



**Caroline Lindley**

**Lindley Mills**

**Graham, North Carolina**

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**Kate Medley:** I'll start us off by saying this is Kate Medley interviewing Caroline Lindley. We are in Graham, North Carolina, and it is May 15<sup>th</sup> of 2018. I'll get you to introduce yourself and tell us who you are and where we are. Include in that your date of birth as well.

[0:00:27.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** Okay. I'm Caroline Lindley. I was born on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1991. We are in Graham, North Carolina, so between Chapel Hill and Greensboro, at the site of the original Lindley's Mill, which was established in 1755.

[0:00:42.0]

**Kate Medley:** Super. You sound great. Introduce us to what is Lindley Mills.

[0:00:49.2]

**Caroline Lindley:** So we're an organic flour mill and mixed manufacturer, and what that means is we get organic grains in from all over the United States, but also a lot from the local community in North Carolina. We grind that up into grain. We make it into a lot of different flours, a whole host of flours, and then we send that back out to restaurants and bakeries and distributors all over the United States.

[0:01:13.6]

**Kate Medley:** What would you say makes Lindley Mill—is it Lindley Mill or Lindley Mills, plural?

[0:01:19.6]

**Caroline Lindley:** Plural.

[0:01:19.9]

**Kate Medley:** Plural. What makes Lindley Mills different than other mills?

[0:01:25.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** So part of that is, part of our difference is probably that we are really focused on quality and consistency, so we source all of our grain, first it's got to be organic and then it's got to be top-quality grain. We test it before it gets here; we get a farmer sample, we test that. We test the truck when it arrives. We test throughout the process multiple times, and we do a lot of finished-product testing to make sure that when it gets to the bakery, it's going to be exactly the right thing, it's going to work for them, it's going to perform like they need it to. That's something that not everybody does, or not to the extent that we do it, and we also have a lot of other, like, Global Food Safety certifications, so we're BRC "AA" certified, which is a very high ranking in this industry. We're really proud of that. So that's sort of one aspect of it, sort of food safety. I'd say another aspect is that a lot of mills of this size or even much larger than us, they do one or two or three products. We do closer to sixty products or even more than that, so we have a big variety in what we do, and we change around. We have a lot of flexibility, which is a really good benefit. And then sort of beyond that is we're able to custom-mill things. So if somebody needs a particular mix or particular blend or they need a certain protein

percentage, we're able to create that and make that for them, whether it's for pizza dough or a muffin mix or bread. Whatever they need, we can create.

[0:02:44.4]

**Kate Medley:** Give us some idea, Caroline, of the scope of Lindley Mills' work in 2018, what you're producing, who you're producing that for.

[0:02:56.8]

**Caroline Lindley:** So we make a variety of hard and soft wheat flours, so we make a whole different protein range, from a low, 8, 9, 10 percent protein, to a very high 14 percent protein, so we do hard and soft wheats, we do white wheat, we do a whole different set of ryes. We do dark rye, light rye, medium or whole rye. We do rye chops, rye meal. We do spelts, we do corn flours, grits, and cornmeal. And we do also our sprouted products, and that we're starting now to do sprouted spelt, sprouted rye, sprouted wheat, and some sprouted ancient grains as well.

[0:03:32.0]

**Kate Medley:** And who is receiving these?

[0:03:35.5]

**Caroline Lindley:** So national bakeries, I wish I could tell you all their names. We have some confidentiality agreements there where we can't do that. We also do the King Arthur organic brand, so we do a lot of that, which is distributed nationally. We work

with our local bakers as well, so we work with everybody from the farmers' market, the person that wants to buy one bag of flour a week and go to the farmers' market, to these national bakeries that are buying whole truckloads or bulk tankerloads of product, 40,000 pounds of flour a week, even. So it goes all across the board. Locally, we do Weaver Street Market, Whole Foods. We work with Mediterranean Deli that's in Chapel Hill. They've been a really longtime customer. We also work with—I'm having to edit out people as we speak, that I can't share. [Laughter] But we also work with bakeries especially up and down the East Coast, some of which we've worked with the whole time we've been in business.

[0:04:30.0]

**Kate Medley:** Take us back to 1755.

[0:04:35.6]

**Caroline Lindley:** So in 1755, the mill was established by Thomas Lindley, who would be my seven-times great-grandfather, so that's quite a little time ago. He passed it down. It was sort of father to son for a while. He was a Pennsylvania Quaker, had moved down here with his family. He'd come from Ireland originally and moved down here, started the mill. There was actually a Revolutionary War battle in 1781 called the Battle of Lindley's Mill, which took place about three hundred yards from the property where we are right now, and that was a battle between the Whigs and the Tories over the governor of North Carolina had been captured in Hillsborough, and they were trying to get him back. So they had this battle, and it was sort of undeclared who won or what happened.

The governor was not rescued. They were able to take him on, and the Patriots were not able to rescue him, so we sort of feel like it's a little unsuccessful [Laughter], but there was a considerable loss of life. It was one of the bloodiest, per capita, battles in North Carolina during the Revolutionary War. So we definitely think of that as a part of our history. There was a Lindley's Mill before there was America, even, in 1755. It passed father to son until probably the 1840s, when we think it was passed out of the family. We don't have a whole lot of records about this, but this is some of sort of what's been told, and there are a couple of newspaper articles that support that, although it's sort of hard to tell exactly what the dates are. It was passed around, had been a post office, it had been a voting precinct. Supposedly, if you voted correctly, you could ride up the creek and get a little sip of something special. [Laughter] It had been a doctor's office, it's been a community building. It's really been a community center through all of that time. Then sort of to bring it into today's time, in the early 1900s, it was purchased by someone on my mom's family, actually. They were working here and they wound up having the mill, owning it, and working here. Then it sort of passed into some other hands very briefly, then on my dad's side of the family, my grandfather purchased it in 1975 and they began to restore it and put it back into use. It wasn't always continuously running, in use, so they restored it, they stood it back up, they re-supported it with steel beams and railroad trestles to hold it up and keep it steady, and poured a lot of concrete, put a new water wheel in. We got some stones from a local mill that was out of repair and wasn't going to be able to be saved, so they rescued those stones and put them in here and started grinding grain in 1975.

[0:07:14.4]

**Kate Medley:** Wow. So now we're in the tenth generation?

[0:07:19.0]

**Caroline Lindley:** I'm the tenth, yes. The ninth and tenth both work here today.

[0:07:22.6]

**Kate Medley:** Caroline, while we're talking about sort of the historical framework for what you're doing here today, I think your mill is the only one that really reaches back far enough to make the idea relevant of sort of regional mills, and as you were saying how the mill would often be the post office and the medical center, and was really the community hub. Can you give us a little brief history of community mills in the South to any extent?

[0:08:02.1]

**Caroline Lindley:** Sure. So, I mean, I think a lot of what we know about how mills were, everybody had to come, they had to bring the grain that they grew on their farm to their local miller to grind it up into flour so they'd have something to eat, and that was a model. If you think about all the roads around anywhere in the South that are named, you know, this mill Road, any mill Road, there were *so* many. I think there's something like 19,000 mills that used to be—or maybe it's 18,000, but several thousand mills used to exist in the United States. This would have been, I think, in the very early 1800s. And now they're closer to—I think it's between thirty-five and sixty, less than 100, I think,

mills that are available now. Some of those each own, you know, twenty, thirty mills. They're big operations. But as far as independently owned, there are not very many that are independently owned anymore, and there are even fewer that are sort of small regional mills. Part of that, I think, is because volume requires—you have to have a certain amount of volume to be able to price your flour competitively and you have to be able to distribute that, so you need volume to be able to survive. Unless you're going to be really, really small and you have people that are really bought in to buying these really specialty things and they're willing to pay that price for it. But in order to compete especially with white flour on a big scale, even as a regional mill, you have to be able to sort of play with those big, big players that play on a national scale. So I think it's really shifted. We used to be in this model where everybody went to their neighbor, and their neighbor was their miller and they saw exactly what was going into the product. They knew when they took their corn, they were getting their grits. So they saw, and it was really a local tight food circle. Then we shifted to this national distribution where you have these very few really large mills that are huge conglomerates that are doing all of the flour, and that's when we got the shift to this white bread, this Merita kind of white bread. And now we're seeing a shift back to whole grains, to more local grains, to heirloom grains and ancient grains, and it's sort of focused back on a smaller, more local food system, and I think that's just a reaction people have to wanting to know where their food comes from and how it's made and have a connection with that. I think the milling industry has shown that. Now we have more small mills popping up. We have people focused on doing local grain and trying to be able to process that as well. We're sort of in the middle of all that. We're small enough we can take our local farmers' grain, people

that are just down the road. We certainly do that. We work really hard to source North Carolina organics, but we also have to be able to play with the “big boys,” so we have to be able to source from other places as well and sort of straddle that road in between and serve customers both farmers’ market size and national grocery store size at the same time. [Laughter] So, a challenge.

[0:10:59.7]

**Kate Medley:** Can you speak at all to the cultural component of those community mills of the 1800s?

[0:11:08.7]

**Caroline Lindley:** So I think that it was sort of the hub. It was a community hub, so they had to come very often, whether it was to get their—I mean, they would’ve stored the wheat. They could’ve stored the wheat all year-round, so they would have been coming all the time, and the miller was probably very much the center of the community and he knew all the gossip—or she [Laughter]—or his family knew all of the gossip and all of what was happening and what was going on in the area. They’re also pretty much always located on a water source of some sort because, you know, it’s got to be water-powered, so that’s the same here. I imagine that people would’ve been a high traffic area as far as people—their fording rock is very close here. That’s why the battle was close to the mills, because they were trying to get to the fording rock, the easiest place to cross the creek, and that is part of the, you know, just the landscape, the lay of the land, and I don’t know that they put the mill here on purpose because of that, but it certainly would make

sense to be able to cross the creek at a convenient location and sort of have customers or farms on both sides of the area there to be able to reach out to and make the grain for. I think as it has progressed into more modern times, it's still a community hub in that we still see our local bakers. You know, every week they come and we get to see them and hear what they're baking, and sometimes they bring us cinnamon rolls or something good like that, which is really nice, and we get that sort of touch point. A lot of what we do is based on baker feedback, and so we get to hear, "I tried this and I liked it, but I'd love it if it was a little more this way or a little more that way." So we can sort of adjust our grinding. I don't know if the millers of the 1800s got to—if they had that much control over it and that much testing to be able to determine it, but we do now and we try to adjust for that whenever possible.

[0:12:53.3]

**Kate Medley:** Great. Can you tell us a little bit, Caroline—keeping in mind a national audience here—tell us where we are and then tell us what this place looks like for someone who may never get to visit.

[0:13:09.4]

**Caroline Lindley:** So we are in the central part of North Carolina in the Piedmont, so we're between the mountains and the coast. We certainly have nice rolling hills and lots of trees, and particular in this location where we are at the mill, we're in a very unique place where the creek makes almost a complete island of the land behind the mill, and the mill is sort of set in this curve of the creek that is very rarely seen. I've never seen

another spot on the map like it, so it's kind of a neat location and we think that was certainly taken into account when they built it in 1755. This is absolutely not the place you would pick if you said, "I'm going to build a mill," especially today. We're not that close to the interstate; we're about thirty minutes south of the interstate. We're not close to a railroad spur, so that would be another, you know, thing that you would be looking for. We live in this beautiful, beautiful area, we get to come here every day to work, and it is rolling pasture and hills and trees, and it's a really nice location. I'm glad they picked here. [Laughter] But it's not where you would pick if you were going to set up a milling business. It would not be the first location. The ground is tough. We're on a creek, basically, so we have all this rock. Everything under us is solid, solid rock, and it's not very level. We just built this new building, and so it's made that a challenge a little bit, but it's part of the history and we wouldn't change it. We certainly looked at other places, and we said, you know, this is too beautiful and it has too much history, too much connection to move the location just to make it a little bit easier on us right now. We wanted to keep it here and keep it with the history and keep it connected with that long-term tradition and our roots, really.

[0:14:51.2]

**Kate Medley:** What's the name of the creek?

[0:14:52.4]

**Caroline Lindley:** It's the Cane Creek, C-a-n-e.

[0:14:57.3]

**Kate Medley:** And tell us a little bit, Caroline, about your company's approach to milling. What are your processes like?

[0:15:06.2]

**Caroline Lindley:** So we stone grind and roller mill. We have a custom setup, so we do both here in order to get what is the best, most consistent product for the customer. So we do a lot of things based on baker feedback, and we have over the years. My dad, who is the ninth generation, who's actually our head miller and head engineer and head everything here, he didn't have any professional experience, any specific training. He just started grinding and he said, "I've got to find a way to make a living doing this." He just loved it. You could argue it's in his DNA a little bit [Laughter], but he just was really taken with it, so he experimented around a lot and he got different equipment in and tried this and tried that, and figured out what made the bakers most happy, what they liked the best, what worked the best for them, and what was most repeatable and easy to make a good, consistent flour. So that is really our main goal: quality and consistency. So beyond that, we adjust around a lot every day, so we might make spelt, rye, and wheat products all in one day. We might be doing several of those things just in a couple of hours, so that means we're not as efficient as a huge mill that just makes white flour all day, but we get the benefit of being able to be flexible. So if we have a customer that calls and says, "Hey, I really have got to have some dark rye," we say, "Okay, well, let us work on the schedule a little bit. We might be able to fit that in more quickly." And that goes for, you know, our customers down the road just as well as it does for our big customers. We try

to be really flexible. I think as a family business we can make those decisions a lot easier than a big corporation, but also as a small mill, we can make those adjustments more easily.

[0:16:43.2]

**Kate Medley:** And for those who might not know, tell us what it means when you say that you both stone grind and roller mill.

[0:16:52.6]

**Caroline Lindley:** So when I say stone grinding, I mean traditional stones that are—ours actually come from Meadows Mill, which is another local family-owned company, and it's in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. So they quarry this North Carolina pink granite, and that's what our stones are made out of. They're either horizontal or vertical, and they can be turned by water power or, in this day and age, electricity. We did use water power up through probably the 1980s to grind our grain, but the electricity is a little bit more reliable and steady for what we're doing now. Roller mills are steel rolls that sort of go in a grind sift, grind-sift operation, so you run it through rollers and it sort of beats the grain up a little bit or scrapes a little bit of the bran off, and then any white flour that comes out of that process is sifted out. Then it goes back in again to another set of roller mills that are perhaps closer together or corrugated differently, and it scrapes a little bit more of the white endosperm and germ apart. So what you're doing is you're just scraping that down and grinding it down so that you have the white flour, and you're sifting the white flour out if you're making white flour. If you're making whole wheat flour, it can all go in

together, but to make white flour, you would sift it out. Another important thing to note on that is ours is a very different custom setup than anybody else has anywhere, and ours is what we would call low-heat setup. So a lot of times people are concerned about roller mills adding heat to their product, which can sometimes denature the wheat, and our setup doesn't do that. We control the temperature and monitor that to make sure that doesn't happen.

[0:18:27.8]

**Kate Medley:** What's the difference in the product by way of those two methods?

[0:18:31.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** So when you're stone grinding, you can only get it so fine before your stones will start to rub on each other. And I don't at all proclaim to be the expert on stone grinding. My dad certainly would know more about that because he's done it for more than forty years. But that is sort of one of the main differences, is it's not quite as uniform. It's going to be a little bit more coarse. When you're roller milling, you can get those bigger chunks of bran ground down finer. That makes it a more consistent and usually more fine product, usually allows you to get a little bit more white flour or what we would call higher extraction rate off of the bran, so you get a little bit more white flour per pound out of it than you would if you were making flour off of stones.

[0:19:12.8]

**Kate Medley:** Got it. Okay. And then, Caroline, let's take a step back, and I want you to introduce us to your family, starting with your parents, I think, if you'll introduce them by name and then also if you have any siblings.

[0:19:26.0]

**Caroline Lindley:** So I don't have any siblings; I'm an only child. But my parents are Joe and Teresa Lindley, and they have been working here together at the mill for probably forty years. Mom came to work here just a little bit after Dad got started. They met and got married, and she also doesn't have classical miller's training, but she's a wonderful, wonderful part of this business and has contributed enormously to making it work and keeping it running. She does all of the scheduling and operation. She's very good at keeping us all on track. My dad is sort of the engineer and tries to figure out how are we going to fix this problem or make this better or change this, so he works on the scheduling and on that, and together they make a really, really great team. I'm lucky to have them to learn from.

[0:20:14.9]

**Kate Medley:** So they met when your mother came to work for your father?

[0:20:18.5]

**Caroline Lindley:** No, they met—she's from this community, so they met, just happened to sort of be in the same place at the same time, but she grew up here and was from around here, and they were sort of—my grandfather moved out here and my dad moved

out here. They were sort of the new kids on the block. This is a very, very tight community, tight area, where everybody pretty much knows everybody else, and so they came, I think, to stop by—my mom’s family came to stop by and sort of speak to the new folks in town after church one Sunday, and they happened to meet, and it just went from there.

[0:20:48.6]

**Kate Medley:** What is it like to grow up in this specific rural area?

[0:20:55.0]

**Caroline Lindley:** It’s very interesting. You know, you meet a lot of different people from all different walks of life. So we’re sort of in an interesting place because where we are right now is very rural, but if you drive thirty minutes in either direction, you can be in Greensboro, which is very much a city, or Chapel Hill, or a little bit further, you can be in Raleigh or Durham. So you’re not so isolated and separated from all of the city or the town life, if you will. But it’s a beautiful, beautiful place. Growing up in the mill was a whole different experience. There’s so many, you know, “You can’t put your hand there. You can’t do this.” There’s all this stuff going on all the time, and it was always very interesting. But to live here, it’s been nice to be able to get to shows in Raleigh or to any kind of music or cultural event that you could possibly think of in just a few minutes, but also still live in this beautiful area and have the peace and quiet of sort of being out in the country. I really like both. I like having access to both at the same time.

[0:21:51.4]

**Kate Medley:** What are some of your earliest memories of the mill?

[0:21:55.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** Well, we used to live on top of the mill, so my crib was on the other side of the wall from a 40-horsepower motor, and so I still can't sleep without a fan or something. I can't do it if it's quiet. I'm just not used to that. So that would probably be the very first thing. But I remember stamping bags. My grandfather, after he retired—he was a surgeon. After he retired and they started restoring the mill and had been working there a while, he would help Dad and get bags together or whatever, and we used to label them. We used to have a rubber-stamp label. Now we have to put lot numbers and dates and all this intense codes on there so we can trace everything, but we used to stamp them. So when I was, I don't know, probably two, I would sit on the table and he would let me—he would move them and I would stamp the bags. That's one of my very first mill memories.

[0:22:45.4]

**Kate Medley:** What other jobs have you held in the mill?

[0:22:46.9]

**Caroline Lindley:** Oh, many of them. [Laughter] Right now I have a lot of different hats. I do E-commerce, social media marketing, any other marketing we do. I do sales, I work on some of the IT stuff. I do new customers, and I worked in the lab some, so I fill in for

our lab tech when she has to be out of the office. That's been really good because it's given me a good understanding for what our quality standards are exactly on each product and remembering all the specs, and being able to keep up with all that, which has just helped me talk to customers and explain to them what it is that we do. I spent a considerable amount of time watching Dad do his sprouting process and what he's doing for that, and it's proprietary, but I have sort of been along for the ride learning all that, so that's been really valuable. And, you know, all the other things too. I've answered the phone, I've taken orders, I've made change or whatever, all the above. If it's a job here, if it's cleaning, whatever, I've done it. [Laughter]

[0:23:50.2]

**Kate Medley:** Have you actually worked the mill side of the business?

[0:23:55.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** I've worked with our millers a lot. In order to learn how to run the mill independently by yourself, at least the milling side of it, it takes several years to learn that, and it's a really, really high-craftsmanship job. You have to have a lot of understanding of all of the different pipes and where everything goes. So I haven't run it by myself yet, but I do have a fairly good understanding of what's going on. You can hear a motor change and know, "Uh-oh, something's happened." I might not know exactly how to fix it, but I know we need to go look at it and take a look at where the problem might be. So that's a really, really high-skilled job, so I haven't progressed to that point yet, but I'm looking forward to one day I want to.

[0:24:34.3]

**Kate Medley:** It sounds like you have done a lot. Tell us about the food of your growing-up years.

[0:24:42.4]

**Caroline Lindley:** So my mom is a wonderful cook. There's nothing that she can't make. I always say it's going to be really hard at some point, because nobody's ever going to make it like Mama made it, you know. She's *so* good. She makes wonderful food. We do bake some at home, as much as we can. I like to bake. I'm a baker. My grandmothers were both great bakers. They would do cakes and cookies, and a lot of the recipes that we have, some of our original recipes are ones that my dad's mother, my grandmother, made or worked on or sort of created. So I'm excited to have those still and be able to recreate those. The cornbread recipe that we use is one that she worked on and came up with, and so we still share those today with our customers.

[0:25:26.4]

**Kate Medley:** Tell us a little bit about that cornbread.

[0:25:28.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** So we like to do a sour cream cornbread, so it has our cornmeal, our organic yellow cornmeal, has a little sour cream in it, it has a little oil in it, and some sweet cream—sweet corn in it, just a little can, doesn't have to be anything fancy, but

you just dump it all in there, stir it up, and put it in the oven, and it makes a really good cornbread, I think.

[0:25:51.7]

**Kate Medley:** Love it. And what was that grandmother's name?

[0:25:54.5]

**Caroline Lindley:** Shirley Lindley.

[0:26:02.5]

**Kate Medley:** When you were growing up here, Caroline, what did you want to be when you grew up?

[0:26:08.2]

**Caroline Lindley:** Ah! This was the question of my life, right? So I'm an only child. I know that this business has been doing for, you know, ten generations off and on, and that, you know, it sort of all comes down to me, if you will. So I struggle with that a lot. When I was in college, I couldn't decide what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a doctor for a while, I wanted to be—I don't know. I had a whole list of stuff. But I got into business school at Chapel Hill, which was pretty difficult, so I had made that and I thought, "Okay. Well, I'm going to try this." So I went to business school. I liked it. I got a job at Credit Suisse in Raleigh, I worked there, enjoyed it, but what I realized was that I could come and work for my family business and be able to get a *lot* more accomplished in an

eight-hour day. So I went back and got my MBA so I'd have some really good, relevant experience to bring to the table, and then I came back in May of 2017, so I've been full-time. I was working part-time during my MBA, but full-time in May of 2017, so I've been here just a full year this week, actually, which is exciting, and I love it. I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's different every day. Some days it's crazy and it changes, and you are never bored, but I have really enjoyed, really enjoyed working here and the challenges that I get to work on every day and try to make better.

[0:27:24.6]

**Kate Medley:** Were both your bachelor's and master's at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill?

[0:27:28.9]

**Caroline Lindley:** Yes. Kenan-Flagler.

[0:27:33.0]

**Kate Medley:** That's the business school. Gotcha. How would you say that the grain industry in the South has changed in your lifetime?

[0:27:48.2]

**Caroline Lindley:** So I think we've seen a shift from people mostly growing white flour, like conventional white flour. For us, when we say conventional, that's the opposite of organic. So we would say mostly conventional white flour for like a Merita-type white

bread, what you would just expect to see in your grocery store as just a Wonder Bread, white bread kind of thing. I think we've increasingly seen a shift towards whole grain flours, so people taking advantage of the whole wheat, not just the white part of the grain, so getting a lot more nutrition and a little bit more flavor. So I think there's been a little bit of a shift towards that, and I think there has been a shift more towards organics. So people are much more interested in where their food comes from and if it's local or not, and I think that has probably ramped up a lot more in the last couple of years than over my whole lifetime, but I think that has certainly become a lot more important, and we're really glad to see that organic boost. That's how our ancestors did it two hundred and sixty years ago and that's how we've always done it, and we're glad to see that shift towards organic and the whole wheat and the whole grain, and we hope soon to the sprouted.

[0:28:57.0]

**Kate Medley:** All of your product is both organic and non-GMO. Why is that important to y'all?

[0:29:04.1]

**Caroline Lindley:** So right now there is no genetically modified wheat in America, so if it is organic, it is by definition non-GMO, thankfully. And then all of our corn products are obviously organic, so they're also certified non-GMO. That's important to us because we think that it's better for us. That's what we would want to eat, and so we only want to make food products that we would eat, and we often do. I'm always taking a little bag of

something home to try, you know, grits or work on some new recipes. So we want to make something that our families would want to eat and our communities would want to eat, and we think of it sort of, you know, in 1755, if you went to your miller and you took your grain from your farm and they didn't do a good job milling it, you'd hear about it. You would definitely know. Your miller would be aware that they had not done a good job. And today I think a lot of times where we might get that feedback if the baker was not happy with it, or other mills might get that feedback, the end consumer doesn't get to provide that feedback because they're buying it, you know, off a grocery store shelf from a bag, so they don't get to say, "Well, that bread wasn't all that great." So the people that are making the flour don't always get to hear that original feedback from the consumer like they would have a hundred-some years ago. So we are a little closer to that with a lot of our customers. We do get to hear that feedback and have worked to pull that feedback from them to make sure we're making the best possible flour that tastes good and is better for them, if possible.

[0:30:30.6]

**Kate Medley:** Caroline, what are a few of the challenges that you guys are facing in 2018?

[0:30:37.4]

**Caroline Lindley:** Well, I would say that space is one of them. So we're in our original location. We don't know if the building is original or not. It's certainly very old. Some of the beams in it are hand-cut, not chainsaw-cut, so you know that they've been there for

quite some time, so it's sort of an old building. We've just built this new addition, so hopefully we're going to have some new space here in a couple of weeks. We're excited to open that up. I would say another thing is the increase in food safety regulations. So we're sort of at the forefront of that, which is awesome, and part of what we try to provide to our customers, but it is very difficult to continue to raise the bar. It's very hard to be perfect, and that's about what is required now, so we go through a lot of paperwork and we have whole rooms of paperwork that just supports our operation and that we've cleaned it and that we've documented all of that, and it does make the food safer and that's great, but it worries me where's the ceiling on this, right? I mean, you can only have so many pieces of paper per truck and per thing, but that's part of the benefit we give to our customers, is it's highly traced, it's definitely certified organic, and right now we are BRC "AA," which is part of the third-party certification. Beyond that, I think transportation, we're going to see that be a bigger issue. They've just changed the trucking regulations in 2018, and so while it's definitely a good move for the truckers and the folks that are driving those trucks, I think it's going to have an impact on the cost associated with all that, and I'm not sure that the end consumer or even distributors are fully aware of what that is going to do to their prices.

[0:32:14.8]

**Kate Medley:** Some other folks that I've spoken with for this project have suggested that they would love to see greater infrastructure around milling in the South. What's your take on that?

[0:32:26.4]

**Caroline Lindley:** Absolutely I would agree. So one of our concerns with our North Carolina wheat is that there's not enough on-farm storage to hold all of it, and so sometimes it goes bad before we can use it. We definitely try to rotate our farmers and get as much of it in as we can as quickly as we can, but we don't have enough storage here either to be able to store all of what we need for a whole year. So they might be able to do that in the Midwest, where they're set up for that. They have grain silos and testing centers and they can really do that well, but the industry is not built up enough here for us to be able to do that. So that's part of this expansion. You won't see it here yet because we haven't purchased them yet, but we're working towards getting some grain silos that will be able to do more on storage, not on-farm, it'll be at-mill storage, but more of that, so that we can hold some of that North Carolina grain and take care of it properly. It has to be moved, and it has to be kept cool, so that's all, I think, more complicated for a lot of these farmers that maybe wheat is not their first crop. Maybe they grow sweet potatoes or something else, and wheat is their cover crop for that, and they're happy to grow the wheat, they grow great wheat, but maybe that's not their bread and butter, so they may not have the exact right equipment or experience to keep it for a whole year.

[0:33:40.5]

**Kate Medley:** Is North Carolina-grown wheat a big part of what y'all are doing?

[0:33:47.0]

**Caroline Lindley:** Absolutely. So we put North Carolina wheat in a lot of our products. Especially we use soft and hard wheat, so we put soft wheat, mix it in with some of our other flours, even with wheat that comes from somewhere else, in order to balance that out and get exactly the right specs that we want. So we work pretty hard to get that, to work that North Carolina wheat in there. We also have our North Carolina bread flour, which is 100 percent North Carolina wheat. It's only made out of wheat from North Carolina. But we put our other NC wheat, we use that across all of our products, so a lot of our bakers, they'll say, "How much of this wheat do I have has North Carolina wheat in it?" and we can say, "Well, these three bags have some in it." We can tell by the lot numbers and by the tracing information exactly what the NC bread has in it or what the NC wheat is. It's a big part of our business as far as transportation costs. It doesn't have to come as far. So a lot of the top-quality wheat is grown in the Midwest, so we're obviously not in the Midwest, so it takes a lot more transportation dollars to get that to us. But we do, we use North Carolina, we use Virginia, we use wherever in the Southeast. If it's good quality and it's organic, we're happy to take it and look at it.

[0:34:57.9]

**Kate Medley:** Give me some insight into the state of wheat farming in the South. Are you seeing more people growing wheat? Where are they growing it?

[0:35:10.1]

**Caroline Lindley:** So wheat likes cold and dry temperature. That's, like, its favorite climate, and for soft wheat you don't have to be quite as cold or quite as dry, so that's

primarily what we see in the South, is the soft wheat because it just grows better. So the farmer obviously is going to grow what they can get the most yield out of, what the most money at market for, and so what's most successful is the soft wheat, usually, especially in organics. I'm talking exclusively about the organics. We mostly deal in that. We don't do the conventional, and I think that's a little different market because there's a different pricing structure there. For the organics, though, the hard wheat is not going to get quite as high of a yield, and so it's a little bit harder to convince farmers to do that and to take that on, especially with the added cost of certification and you have to have your truck washed out, you have to have wash tickets, you have to have weigh tickets. There's a lot of more paperwork and more regulation that goes into that, that's probably more of a hassle than to just do it conventionally and to just grow soft wheat. So they do get a premium for it, but it is a little bit more work and it's a little bit more difficult. And, you know, farming is a hard life. If it hails or if there's a bad storm and something happens, you know, I think that just makes it—it's just one extra variable for them to contend with.

[0:36:23.8]

**Kate Medley:** Some people have suggested this idea that there's sort of a resurgence of Southern grains or at least burgeoning interest in it in recent years. What's your take on that?

[0:36:37.6]

**Caroline Lindley:** I think so. I think people are, like I said earlier, much more interested in where their food comes from, or there's at least a really strong contingent of those

people and they're very vocal about it. I was just at Weaver Street Market the other day, they had a Co-op Fair, and everybody that came up—they were demo'ing some pretzels made with our flour—they said, "We want to know, so where's this come from? This is the mill? Okay." They wanted to know from me where did the wheat come from, how did we grind it, these same questions that we've been talking about. So I think there's a lot more interest in that, and I think that's great. That's a great thing. All it does is help us and help us sort of tell the story of what it takes to provide these good grains and how we can get more people to do that. I would *love* to have more organic wheat farmers in North Carolina. I think it's certainly increased and improved from when Dad started working with them thirty years ago. I think it's been a big change as far as there's more people out there doing it, but it's still a bottom-line game. It's can you make enough money doing this for it to be profitable for the farmer.

[0:37:38.3]

**Kate Medley:** Give me some idea, Caroline, of the size of your mill, whether that is size by way of production or employees.

[0:37:51.0]

**Caroline Lindley:** So we have about twenty-five employees, full-time employees. Right now we have two different shifts. We work about 7:30 to 11:00, pretty much. Our office is just open during the day. We can ship out whole truckloads. We can make whole truckloads of flour, so a truckload is about 40,000 pounds of flour. A bulk tankerload can be from 40,000 to 50,000 pounds of flour. So we can make a couple of those every day,

certainly, and with our new facility, we certainly have options to increase at it and make a lot more. It changes based on what we're making, so if we're switching around a lot, we have to run what's called a clean-out to separate between the products so there's no cross-contamination. You don't want wheat flour in your rye or vice versa, so we have to do that to sort of separate it, and that makes us less efficient time-wise, so we can't run quite as much in a day if we switch around a lot, but if we just stay on one product, we can run whole truckloads of stuff, whether that's in 50-pound bags or 25-pound bags or in bulk tankerloads.

[0:38:56.4]

**Kate Medley:** And to clarify, that's 7:30 AM to 11:00 PM? The one thing that I wanted to back up and ask you about, Caroline, is—I'm forgetting the trademark name of it, but the—

[0:39:08.1]

**Caroline Lindley:** Super Sprout?

[0:39:08.1]

**Kate Medley:** Super Sprout.

[0:39:09.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** So Super Sprout is sprouted whole grain, whole wheat flour that we created with a proprietary process. So what Dad really wanted to do, even from when he

first started milling, was make a whole wheat flour that was better for you, that tasted good, because people at that time—this would have been in the 1970s, early 1980s—people were not eating whole wheat flour. It was like, “Oh, those crazy health nuts. They were eating whole wheat flour.” And it didn’t taste that good. But that’s really where all the nutrition is. White flour is great and it makes great bread and it certainly has a place and a purpose, but it’s not a nutritional vehicle, really, unless you’re going to put stuff on top of it. So he wanted to make a whole wheat, whole grain flour that actually tasted good, that people would want to eat, and there’s a lot of people who have a bitter taste when they eat whole wheat flour. The Super Sprout, the process that we use changes the proteins and the enzymes and allows us to create this really long shelf-stable flour that you can add more water to, you can use less sugar with because it has more increased sort of naturally enhanced sugars, so it has a sweeter taste. You don’t get that bitter taste. And the process also allows us to—it reduces the phytic acid. Phytic acids sequesters calcium and zinc from your body being able to take it in, and it’s always present in whole wheat, but with Super Sprout, that phytic acid is reduced, so you can take that in and you can actually get more of the nutrients per bite, really. It’s also good because you can add more water to it, so the baker gets to sell more water in their bread, and that makes the bread lasts longer. So I have some bakers that can keep their bread two or three additional days longer, like a week or eight days or whatever out from when they make it, if it can last that long. So, you know, it’s an amazing product, it tastes good, it’s better for you. It’s more easily digestible, so folks who have gluten sensitivity, non-celiac gluten sensitivity, have been able to eat it without any ill effects, and also people who are diabetic don’t get a big sugar bump from it, so it has a better glycemic load.

[0:41:10.7]

**Kate Medley:** And this is sort of your dad's baby, if you will?

[0:41:12.8]

**Caroline Lindley:** Yeah, absolutely. So he started developing it in the early 2000s. He had a little test mixer. This would have been part of the time I was in high school, and we would come down at night, at the end of the day, and run a test batch or test mix and test it and see how it did. He worked really hard on perfecting this process so that we'd be able to scale it and be able to make a whole lot more of it. So we found out that—we sort of tweaked all these variables. What we basically do is control the light, temperature, time, the water, the grain, all these different aspects of the environment of it, and are able to really optimize the nutrition, the sprouting, and therefore the nutrition, and then stop it right before you lose baking viability. So you want to make sure that you're still going to be able to make a loaf of bread out of it, that the reaction doesn't go too far, but that you optimize the nutrition.

[0:41:58.2]

**Kate Medley:** Because your dad seems to be very much a central figure to this operation, for those of us who won't get to meet him, tell us a little bit about what he's like, his personality.

[0:42:13.8]

**Caroline Lindley:** Well, he's very—he's a quiet person, he's very thoughtful, and he spends a lot of time thinking and considering all the angles and what will be the best thing to do. He can think through these really complicated processes and the way that the pipes are and how this line's going to feed over here. He can visualize all that in his head and sort of come up with an optimal solution out of that. So he's really good at that, and he thinks very carefully about our business and our products and our customers, and he likes to have a partnership relationship with our customers, where we get to have feedback from them, we get to understand what it is that they're doing and how we can better help them accomplish what they're trying to do and have a great product. So he's a very thoughtful person. A lot of people think in a family business that a lot of times leaders are very autocratic, but he's definitely not. He listens to everybody, he takes everybody's thoughts into account, and then he makes a good decision about what we need to do to move forward.

[0:43:13.2]

**Kate Medley:** So of all the things that you do in a day at the mill, Caroline, which it sounds like they're wide-ranging, what's your favorite part of your job?

[0:43:23.9]

**Caroline Lindley:** I love to talk to customers, so I talk to everybody from, you know, somebody just down the road that calls and they want a couple of bags and they want to come in and pick them up, to somebody who is a national grocery store chain and they want to get a bulkload tomorrow. [Laughter] So I get to talk to that whole different range

I get to talk to about what they bake, how they're baking it. You'd be surprised how many people say, "What should I do about this?" and how many bakers will come and ask us for advice or how to tweak a recipe a little bit one way or another, so I get to work with them on that and understand what they're doing. I love talking to people about flour, explaining it to them and trying to get the best thing for them, whatever they're working with, and particularly about Super Sprout. That's our big product that we're really excited about. Like I said, it's better for you, it tastes better, and it can be used in anything from pizza to pancakes to bread to cookies. I've made pie with it. So that's sort of one of my focuses, is to tell people about that and to get them to try it, because it is a new product and is different than other whole wheat, whole grain flours on the market. So once I get people started on that, they're like, "Oh, this is so good!" So I really enjoy that feeling of getting them started on something that's going to be so much better for them and tastes good too.

[0:44:37.0]

**Kate Medley:** Are y'all selling that retail at this point?

[0:44:39.5]

**Caroline Lindley:** Yes. So we sell that wholesale and retail. It's online on our website and it comes in two-pound bags there, and then we also sell it out of our office in 25- and 50-pound bags, and then wholesale 25 and 50, or bulk tankerloads.

[0:44:53.0]

**Kate Medley:** Perfect. What's up next in the future of your mill?

[0:44:59.3]

**Caroline Lindley:** Well, we've got to move into our new space, which is exciting. That space has a lot of Super Sprout processing in it, so we're hoping to be able to increase our production of that several times over, so we should be able to produce a lot more, which is really exciting, and we'll be able to do more specialty products on the equipment we have now. So we might be able to get into some additional heirloom and ancient grains that we haven't been able to do as much of because we're running our wheat, which is sort of the primary vehicle for a lot of nutrition. So that's what we feel like is really important, but if we can move that to our new facility, we'll be able to do some more specialty stuff. So I think that's really the big future push is more Super Sprout and more specialty Super Sprout, so we can do rye, spelt. Right now we do an ancient grain blend, which has amaranth, quinoa, millet, sorghum, and buckwheat in it, so more things along those lines.

[0:45:48.5]

**Kate Medley:** And then taking a longer view, let's say twenty years from now, if you're running this mill, what are your priorities for the direction in which it might grow?

[0:45:59.7]

**Caroline Lindley:** Well, I think that the sprouted flour is going to take a while to catch on, and I think we've already seen that. I mean, it's almost been around for a decade now,

and people are just starting to get the interest and the hang of it. So I think that's got a long way to go. There's almost no reason to make regular whole wheat flour if you're making sprouted flours, whole wheat flour, so I think we'll see a continual shift towards that. I think there's really going to be a revolution from just regular whole wheat, whole grain to any kind of whole grain rye, spelt, whatever, in the sprouted realm. So I think even in twenty years, I think we'll be doing sprouted flour, and that'll be our main focus. I imagine that we'll have some other grains by then. We'll be able to do einkorn and emmer and some of these sort of ancient other grains that people will be interested in. Hopefully there'll be more of that grown even locally, that's organic, that we'll be able to have access to.

[0:46:55.1]

**Kate Medley:** Cool. And then my last question for you before I open it up to you is: when you're not working, what are some of your interests or hobbies?

[0:47:06.5]

**Caroline Lindley:** [Laughter] This is a hard question, because mostly I'm working. But I love to bake, which for me is not working because I enjoy it and I like to try different recipes out and try different flours out. A lot of times I get like the first dibs on whatever new product is out there. So that's one thing I like to do. I love to listen to live music and go and see different things around, and I'm super interested in history, especially Revolutionary history just because of where I come from and what I come from, and so I

love going to different places like Monticello or other sort of semi-local, within a weekend's drive, interesting places like that that have historical relevance.

[0:47:47.3]

**Kate Medley:** Cool. What are your specialties in baking?

[0:47:49.7]

**Caroline Lindley:** I do a lot of just really simple breads, so flour, salt, yeast, water, because you can really taste the flour and the grain that way, and you can tell if it's going to rise or not. It doesn't have a bunch of extra sugar in it. It lives or dies on its own. So I like to do that, just to be able to really taste the flavor in the wheat. I make a pretty good scone and I like pancakes a lot. They're super easy. We do Super Sprout pancakes, and they're really easy to whip up, and you can keep them—I don't even like pancakes, actually, but the Super Sprout pancakes I really like. So it's just something that's really easy to do.

[0:48:24.7]

**Kate Medley:** Nice. That's all of my questions, Caroline. Are there other aspects of this operation or your family that you think are important that we include and talk about, any parting comments?

[0:48:37.2]

**Caroline Lindley:** I'm just trying to think. I think we feel really fortunate to be here and to be in this time where local is important now. Dad says, "I did local forty years ago and nobody would even talk to me because I was doing local. I was grinding North Carolina wheat forty years ago, and the grocery stores wouldn't have it. It wasn't cool to be local then." So it's cool to be local now. We're real excited about that. We *love* this North Carolina bread culture. This North Carolina grain culture's been really great. We have awesome bakers, and we're thankful to have people who really make art out of what we create, sort of the raw material. So that is awesome. And I'm personally just really thankful to have this opportunity to work with my family business and to be able to hopefully carry this on for future generations and be a good steward of it so that, you know, in another hundred years, somebody else can have this interview with somebody else in the future. So I think we feel really lucky and real excited about the future and what it's going to bring.

[0:49:38.0]

**Kate Medley:** Thank you.

[End of interview]