

GREGG RENTFROW
University of Kentucky Butcher Shop, Lexington, Kentucky

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Date: April 21, 2014

Location: Gregg's office, University of Kentucky

Interviewer: Sara Wood

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: Forty-seven minutes

Project: Cured South

[Begin Gregg Rentfrow Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Wood: It is Monday April 21, 2014. I'm sitting in the office--what's that--?

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Gregg Rentfrow: I said where has April gone?

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SW: It's over; it's over. I'm sitting in the office of Dr. Gregg Rentfrow at University of Kentucky in Lexington. And Gregg I'm wondering if you could for the tape--oh well this is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance, and could you say hi and introduce yourself and tell me who you are and where we are right now?

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GR: Sure; okay. I'm Gregg Rentfrow and I'm the Extension Meat Specialist, Associate Extension Professor of Meat Science here at the University of Kentucky. A little bit about my background: born and raised in Central Illinois. My father is now a retired Ag teacher and he was, you know, very adamant that I developed that character you know type thing, so I went to work pretty early and I went to work for a grocery store in our hometown of Shelbyville, Illinois. And it wasn't long before they asked me to go back to work in the meat department. And I learned cutting meat back there and--and just you know kind of an after school job that I never, ever would have dreamt would have turned into an actual career of this--this caliber. I cut meat as I worked myself through junior college at Lakeland College in Mattoon, Illinois and then

transferred to the University of Illinois in Champagne and got my bachelors and masters at the University of Illinois and then moved west to the University of Missouri for my Ph.D. and then took the position here at UK [University of Kentucky] and I've been at UK about eight years now.

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So I've been in the business for over twenty-five years.

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SW: And so you're from the Midwest originally, but did you have--I mean you--where you were, were there curing traditions there?

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GR: Well, I worked in a grocery store so what curing was already done, it was products that we brought in. What's kind of interesting is if you look at the map, the Midwest and the North have a lot of meat curing so there's a lot of processed meats in those regions. Here in the Southeast and the South it's mainly focused on fresh meats. Why there's that division I really don't know. But it's really kind of interesting.

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Each--each kind of region of the country has their own kind of food you know like Texas has barbeque and North Carolina has barbeque. There were certain areas in Missouri where the traditional dry cured sausages like not--and I must say summer sausage wasn't the summer

sausage you see in a grocery store but it was a dry-cured summer sausage. That was kind of popular in Missouri.

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As I go up to Minnesota and Wisconsin you'll see adding different things so, like, a couple weeks ago I was at the Minnesota Meat Processors Convention and they had a blueberry and wild rice summer sausage which you don't think about blueberries going with meat, but it worked out really well. And so you--you see some muddling of that kind of stuff as you go throughout the--the different regions of what's kind of special.

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Here in the Southeast and in Kentucky the dry cured country ham is the big thing, the dry cured bacon is the big thing here and it's--it kind of makes sense because we're in that region where the weather is conducive to that. You know we have mild winters that gradually go into springs and the summers are--are mild as compared to some other places where the humidity is perfect and so the--that dry cured ham or country ham or country bacon, the environment is perfect for that.

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SW: What else can you tell me about curing in terms of what's specific to Kentucky or as opposed to Missouri or a place like Virginia even?

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GR: Yeah; like I said here in the Southeast the country ham is the king. You know if you look at all the country hams that are made in this country, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia where you're going to find the bulk of those being made--as along with the country bacon, once you leave the Southeast the term "country ham" kind of loses its flair so to speak and people just know the ham as a ham. You know here in the Southeast you hear the term country ham and city ham. City ham is what the rest of the country knows as ham but in the Southeast and the South there's city ham and there's country ham. And they're two different products even though they're made from the same meat so to speak, the hind leg of a pig, the process to making them is entirely different.

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You might from a sausage standpoint a lot of fresh sausages one of the things that is kind of conducive to the Southeast is what we call a country sausage which is a--a fresh kind of breakfast sausage that's put inside a canvas bag that's FDA and USDA approved. And it's cold smoked. And so you take it out of the canvas bag and you--and you fry it up and it has that smoky flavor to it. That's a product that you really only see here in Kentucky and in--in Tennessee. Now if you drive up north of here into the Cincinnati area you get into a very regional food known as goetta which kind of is a throwback to the time when we had to make things go further and get as one of those products that it's along the same lines as scrapple in Pennsylvania and head cheese and souse and things like that--not something that if you look at the ingredients you probably wouldn't eat it but if you tried it you like it. And goetta is one of those that if you draw a fifty to sixty mile circle around Cincinnati that's the only place you're going to find it.

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SW: Is there anything like that here? I know you mentioned the country sausage and the canvasback but do we have--does Kentucky have anything like that here?

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GR: Really the only ones that are special are the country sausage and the country ham and the goetta. We don't really have a--I mean there's certain areas of the state where barbeque is kind of popular. You get out in the western part of the state, barbeque mutton which is older lamb is popular but here in the central part it's not that popular.

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There's dishes like burgoo which is--it's kind of funny; where I came from in Illinois we call it the vegetable soup. And in Southern Illinois where my wife is from it was called chowder and here it's called burgoo but it's all the same thing. You know so certain dishes are conducive to this area and I'd say burgoo especially this time of year when we're getting into the derby is one of those traditional Kentucky products that you have as well as the Hot Brown which is basically a lot of mashed potatoes, cheese, and country ham, so--. **[Laughs]** That's what a Hot Brown is. There's more to it than that, so--.

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SW: I'm wondering; what was your learning curve like with curing as you went along from you know coming from starting in Illinois and going west and coming back toward Kentucky?

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GR: Yeah; well oddly enough it's--it's weird. You know as an extension person you have to be kind of a jack of all trades. And sometimes you have to be an expert of all those areas. And I was trained to not only be a researcher but be a fresh meat researcher, so my--my realm is fresh meat. And so when I moved to Missouri and I moved to Kentucky I had to kind of learn some of that. So I really--you know when I got to Missouri I was exposed to the country ham for the first time and then when I moved to Kentucky boy my learning curve had to go straight up. I mean I had to learn everything I possibly could and processed meats you know since we don't have a whole lot of processors in the state--we've got probably 130-plus meat processors in Kentucky and I would say maybe a half dozen of them do specialty products.

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And so my demand for that kind of knowledge is not as great as if I was in Missouri or Iowa or Wisconsin or someplace like that but the country ham, I mean boy when I got here it didn't take me long to go you know--I realized. You could look at my shelf and there's a lot of books on country ham and things like that. **[Laughs]** Now I will say one thing. We've hooked up with our dining service on campus and our interests in processed meats have gotten greater mainly because of the Kentucky Proud Program and more and more five-star type chefs looking for locally produced foods. And when they get that they get like whole carcasses or whole pieces of meat instead of just the steaks. They get the whole chunks and they have to process it themselves and they're left with these trimmings. And so now they're starting to make some of these charcuterie old European style sausage and so we've had to--our learning curve on those have had to go up you know pretty steep as well because we're trying to get in front of that so we

can't start advising and working with those individuals that are making that so we are producing a safe product.

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SW: Can you talk a little bit about that? When did that actually start?

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GR: The Kentucky Proud Program?

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SW: That and the--the connection to the Dining Services?

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GR: Our connection with the dining service, kind of interesting; when I got here eight years ago our executive chef Scott Kohn he got here about the same time. And that was his goal is to produce or to put as much locally produced foods into UK dining halls as he could. Obviously you can't do everything but you can do what you can.

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And eight years ago I think he told me they--they purchased about \$18,000 you know. Last year their impact was \$1.8 million. So he and I kind of hooked up I'd say about five or six years ago when we were trying to okay, we can't get whole carcasses. This is our thinking five--six years ago. But maybe we can do ground beef. And so we started to try to get ground beef in here. And it's--it was really a fascinating thing because we were getting--they were producing a

higher quality hamburger but the students rebelled against it because they were so used to the lower quality when they got something higher quality you know their quality was different than that. And so it was kind of an education from that standpoint. But we didn't give up on that kind of--that concept.

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And so about three or four years ago we started to really explore the meats. And it seemed logical for us to bring those meats in underneath our inspection legend here at UK in the meats lab and then process those cuts and then throughout the different dining halls throughout campus, and so it made for--if you stop and think about it you think well why didn't somebody do this beforehand 'cause each--each state has a meat lab, you know more than likely and you know you have these land grant institutions in each state, well why wasn't this a logical marriage a long time ago?

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But we're the only state in the union that has that. You know more and more states are interested in it 'cause we've kind of broken the crust on that but as of now we're--we're the first, so--.

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SW: And could you explain for people who don't know what land grant is can you explain that situation?

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GR: Land grant universities is a concept, there's actually--you have to forgive me on the dates; there's two land grants. We're the older land grant and then there's a newer one like nineteen--something but these are institutions in each state that it was targeted you will have extension programs, you will have agriculture, you will have this and that and the other and these are a way of taking you know the knowledge--that's what extension basically is in a nutshell is taking the knowledge from research to the people.

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And so my job is to look at these big--part of my job is to look at these big complex research projects and pull out what I can take--use from that research to advise and work with our--with our processors throughout the state and throughout the country. And so what a land grant institution is--is one that has all these mandated programs that are designed to kind of take the science to the people, not only develop the science but be able to take it to the people as well.

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SW: So you know it can be used for research but you're taking that as well and the community is involved in it somehow? They get to see sort of a piece of the final product?

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GR: Yeah; I mean you know like I said there's two other meats researchers here and you know what they do and what I do is you know they may look at a certain pathway of a cell. And it's my job to look at that and say, "Okay how can I take that pathway?" And what they're finding out and expand it bigger to what's going to happen to the actual product. And so you know I'm

more--they're more basic researchers and I'm more of the applied research type guy where I want to--the research I want to do is something that's going to impact--have an immediate impact. But in order for me to explain and develop my--my applied research I need those basic researchers as well. So they kind of lay the groundwork for me to do what I do.

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SW: So to go back to the dining hall, the connection to the dining services here, is there a curing program that they have here at the university? Can you talk about that?

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GR: Sure; yeah we--we do a lot of cured meats here on campus. We do that not only for teaching but for the dining halls as well and that all happens down in the meat lab. From a teaching standpoint most of the kids that take my class they learn that in their--in their classwork. And I turn--there's days I turn them over to the chefs and the chefs teach the class and teach them how to do this kind of stuff. And so a lot of the products that the students are producing in my class will ultimately end up in the dining halls as well so it's kind of a full circle education because those follow those animals from live through the slaughter process through the fabrication process, through processed meats and what's kind of unique at the end of the semester I turn them over to the chefs and they've kept some--we've kept some of the meat back from the animals that they process. And they make and plate their own kind of five-star meal.

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So we--we go from the hoof all the way down to how a restaurant works. It's kind of a full circle knowledge for them. And it's kind of neat for them to be able to see what the chefs are

doing so that they can go back and when they hear their friends say, “Well this, this, this,” and they can go back and say, “Hey no. No, no; we know those guys and we--this is how they do it and this, that, and the other,” so--it’s kind of neat.

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SW: That is really neat. It sounds--are there other universities doing this kind of thing in terms of the curing?

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GR: There’s a lot of them that cure their own products, yes, but as far as working with the dining services on campus--no. We’re--as far as I know we’re the only ones doing that. But a lot of schools do the same thing. For example, when I was at the University of Illinois they had their own cured meats as well. We had the Illini ham, we had the Illini bratwurst, they had snack sticks and things along those lines. When I was at Missouri they had their own; they had Mizzou bacon. We had the tiger tails and things like that. And so each school has their own you know products that they make. Here you know we make a big line of bratwurst and we make a big line of dry cured sausages as well. So it’s--each school is different and they kind of tailor things to what they need.

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SW: And where do you get the--what kind of--I’m wondering to be particular, what kind of--what kind of hogs are you using or what--where are you getting the meat from?

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GR: Most of our animals come off of our farms and so a lot of times what we sell through our butcher shop are the leftover and it's kind of--leftover is probably a bad choice of words but you know the excess from the research and teaching and for example, somebody doing research they may only be interested in six or seven inches of one muscle, so we have the entire carcass to deal with and that's where a lot of that comes from.

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Our pigs, our cattle, our sheep all come from our farms here on--I shouldn't say on campus but here in the area. We do a service for some of our farmers locally, not a big--not a lot but we do some of that but most everything comes off of our own farms here at UK.

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SW: And how many do you have here--how many farms?

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GR: How many farms, let's see; there's--there's the beef farm, the pig farm, and a sheep farm which are all located about fifteen miles off campus. And then there's a pig farm and a cattle farm that's located in Princeton which is about three hours away from here. So there's probably about a half dozen different farms, livestock farms that we have that UK owns.

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SW: Could you talk about is--I'm wondering in terms of the breeds, do you know--can you talk about some of the breeds you're using?

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GR: A lot of our cattle are Angus breeds. Most of them are crosses. Pigs, what's kind of neat, with pigs we'll use a variety of breeds and a lot of composite breeds. I can't say we have any one particular breed although all of our pigs are white and that's kind of--it's odd in--in the beef industry the more desirable cattle are black and in the pork industry the more desirable pig is the white pig.

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SW: Why is that?

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GR: Well black is because of the Angus breed and the notoriety with that as far as quality and you'll see a--you know if you watch a livestock auction you'll see a pen of cattle that is black will go for a higher price than a pen of whites or browns or mixed colors. And it's just because of the Certified Angus breed, you know or Certified Angus program that these breeds qualify for.

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Pigs, the reason why we go with white pigs is they're easier to de-hair. Colored pigs tend to have a coarser hair and they're more of a challenge to de-hair. And so the desired one is the white one and so there's--there's places that try to make sure that when they cross breed their pigs that they're white in color.

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SW: That's so interesting. I've never heard--I mean I've been talking to people and they talk about specific breeds but nobody has brought up the color so that's really interesting.

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GR: Yeah; color it's--it's odd. You know the whole influence of black cattle is fascinating because when you breed a black hided animal to any other color chances are the offspring is going to be black and black is a dominant gene. And because of Certified Angus beef one of the requirements is that they have to be fifty-one-percent black. And so those animals get such a premium for being black that we're starting to see even breeds that are not traditionally black have a black option.

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For example a Hereford is traditionally a red body with a white face. Now you're seeing black Herefords which are black body with a--with a white face. Simmentals which are traditionally kind of a red and white, lemon and white color, now you got black Simmentals so you're seeing even breeds offer black versions of their animals. And it's just--it's whether or not those animals are higher quality than the others it's you know that's subjective obviously. But you just see the--the color becomes--becomes a big thing. And you know and as vertically integrated as our pork industry is getting to be where the--the--the processing plant may own farms, you know it's easier for them to de-hair a white pig and so the white pig has become the desired one, the same with chicken. Most of our chickens are white too.

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SW: That's so interesting. And you do lamb--you have a lamb farm you said?

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GR: We do sheep here as well. The two main breeds that they use here are Dorpers and Polypays which are muscle breeds. And that's just where our--our sheep researchers that's the one they do the research on now. If they decide to go to a different--you know take their research a different direction and look at different breeds then those will change as well, so--.

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SW: And your classes are at the University here. Are you guys curing like are you curing the sheep or the beef or doing anything like that?

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GR: Yeah; we--we--we cure all of our own meats. We don't do a whole lot of lamb. But we've experimented with making lamb--cured lamb products. The challenge of it is--is you know when we cure it we add value to it. And so lamb is already higher priced, so we cure it and add value to it and then all of the sudden we've got to charge an even higher price and we can't sell it. And so we don't do a whole lot of lamb but we do a lot of curing with our beef and our pork.

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SW: Can you talk about some of the ways you're curing or what happens to it?

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GR: There's various--how do you say--there's--there's various levels or various types of sausage. The most basic and easiest to make is the fresh sausage and so for us our fresh sausage is basically ground with seasoning added to it and put in a--put in a casing and sold. For here those of us at UK we have--we're known for our bratwurst line. We have a regular bratwurst and we have what we call Wildcat Tail, keeping with the school theme. It's a bratwurst with a cheese in it and we do a bourbon apple brat where the--the apples are from Kentucky and obviously the bourbon is from Kentucky as well. And we do an Italian sausage which our--what makes our Italian sausage neat is the guys will pick fresh oregano and basil off the stem to put in the sausage. We don't--you don't see that very often done.

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We do a--a Mexican style chorizo where some of the products--some of the ingredients we put in there we have to go to the Mexican grocery store to buy 'cause it's just not--you don't see those ingredients very often like Mexican oregano and ancho and guajillo peppers. Then we kind of step up to where we've got our smoked sausage line which is we do a regular smoked sausage and we do an andouille and our andouille is really popular which is odd because that's mainly a Louisiana type product. But for some reason we sell a lot of it here in the Bluegrass.

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Then you step up to the most challenging one and that's the semi-dried and dry-cured sausages. And that's where we've got to a summer sausage line that falls into that semi-dried category where it's just a regular summer sausage and we do a beef and pork summer sausage and then we do a jalapeno and cheese summer sausage and then we step up to the dried ones

where we've got a Genoa salami that the guys will age at least nine months to a year before we sell it. You know we do a Landjager and a Spanish-style chorizo as well and so you can kind of see if you got your list of different types of sausage. You can go through our meat cases and see those throughout there. And obviously the dried and the semi-dried ones demand a higher price point than the fresh because you know there's a lot more loss and a lot more involved in those.

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SW: And could you talk just specifically about summer sausage because you--you mentioned this being a Kentucky thing? Can you talk about what--what is in the summer sausage and a little bit about the process?

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GR: Sure; our summer sausage you can either make with all beef, all pork, or a mixture of both. We do--we do all those. Mainly what we sell is the mixture of beef and pork. It's fermented. When you get into the dried and semi-dried sausages they're fermented meaning that we're going to add a lactic acid producing bacteria to the sausage. And so through the process we add a--it's called culture or a bacteria and they munch on the sugars that we add in there and--and one of the byproducts is lactic acid.

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That's part of not only the flavor profile but it's part of the preservation as well because as they produce lactic acid the PH lowers and as the PH lowers fewer and fewer bacteria survive. And as--as--that's how you get shelf stable sausage meaning they don't require refrigeration because number one, the PH is low or number two, the water activity--meat has roughly a water

activity of about .98. Pure water has a water activity of 1.0. And so when we lower that we create an environment where bacteria can't survive. And so we do that by adding salt and that pulls the moisture out of there.

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And so once they're fermented then they're smoked and cooked and part of the flavor profile of a summer sausage is that nice tangy taste to it--that's the acid, the lactic acid that was produced. And so they will go through an incubation period of several hours to a few days for the--for the fermentation to happen and then we--we smoke and cook them.

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And you know like I said you can have just the regular summer sausage, you can add cheese to it, you can add jalapenos. We had dried jalapenos or--and we use a high-temperature cheese so that they don't melt through the cooking process. And so that's the basis--basis of making a summer sausage is making sure you have a fermentation. And then whatever seasonings and spices you want to add to bring out different flavor profiles or how they interact with each other that's totally up to you, the processor and the consumer.

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SW: And when you smoke--I mean are you using--is there a specific kind of wood you're using or--?

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GR: We--we mainly use hickory although this is what happens when you buddy up with chefs is they--they want to experiment. Okay what happens if we use cherry? What happens if you use apple? What happens if you use mesquite? What happens if we mix apple with cherry? **[Laughs]** Or mix you know mesquite with hickory? We mainly use hickory as kind of the king of all smoking woods or you know those hardwoods because it works well with everything whereas you know apple works well with pork, kind of okay for beef, you know one of those types of things. And so and hickory is a lot cheaper. I mean you know we've got a little three-pound bag of cherry sawdust that costs more than the fifty-pound bag of hickory sawdust. So that's part of the reason why we use--use hickory. It's a little bit cheaper and it's--it works with everything.

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SW: And do you know--do you know--could you talk a little bit about the--I mean you did a little bit before but just in terms of the importance of--or of summer sausage here in Kentucky and the traditions or why people made it in the first place?

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GR: Well a lot of these products go back to how we preserved things before refrigeration. The traditional summer sausage that we have nowadays still requires refrigeration but like I said if we go over to Missouri they make a summer sausage that doesn't require refrigeration. So a lot of these products were made out of necessity meaning that we have to preserve this for a long period of time because we don't have refrigeration or the winters are shorter than maybe in other--other parts of the country. And so we needed a way to preserve it. And that's where a lot of this comes from.

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The same thing with like we talked about with goetta in--in Cincinnati. That was one of those products where I've got five pounds of meat but I need ten pounds of meat and so how can I extend it? So a lot of it comes out of necessity. And a lot of times out of necessity becomes a traditional product and when you get a traditional product then boom. You've got something that identifies a culture, you know and that's what I tell a lot of our 4-H kids is the country ham is part of our food heritage, part of our food culture, something that our forefathers did to feed the family and preserve meat for long periods of time that didn't need refrigeration and now it's become an identity for us.

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SW: And I wanted to ask you about the 4-H but before I do you know you just said a lot of great stuff about the tradition of curing. Now we have refrigeration and you talk about identity so is that what curing is for us now, it's more of an identity thing because we have refrigerators? So I'm just wondering the importance of continuing these curing traditions.

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GR: Yeah; it--well we do have refrigerators now and it is important to continue these traditions but I think it's changed. You know as technology changes things in general change like for example I can remember when I was a kid we--you know we went from Illinois down to Orlando, Florida and this was back in 1979. We didn't take a cell phone with us. Most of us now wouldn't even--we would shudder at the thought of driving across town without our cell phones, so technology changes and becomes a norm. And I think with a lot of those foods where at one time they were shelf-stable, now they require refrigeration. So I think that's kind of a throwback

to saying, “Okay we want it but we don’t necessarily want to go through the long period of time to make it.” And so--and that’s kind of where the city ham came from. I want the ham but I don’t want to wait a year to have it, so I want to wait a few hours.

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And so that’s why I think technology has kind of changed things is where we don’t have to wait as long. And I think that’s where a lot of the--like the summer sausage, in Missouri there’s a traditional one that says it’s shelf-stable but here in Kentucky and the Southeast ours needs refrigeration. At one time it was probably the same as the one in Missouri, but as technology evolved we kind of abandoned the non-refrigerated for the refrigerated.

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And of course you know from a USDA regulation, refrigerated is a lot easier to make than a non-refrigerated, so--.

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SW: And just to be clear are you guys also curing hams here as well in the program?

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GR: Yeah; yeah. We--we cure a lot of country hams. We do a few city hams. But we--we do a lot of country hams and part of that is that’s one of my research areas as well as it helps us stay ahead of things so we can help our 4-Hers that are doing the project as well.

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SW: And so since you brought that up can you talk about what that program is? How did it start?

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GR: It started in the late nineties from my predecessor Dr. Benji Michael and it was kind of spurred on by the Kentucky Country Ham Producers Association. They thought it would be a neat way to promote making country hams in the youth and the 4-H obviously is--is a logical avenue for that. And so when--when Dr. Michael started that in the late nineties there was only about eight counties and about forty-five kids. This year we've got over sixty-five counties and over 780 kids involved in the project. And so from a short period of time of--of roughly around ten to fifteen years that project has grown exponentially. And it encompasses everybody. I mean it's one of those projects I tell folks that, "You don't need acres of land, you don't need livestock; all you just need is you know the desire to do it and learn about it basically."

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SW: And so how does it work? So you use I know you explained this to me on the phone; can you talk about how it works and you know each county has--?

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GR: Yeah; we--there's two ways that--that it works. The vast majority of those 780 kids signed up for the project, they work within their county or group of counties get together and they have their own ham house. And so those counties that have their own ham house, we start in January. We usually start on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday because the kids are out of school. And so

it's nice and cold. So we're allowing Mother Nature to be our refrigerator and this year she was-- I wish she would turn that refrigerator off. But any-hoo and so we start in the cold winter months and basically we let Mother Nature be our refrigerator. And those--those ham houses are at the county offices. And there's probably about twenty to twenty-five of those throughout the state.

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The other side of the state, the smaller group will work with--work with their local country ham curer, their professional country ham curer and they'll put them in cure there. There's--there's advantages and disadvantages of both. If you're working with a professional curer, you show up, you don't have to worry about them anymore until they call you back to clean the hams and get them ready for the fair. But on the flipside those counties that have their own ham houses they've learned a lot more because they've had to watch those hams through each of the--each of the steps and they've--they've learned the little things that the professional guys have already learned and just do them automatically whereas those that have their own ham houses have had to do that.

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SW: And can you talk a little bit about--okay I asked you this on the phone--I've been trying to find the curing traditions in different communities for instance. You know a lot of people I've interviewed for this particular project it's been a lot of white people. I'm wondering with the 4-H program are you seeing kids from different backgrounds participate.

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GR: We do and I don't have the statistics at my fingertips to--to give those to you but yeah; you--you do see that. We--we are a melting pot and some of those old traditional lines in the sand are no longer there anymore. We do see a lot of African American kids, Asian, Hispanic, those types of kids in the projects as well. And I think 4-H has done a wonderful job of moving into the larger urban areas and--and convincing urban kids regardless of race or religion or whatnot that you can be involved in 4-H and you don't--it's more than just livestock. It's more than just crops--that there's these other projects that the kids can get involved in as well.

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And so you know you see that. You know now I'll grant you the vast majority of our meat processors are white European nature, although we do have a handful in the state that--that are African American, a couple that are Hispanic as well and you're starting--even when you go in there they may be owned by certain race or whoever but you're seeing even a mixture of cutters down there as well.

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For example down in our--in our meats lab there's myself and the meats lab manager and the--and the kids that work there but then you also see one of the sous chefs we work with and he's Muslim. You know so it's--it's--you're starting to see kind of more of a--of a blending of--of races and cultures working together on these projects.

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SW: Are you seeing curing traditions from other backgrounds being a part of it at all?

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GR: A little bit and I--and I--I go back to our sous chef downstairs. He's not only Muslim but he's from Bosnia and so he's brought some of those you know--especially the dried beef; he's brought that over from Bosnia and he's also you know oh, well we do this in the Muslim tradition as well. And so we've kind of incorporated some of that stuff in--in our products.

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SW: And what's his name?

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GR: His name is Zlatan Prasovic and what's kind of interesting about him is he is a Bosnian war refugee actually and his--his English is--well to put it this way, I think he learned English by watching the *Big Lebowski*. So it--he--every other word is dude, so [*Laughs*], but he's kind of a neat guy to talk to because he has brought some of those traditions over from Bosnia and Germany where he spent some time in Germany as well. But he also maintains his Muslim culture on top of that.

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SW: That's really interesting. I'm just--I was just curious as to how people bringing their own--if there are there--curing traditions into the program.

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GR: Yeah; and you got to realize that even our country ham, myself and--and Dr. Dana Hanson at North Carolina State we--we jokingly call the country ham the redneck cousin to prosciutto because our forefathers from Europe brought those traditions over here and they've kind of got muddled together to create this one product.

00:36:01

SW: And I wanted to ask you because you keep seeing *Kentucky Proud* label on things, how is that--what is that and how is that having an impact on what you guys do here?

00:36:11

GR: The local food movement is absolutely monstrous and when I first moved here to Kentucky it was at the beginning of the Kentucky Proud program. And basically what the Kentucky Proud program does is it highlights those products that are made within Kentucky. And what's kind of unique about it is those products are made within Kentucky but they may not necessarily be Kentucky in nature. For example, we have Kentucky Proud coffee. And now obviously coffee is more of a--of a tropical type plant, but the beans were--come up here and they're roasted in Kentucky by Kentuckians.

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And then there's some stuff like the country ham or other meat products that are from animals raised here in Kentucky and that's Kentucky Proud as well but basically it's a program designed to highlight all the products and--and the people from Kentucky. And it's become so popular that you're seeing other states have their own brand of programs like Goodness Grows in

North Carolina. It's their version of Kentucky Proud. Ohio Proud is another one. And we've even got a sub-set of Kentucky Proud called Appalachian Proud so that highlights not only products made in Kentucky but those products made within the Appalachian region of the State as well.

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SW: Why is that so important?

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GR: I don't--you know it's interesting. I've been asked that question many times and I think what it is--is I think people are becoming more and more interested in their food. They want to know where it comes from, what went into it; one of the kind of metaphors I use to describe it is you know in my off-time I've got a Harley Davidson and I love to get on that motorcycle and just point the front tire in a direction and go. And any--any biker out there will tell you it's not the destination it's the journey. And so I think people are getting that in their food as well is it's not so much the food in and of itself but what happened to that food? What's the story behind it? What's the--what's the story behind the farmer, you know did the farmer have kids involved in 4-H and FFA? You know was this farm a farm that was passed down from generation to generation? And people are more interested in the story than the actual food in and of itself. I think that's where it's coming from is people--they want to say I know the farmer where this came from, or I know this came from Kentucky. And there's also that sense of taking care of your own, you know. If I buy Kentucky Proud I'm taking care of a farmer in Kentucky or whoever it was in Kentucky.

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So I think it's kind of a community-type thing; I think it's wanting to take care of our own and wanting to know where your food comes from, wanting to know the story behind your food and it's--it's really neat. It really is because you know the local food movement has gotten huge. It's not only big in Kentucky; it's big everywhere. It's absolutely monstrous everywhere in the country. And more and more people that you know well classic example is when you take a vacation you don't ever--you don't want to just eat at the chain restaurants. You want to eat where the locals eat. And that's kind of where this comes from I think.

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SW: And I just wanted to ask you a couple more quick things about the butcher shop, maybe just one. I just wanted to--so I mean I was thinking about this. You have college students here that are going into the dining hall and they get to eat charcuterie?

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GR: Uh-hm.

00:39:37

SW: Sounds pretty nice.

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GR: Yeah; they do and what's neat about Dining Service is they have theme nights. Like back in February it was kind of cool and I wish I could have seen it; we've had a long, cold winter. Now obviously it's not been as long and cold as like people in Minnesota or you know

Wisconsin or North Dakota but to warm things up they had--they had a luau night where we--we--this last summer we slaughtered a bunch of roaster pigs and they cooked a bunch of those roaster pigs up and they had luau food just to kind of warm the spirit so to speak.

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And so they made--they'll have themes like that. They'll have every once in a while you'll see some of these--these products that we make you'll see that on there as well as a high-class meal or something like that. And so they--yeah they--they do. I don't know if they understand the traditions behind it or not but they do have those--those products at their fingertips.

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SW: It sounds a lot better than the options I was given when I was in college. [*Laughs*]

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GR: Yeah; the--the--hopefully the--the days of the Ramen Noodles are gone but I don't think so, but [*Laughs*]*--but we--*. You know they--they do an excellent job of trying to have fun nights, you know like that.

00:40:47

SW: And then just to make sure I have this right, so then for the butcher shop can anybody come in and buy from you guys and you provide to restaurants and things like that?

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GR: Anybody can come in and buy. You know we take cash, check, or charge. Whoever walks through the door has any of those things; we don't barter, so--. You know don't bring a goat or something like that to trade for a piece of meat. But we do--we're open to everybody. Grant you most of our clientele are people here on campus, people over in the hospital but we do get a lot of people that come in just for something different. So you know we've had folks as far South as Somerset which is down by the Tennessee border come in and--and part of it too is you know we have a very--you know our basketball tradition is very deep and steep in this--in this region. And so it's kind of neat to say you know this came from wherever and we always sell the story that our basketball coach really likes our Italian sausage and so we'll see people come in. "I want some of that sausage that Coach Cal likes." **[Laughs]** So we--you know it's just marketing that we do and he does like it; that's--at least that's what we've been told. And--and so now we don't have a picture of him eating it. That would be kind of neat. But it's--you know it's part of that tradition too of come up and buy a UK hat and get some UK sausage as well, so--.

00:42:03

SW: Sounds like a good deal. And so the people who work in the butcher shop and they're curing is it all--is it mostly it's like a rotation of students working?

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GR: Yeah; we--we train and--and employ about 300 graduate students. The dining service sends folks over as well and we train and employ them on top of that. We do have a set two or three people that operate and I say operate--gather the money and everything else because the money handling regulations that the--that the University has--there's only two or three people that

actually do that. But during hours of operation we're getting ready to reopen ourselves and I'll take you down there and we'll show you how it looks now remodeled, but I'll have the workers go out there and kind of interact with the customers, mainly just so they--you know like some of those--some of our undergrad students have had my class. And as one of them came up to me and said as they're interacting with them, said, "Oh I understand why you taught me this now." **[Laughs]** And so it's a way for them to not only interact with them but a way for them to apply the stuff they've learned in classrooms 'cause they'll get these questions and things like that.

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And so they're interacting with the customers. The customers can talk to them and then they can see that it is a student run organization so to speak. And they're able to interact with students are able to use the knowledge they've learned in class. So it's kind of a--it's one thing to learn and it's another thing to figure out how to apply it and that's what those students are learning.

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SW: Well Gregg, I've asked you a ton of questions and I'm pretty much out of them but I'm wondering if there's anything else you want to add that you think is important about the curing program here at UK or you know what you see where--where you imagine it going?

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GR: Uh-hm; well that's kind of tough. It is interesting; it--just to kind of give you I guess a little bit of demographics. In our department which is Animal and Food Science, we have Animal Science students and we have Food Science students which you know some--some institutions

have those split up in two separate groups. But I think what's surprising to a lot of people is the number of females.

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In my class where we teach the slaughter and fabrication and everything through the hands-on experience, last semester I had thirty-seven students and I had the most boys I ever had last semester. I had ten boys, so if you do the math that's twenty-seven girls. And--and the girls are all range of farm girls to city girls and same thing with the boys, farm--farm boys to the city boys. But I think a lot of people don't realize how female influenced things are nowadays. You know when I first got into the academic side of this going through graduate school I belonged to the American Meat Science Association. That's our professional association. And when I started there was only about three or four girls. Now it's predominantly women and I don't think folks grasp that or they realize how--how the tide has changed.

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The old story about the building we're sitting in now was it was only built with one female restroom because there would not be any women in agriculture. You know now it's predominantly women so it's amazing how times are changed. You know and so it's--it's fun when like I had a 4-H group this morning and they--one of the girls said, "Oh that's a class for the boys." No; that's a class for the girls. You can see that and it's really--it's fascinating to see that shift. It really is.

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SW: Do you see a lot of female traditions in the curing process? I mean have you see much of that?

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GR: What's interesting about when the females, the girls get involved in it it's exactly what you would think is the girls which is really neat, they tend to be more on how it looks. And so you're seeing some of the more stylish stuff done by the girls where they not only does it have to taste good but it has to look good as well. A lot of the guys, you know they do it and they don't care. Does it taste good? I don't care what it looks like. But the girls are a little bit both. And you see that when we do have that and the girls are doing it. They really strive to make it look good whereas the guys are throwing it together because you know as long as it's not moving I'm going to eat it type thing. With the girls it has to look good, and so you're seeing more of that artistic flair coming in with it with the females in the groups.

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SW: Well Gregg is there anything else you want to add that you think--?

00:46:44

GR: Not that I can think of--not until you leave. *[Laughs]*

00:46:47

SW: It's always the case. Well thank you very much for doing this, this morning; I appreciate it.

00:46:51

GR: Hey no problem; no problem whatsoever.

00:46:54

[End Gregg Rentfrow Interview]