zoom across. But when you get over here, you’re safe, because you’ve got a wide enough space where it won’t jump the lane. So that’s the major technique. And then—because once you start a fire, it’s going to—with all those gases getting entangled, it kind of creates a whirlwind, like. You know. So it will—so you have to be real careful. And sometimes sparks can go. It’s something that you have to pay attention to. But it’s very necessary. So that’s one tool that I use. And in two or three hours you’ve covered a lot of ground. I didn’t get a chance to burn as *much* this year as I wanted to, because we had so much rain during the—we just didn’t have the burning—if it’s—

0:27:10

Sarah Rodriguez: Like the conditions for it?

Leonard Brown: Yeah, the conditions. And, if it’s not dry enough, then the moisture, like you light the fire; the moisture that comes from the ground will generate enough steam to put the fire out. So it’s little—it’s not that bad, but you just have to kind of know what you're doin.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. Could you tell me a bit more, whenever you left, what that was like? Because you had grown up here, what was it like going and especially living in a place like Montgomery? Do you remember what that was like for you?

Leonard Brown: Well, it was a little bit different, because, you know, it takes some getting used to being away. When you here, it’s like anywhere you—but you have to learn to adjust.

0:28:06

Anytime you do something different, what you're doing different might be better than what you were doin, but it’s that adjustment. Because it’s a natural process to resist change. So you have to find a way to go ahead and make the adjustments, although it’s just normal for you to—“Well, I really don’t want to go”—you know [laughs]—“I don’t want to do this; I don’t want to do that.” But you find that you can—if you understand what you're tryin to do, then you will say, “Well, okay, yeah, we gonna do this.” And you'll make the adjustment over a period of time, once you stay focused on what you're doing.

0:29:02

But it’s just natural. Yeah, it takes a little toll on you, a while. It’s just like if you're going on a vacation, it may be exciting that you go, and then once you get to where you goin, it may be totally a disaster. But you have to [laughs] make the adjustment. So that’s the way I look at it.

Sarah Rodriguez: Did you miss Water Valley, whenever you left?

Leonard Brown: Well, yeah, at first, yeah. But then the longer you stay away—you don’t forget it, you know. You constantly—I was constantly back in touch with here. I never totally just went away and stayed. I was back on a regular basis. But you somewhat will miss it, somewhat. But then, when you tryin to do a certain thing, you say, “Well, okay, that way’s [sp] better to go ahead and—I’m gonna be over here and try to get this done,” than to say, “I’m worrying about where I wanna be.”

0:30:16

So that’s part of—well, when you're in the farm business, it’s a lot of adjustments. Even when you here on a daily basis, it’s quite a few adjustments you've got to make all the time. You might go out here this mornin, and somebody say, “Well, all your cows is out in the road.” Well, I don’t want to fix no fences this mornin in 100-degree weather, but, you may have to go and repair that fence. Because that’s necessary to keep this enterprise goin. So that’s what it’s all about, is making adjustments, is constantly making adjustments to make this better, improve this from zero level up to wherever you wanna go.

0:31:10

So that’s the way I try to operate, is try to have short-term goals, have long-term goals. Because if you go out and try to do everything—in other words, I want to make—my goal is to, say, make

\$100,000 this year; well, that may be too much of a goal. You might say, well, okay, let me just set it for \$20,000, or \$25,000, and then, I’ll be *happy* to make that, and then, if it goes up to \$100,000 I’ll be super happy. But you don’t want to set your goal on something that’s not realistic.

0:32:09

And that’s quite a few people that’s gettin into farmin, they get into it, and they might have a little success this year. They say, “Well, okay, I had success with this. I grew produce on one acre. So why don’t I do produce on two acres next year? Because I made really good on this one acre. So let me double it.” Well, when you double it, then you get there—you didn’t double your manpower. You didn’t double figurin in that it’s going to cost you more, with the expense of plants and whatever. So you get there, and then you—then the weather conditions is not the same, so you didn’t make a real good crop, so then you're frustrated.

0:33:03

So that kind of gives a person a burnout, and before you know it, they're throwin up their hands. So you got to set realistic goals, and you got to look at things on the long term. “Well, I would love to get this much done in the next three years or five years, but right now, I’m going to try to get this done, this year.” So that’s what I try to do, is focus on what I can do right now, and then at the same time, think about how this will be further down the road. So, that’s my way of operating.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. Could you tell me a bit about how you got involved with the Oxford Community Market?

0:34:01

You said your father had been going and selling in Grenada.

Leonard Brown: Grenada, yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Were you selling at markets before that, or—?

Leonard Brown: No. *Actually*, before I got into the Market, I was actually managing the timber on this—really making my money from the sale of timber. So I have the capability of going out, cutting the trees, loading the trees, and taking them to the market. So that was my major—

Sarah Rodriguez: Where did you take them to—where did you sell them?

Leonard Brown: I would sell some in Grenada. Yeah, down at a place called, what—not newsprint—Hankins Lumber Company. And I can’t think of the other place. But then I would go to Bruce. I would carry some to Bruce, to warehouse them. Take some to Charleston. Can’t think of the name of the mill over there.

0:35:02

I did take some to Winona. Different places, you know, at different times, they want different types of wood. So that was my main focus. Well, I really got into the herb—well, I was already doing a little bit of herb, but anyway, I ended up getting a greenhouse, so I ended up getting—doing more herbs. Then I took on the mushroom project just to see if I could do it. And when *it* exploded, and I had all kind of mushrooms, well, in this area, people weren’t familiar with mushrooms too much, so I couldn’t even *give* em away. I heard that they were just starting a market up in Oxford, and I said, “I think I’ll take some of these up there just to *see* what the

reaction would be.” Cause you got a different mindset of people up there, around the University.

And I carried them up there, and people—

0:36:01

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember around what year this was?

Leonard Brown: It’s going to be eight or nine years ago. I’m not sure.

Sarah Rodriguez: Okay.

Leonard Brown: But anyway, people were—they were so excited. [laughs] I couldn't believe it! So, anyway, we—so, the demand got greater and greater. So really, right now, I’m not meeting the demand. I’m trying. My goal—

Sarah Rodriguez: Because the demand is so high?

Leonard Brown: Yeah. Yeah, the demand is so high. Until—so I’m trying—so my goal, my long-term goal is to meet that demand. But right now, my immediate goal is to produce as many as I can, right now, and take as many as I can. So that’s how I got connected with the Market. I did not intend to continue the Market, but everybody was encouraging me so, to bring the mushrooms, so they're still doin the same thing.

0:37:08

So I’ve increased the mushrooms, what, by 1000% or more, than when I started—or 5000% or 2000%—based on when I first started. But I’m still not at the level, so it’s causing me to have to keep expanding and expanding. So right now, I’m working on a project to try to have em in—grow some inside, during the colder weather, and during the warmer weather. So, mushrooms

don’t like to grow under 50 degrees. They don’t like to grow over 80. So right now, this is not mushroom weather. [laughs] People saw some over there yesterday but they weren’t the quality, because they will—they’ll actually get up and just dry up, you know, if you don’t—even if you’re giving them a certain amount of moisture.

0:38:16

But they just don’t tolerate it. So I’m trying to get it where I’m almost there, but not quite. So that’s my long-term goal, is to have it where I could actually be producing quality mushroom during the summer, and also during the winter. I’ve actually got a little deal on the ground where the temperature should remain kind of constant. Most of the time—I’m trying to remain—I’m trying to get a temperature of about 65 degrees, something like that, so I would be in perfect shape. I think I’m just about there. Right now the coolness is where I want it to be.

0:39:02

I’ve got my sprinkler system set up. I’ve got an air conditioning to cool it down, if it gets a little too hot.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you grow them in the greenhouse, the mushrooms?

Leonard Brown: No.

Sarah Rodriguez: Or they have their own space?

Leonard Brown: Right now I’m just growing em outside. But this is my plan, my long-range plan, is to get em inside. Now I don’t intend to stop it. I don’t intend to stop the outside growth. But I intend to do—I’m actually growing mushrooms outside on logs. But I’m actually

planning to do the mushrooms inside, on straw, and sawdust blocks. So, that’s my long-range goal. [laughs]

Sarah Rodriguez: That’s exciting.

Leonard Brown: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you tell me what it has been like connecting with people at the Market, both the people who come to buy things from you, and the other vendors?

0:40:00

Leonard Brown: Yeah! Well, we had—the vendors—it’s really like a family, somewhat, with the vendors. They can tell when you're not there. It’s kind of like—like if you've got a family, and then one is not here, you know it. So, anytime you're not there, it’s pretty much you look around—“So and so, they not here today.” So that’s kinda sorta developed a—and the thing about it, most of the vendors have some of the same problems, same successes. Most vendors are faced with not enough help. And some of the vendors kinda overextend themselves because of that, and it really takes kind of like a little toll on em.

0:41:05

But anyway, it’s still—and it’s competition. People will watch what you doin, and next thing you know, somebody else is tryin to do what you're doin. [laughs] They tryin to do—but you know, it bothers some vendors; it don’t bother me. Because what you do, you try to set up a relationship with the people that’s going to buy. You develop that bond. And many times, they're going to come and buy from you sometimes when they don’t actually need things. They go ahead and

buy. So that’s what you try to do, is—and then you try to reel in some of the newer people, that you haven't sold.

0:42:03

So that’s what I do. When I go to the market, I’m not necessarily caterin to the established customers, because they gonna buy anyway, pretty much. But you're tryin to increase your customer bases all the time, by tryin to find a way to attract the new ones. So that’s my goal whenever I go to the Market, is I look to sell to the established ones, but then I’m also—that’s where the sellin comes in, is when you—because once the people know that you've got what they want, they gonna come—“You got this today? You got that?” You know, that's your established customers. But then the other people that don’t know what your product is, and don’t understand what you do with it, that type of thing, so then *they*—so you want to try to reel them in.

0:43:10

And sometimes—so basically it’s trying to develop a relationship with the new people as well as the older established people. I’m constantly getting new customers all the time. And when they come back and they tell somebody about what you've got—well, number one, you want to believe in what you've got. Whatever your product is, you want to believe that your product is the best, or it’s really good. That’s number one, for me, is to have quality merchandise. And then, once people find out that you really got good quality, then they gonna tell somebody else. So it kind of goes from there. So I’ve got a big customer base right now.

0:44:13

And as some of the other people, they got certain people that come in—you may have the better—I may have better quality of things than somebody else, but then that’s they customer base, so they gonna basically [laughs] buy from that person. But it’s enough area there, enough new people, to where all you gotta do is reel in some of those newer people. So you don’t have to worry. And then, the competition actually—actually, it’s good. You know, somebody come up—like I do the essential oils, because they—they actually come from the herbs.

0:45:03

And it was a new vendor came in Tuesday, and I think he had some essential oils. Well, normally the first reaction would be to be upset because he got what you got. But it’s actually going to help *me*. In the long run, it’s gonna actually help me, because if somebody else got the same thing you got, it must be good. It must be something to it. So if you walk over there and you see this person got it, and then you walk over here and see—now, he might make the sale, but then it’s going to—and then I might make the sale—but it’s going to get the word around that all of this stuff—that’s really good stuff, because he got it, and then he got it.

0:46:00

So what I try to do is make sure I got the good quality oil, the better—the best quality. So it don’t bother me at all, that somebody else would try to sell what I’m sellin. But that’s the thing that—[laughs] it upsets some of the vendors. That they walk in and you sellin mushrooms and then—because it was—somebody came in with some mushrooms [laughs]—that’s been a couple years ago—and I think you can go to these different big warehouses and get the [0:46:43] [phone ringing]—

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you need to take that?

0:47:00

[phone ringing]

[phone stops ringing]

Leonard Brown: So I was tryin to—the—

Sarah Rodriguez: The vendor brought in the mushrooms?

Leonard Brown: Yeah, the vendor brought in the mushrooms, and the people come to me—
“You got mushrooms today?” I said, “No, but my competition got some.” And most times, they
would say, “Well, you don’t want any of those.” So it wasn’t too long before they stopped
coming to the Market. They stopped coming to the Market. I don’t know where the people were
from, but I don’t think they were growing them themselves. I know they weren’t because when
you’d look at em, they didn’t have the quality to em. So that’s what you have to do, is—you’re
trying to have the quality—let me get some water.

0:48:00

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure, take your time.

[rooster crowing in background]

Leonard Brown: So you have to have the quality and believe in what you got. And then—
then you automatically make sales. You make sales. So, that’s my philosophy on sellin.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you have any favorite memories or moments, experiences that you had
at the Oxford Market, that stick out, off the top of your head?

Leonard Brown: Well, they've all been good memories. The main thing—when people get upset that you don't—say for example, I—sometimes I have to hide back certain—some mushrooms, because certain people come in and find out that you had mushrooms and they all gone, they get mad.

0:49:07

So I try to honor that. So a real good customer, it's a good customer, and then that good customer is a little bit upset because you don't have—and they find out that you had it that day. So, that's one of the things. It's all been good memories. We've increased the vendors. Some come and some go.

Sarah Rodriguez: So it's changed a bunch since you first started going to the Market?

0:50:02

Leonard Brown: Well, it's more creative now. Because people are becoming more creative. I think when I first started, they only had like canned food, mostly, and the real food like potatoes, tomatoes, or something like that. But now—

Sarah Rodriguez: Take your time. No, you're good.

Leonard Brown: Lemme get some cold water.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Leonard Brown: People have gotten more creative, and they're givin more samples, so it's changed from just bringin the merchandise out, and sayin, okay, if this is a good pie or a good cake, here's a little sample.

0:51:14

So I think that’s one thing that I have observed. It’s like one guy, he’s bringin the little miniature goats up there. You've seen em, I guess. So that’s creative. I think he’s sellin goat soap, and just—

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

Leonard Brown: So, the vendors have become a little more creative, I would say. And also, they're becoming more professional with the quality, with the packaging, and that type thing. So I would say that has made a big difference.

0:52:01

And then you're gettin a greater amount of people that’s comin *to* the market, just the public. I think people gettin a little more conscious that they can actually get better quality merchandise, getting cabbage that’s not shipped from California, or gettin tomatoes that’s not shipped from, where, Arizona, or what have you. I think that’s what is helpin, because people like the quality that they're gettin. Although sometimes you could probably go to the store, the grocery store, and buy it a little cheaper.

0:53:00

But many people are lookin for quality now. So I think that’s one big change, as I can notice and that stands out. Then you got people that’s—like on the Tuesday market, we actually got people, the volunteers that helps the vendors set up and take down, that type thing.

Sarah Rodriguez: So it’s a bigger group of people working with the Market now?

Leonard Brown: Mmhmm. Of course, it’s like anything else. You’re gonna have some vendors that will come for a while and then, they either leave town or just figure it’s not worth it, or they’re not makin as much as they expect, and they drop out.

0:54:07

But that’s gonna be true in everything. You gonna have some people that stick it out, and some gonna say, “Well, this is not for me.” But I tell anybody, “Come and observe, observe what’s goin on, and then if you feel like this is somethin you wanna do, then try it.” Like I say, I have seen quite a few vendors come in and some drop out, and then new ones come in. But sometime people don’t have the—the real understanding of what it takes to do a certain project.

0:55:00

In other words, it’s what’s behind the curtain that counts. When they come up there, and you walk up there, and, “Oh, I got all this fancy stuff here on the table”—well, yeah, I could do that! But I think that’s what happens, and people go to the effort of tryin to do that, and then they don’t have a good relationship with the public. So anyway, they default. They just don’t make the money. “Well, I’m just gonna back out.” But anyway that’s just another part *of* it. But I try to—believe in what you got. Try not to overextend yourself. Try to make sure you’ve got enough help to do what you’re trying to do.

0:56:03

Certain market items take more labor, or more time. That’s the thing I think some of the people don’t figure into it, how much time it’s gonna take to do it. And you got to be organized, to where you can do this in a certain period of time. You can get it to the people in a certain period

of time. And there was a girl brought—she was doing crochet, had some pretty things, but I’ve noticed I haven’t seen her in the last few weeks. It may be that she gone somewhere else to—that she can do better somewhere else. And it may be that she felt like, “Well, I’m not making enough.” People—you gotta have your product priced to where people willing to buy it, too.

0:57:03

Sometime people overprice a little bit. Everybody accuse me of underpricin. [laughs] Accuse me of sellin too cheap, you know? [laughs] But I’d rather be accused of sellin too cheap than sellin too high. [laughs] Anyway, it’s—well, you don’t need to go into it for just looking for the money. Now, sometimes people give me big tips. But I think if you go into something with the expectation of, “I’m just gonna—I’m going to make this—” It’s kind of like going to the casino. You go there—“Well, I’m going to go and make me \$500.” Then you go over there and you don’t make—you lose \$500, and then you come back, you disappointed.

0:58:02

So, when I go to the Market, I have no thought as to what I’m going to make that day. Most time, I’m surprised. Most time, when I get back and I account of what I did, most time I’m a little shocked that I—in most cases I made more than I expected. So, I try not to have an expectation. Because if I say, “Well okay, I’m going to go over here today and I’m going to make \$300”—well, if I go up there and I make \$100, come back, then I’m going to be a little frustrated. So when you go, I just try to do what I do, deliver the product, and generally the money will show up. So that’s the way I do my operations.

0:59:03

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. As we're wrapping up, is there anything that I didn't ask about, or any stories that you have that you want to share?

Leonard Brown: I think this pretty much covers the farm business. It's not for everybody. [laughs] It's not for *everybody*. I tell people all the time, what I'm doing is *not* for *everybody*. But then it might be good for some people. But you don't want to—you want the shoe to fit you. You know, if it don't, you might squeeze it on, but it might make your foot hurt. So, I try to give the right advice. A lot of people—"Well, I want to go into farmin. I wanna go into farmin."

1:00:03

But I try to tell them, whatever you want to do, try to find somebody that's doing that, and talk to them, observe what they're doing, maybe even help em do a little bit to learn if you really want to do that. So that's my way of seein it. You got to enjoy it. To me, you got to enjoy it to be successful in it. I would say, based on my expectations, that I have been well pleased. I have brought in several people to help work, and for some reason, people see them as good workers around me, because you know, I advise them to do this and that.

1:01:10

And next thing you know, they've gotten extra opportunities. Which—which is good. I had my nephew, when I first started out, and his friend, they encouraged me to keep goin to the Market when I first started. They were actually goin to school up there at Ole Miss. So they said, "Well, we'll help you. We'll come over and help you." I said, "Okay." So they did really good, and next thing you know, people were offering them jobs! [laughs]

Sarah Rodriguez: That's great.

Leonard Brown: So now one of em has got a—he doin really well up there in one of the restaurants.

1:02:01

So I’ve had several people that have helped me, but the kind of help I get is not—not everybody would fit into it. But anyway, if they’re willin to learn—it’s like with the herbs and everything, they have to learn what’s—I don’t expect them to know everything, but what some of these would be good for. Because you actually make sales because people say, “Well, I don’t know what I can do—what can you do with this? What can you do with that?” So be able to tell em a little bit. And they’ve done well. Like I say, I’ve had several people. I’ve always got my eyes open for somebody that wants to help, you know. But like I say, it’s not for everybody. It’s somewhat like—I sell these outdoor wood furnaces.

1:03:09

I probably talk to 50 to 100 people before I make a sale. But then that’s what it’s all about. So I’ve learned that, somebody call—well, when the weather get a little cool, they’ll start callin. Then when people find out the price, then some definitely not gonna be interested, because it’s kinda a high-ticket item. But anyway, you got to talk to every person. You’ve got to talk to probably 50 to 100 people. I understand that, so it’s not frustrating for me to—somebody to call, and you spend all your time tellin em about this, and tellin em about that. But that’s part of the territory. [laughs]

1:04:08

That’s part of the territory. So, I will tell them every detail. And then it may be another year that they’ll come back and say, “Well you remember you—I talked—you talked to me?” Or, “I talked to you, about the heater?” They say, “I think I would be interested.” So you go from there. So, you gotta understand what you're dealin with. What the limitations and expectations. You've got to understand—but you follow through. It’s just like you stay on this road. You tryin to get over there, but it’s crooked and what-have-you, but you just stay on it, and it’ll eventually carry you where you want to go. So I look at everything like—everything got a system.

1:05:01

It may not be written, but it’s a system that it’s gonna follow a natural pattern, pretty much to be successful. Now, you've got to just follow what it takes. Sometimes people don’t know what it *takes* to actually get—to accomplish something on a certain project. So it’s nice to talk to somebody that’s been through this. If you gonna grow chickens and grow goats and grow anything, it’s always it’s more to it than what meets the eye. So you’ve got to understand that. And we need more people producin. Like a lady asked me yesterday, she says, “How can you get more people to produce food?”

1:06:12

I said, “Well, first thing you need to do is find out if they think they're really interested. And then if they're interested, try to line them up with somebody that’s actually doing that. Take them to where—and let them see what’s involved. Let em talk to that person.” Because I said, “Now, if you want—you trying to get a person to grow a big field of soybeans, and he’s not interested, he might be interested in growin cantaloupes. So, he wouldn't be successful tryin to grow soybeans just because you want him to grow it.” So you want to try to match up the—try to make good

matches. You want to match the person up with what he—like I say, the person that you want to do something may not actually know what he wants to do, but you need to try to find somebody that’s doin what you—what he thinks he wants to do, let him observe it.

1:07:25

So that’s what I have learned more, if I try to go into something different now, whereas earlier, I would just jump into it—just like the mushrooms. Well, I should have found somebody that [laughs]—talked to somebody about it. So I made some huge mistakes. And luckily, I survived it. But it was time—I wasted some time. So, I’d say if somebody wanted to grow mushroom, then come down and talk to me! I’ll share what *I* know. I don’t know it all.

1:08:05

But that’s what people have got to do, to get more people to start growin things, and keep a person from gettin out there and spendin a lot of money and then find out he didn’t want to do it. So, that’s my advice on that.

Sarah Rodriguez: Thank you very much! I’ll go ahead and stop the recording.

[End]