

HENRY AMATO
Amato Winery - Independence, LA

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Date: November 3, 2005
Location: Mr. Amato's home – Independence, LA
Interviewer: Laura Westbrook, University of New Orleans
Length: 44 minutes
Project: Gulf Coast Foodways Renaissance Project/Hurricane Katrina

[Begin Henry Amato-1]

This is an interview with Mr. Henry Amato, who runs Amato Winery with his wife Jessie. We are in the Amato home, and the date is November 3rd. The interviewer is Laura Westbrook. With us during the first part of the interview are Matt Ewing and Mike Farace, who dropped by just as the interview was about to begin. They conduct dairy inspections for the Louisiana Department of Health, and have come to consult Mr. Amato about a regulator he has developed for the refrigeration of his homemade Italian cheese. Mr. Amato has offered to assist the men in their efforts to help small dairy farmers and cheese makers.

0:00:00.0

Laura Westbrook: What day is the Baton Rouge market?

0:00:04.1

HA: Saturday.

0:00:05.3

LW: That was the Saturday market?

0:00:07.1

HA: And that's the when the original market started. That was the first one and then from there Chris Kirby come from the other market. They trained him there and then he went to Baton Rouge and started Baton Rouge.

0:00:18.8

ME: And do you know it's more people at the Baton Rouge market.

0:00:23.2

MF: Yeah; I mean Baton Rouge, it *was* busy, well, *now* it's—**[holds arms wide]**

0:00:28.9

LW: In a good way. **[Laughs]**

0:00:36.9

HA: Listen, if--I'll be willing to help whoever y'all want me to talk with.

0:00:41.2

ME: Okay; we might have to bring you to St. Martinville.

0:00:44.8

HA: It don't matter--that would be good. [*Laughs, holds out small machine*] This thing here-- this is the regulator. Okay; first of all I need to find out if her freezer works or if we're going to go with the freezer?

0:00:58.2

ME: The freezer, yeah; it's just a small chest-type freezer you know. Right now she's just using it to put her to cultures in but she's going--you're going to have to rig up something like this.

0:01:08.0

LW: I hate to butt into your conversation, but what *is* that?

0:01:11.8

HA: This is an electronic controller. In other words, we're looking at something for the small farmer--at goat dairies they milk just a few animals--to cool down containers of milk. At your dairy farms you have a bulk milk tank and you have a lot of milk going in it, and about the smallest one of those you could buy would be \$100--\$150. With milk we talking about one

milking; you might get four or five gallons of milk. So we want a chill water bath like the old-time Coca Cola boxes that you put your Cokes in--

0:01:50.0

ME: We can do that.

0:01:49.9

MF: That's what we're looking for.

0:01:53.1

HA: Now like I said, the probe goes in-- this thing has got a lot of uses and I'm going to give you a few examples now. She's got a regular freezer. We go in here and wire it up to 110. You plug this thing into a 110 receptacle, all right; you program this thing and you press this thing and a little thing comes up that says "start." So you press it again; now, what's beautiful about this thing is you can decide the differential degree. If you want it to be--

0:02:30.3

ME: Thirty-three degrees or--?

0:02:31.5

HA: No, no; the differential--that makes the machine come on and off at one degree different, you know within one degree. Like if you want 50 degrees it will come on at 49 degrees and go off at 50, you know. So this thing here you can control--you can be so accurate--

0:02:53.8

ME: One degree, yeah.

0:02:53.9

HA: You know this thing will keep--when you say, "I want to keep this cheese at 50 degrees," it will go 50 and a half, you know, it's real close.

0:03:03.7

ME: It's close.

0:03:04.5

HA: Now the regular stuff, you program it like the refrigerators and all--the factory program there is six degrees, but what I'm saying is with this "brain" here hooked onto your freezer, first

of all she's going to turn the freezer wide open, because whenever this machine tells the freezer to come on it's going to come on. Now like I said--so she programs it to whatever degree she wants it.

0:03:29.5

ME: She's probably going to want it in the 30s.

0:03:32.0

HA: Okay; we're talking about the freezer.

0:03:33.7

ME: We want to cool it down.

0:03:34.2

HA: Yeah; but wait--wait--we're talking about differential right now.

0:03:35.6

MF: Oh okay differential.

0:03:37.7

ME: Yeah; like these milk tanks Mike--

0:03:39.4

MF: Which--

0:03:41.4

ME: Which she might have to turn them milk tanks down. They've got an adjustment there where your tank might kick on when your temperature gets down to a certain--well when it gets up--

0:03:49.9

MF: To a certain--?

0:03:51.5

ME: --to say 41 and then it brings off four degrees cooler.

0:03:54.2

MF: It brings it down. That's a different--okay; I got you.

0:03:57.1

HA: See it's the differential.

0:03:57.5

MF: I understand okay.

0:03:57.9

HA: Okay; like I say--most of the household stuff is six degrees differential.

0:04:02.6

MF: Yeah; I got you. I understand what you're saying.

0:04:04.2

HA: Now from then on this thing can go down to I believe a modest 10 you know. I mean it can get cold and you could program it.

0:04:16.2

ME: Yeah; all you need--

0:04:16.3

HA: Or you could go ahead and heat milk up to 220 degrees.

0:04:21.8

ME: If you wanted to.

0:04:22.1

HA: If you heat it on a heat cycle. What I'm saying; this thing will do exactly--

0:04:28.1

ME: What you want it to do.

0:04:28.6

HA: --what ya'll want to do. Okay; so what I'm saying is, if you want I'll be more than glad to do it, and if you can go get these things at--at mostly any refrigeration place--now the thing about it is it needs to be wired for 110, 220, or open and closed contact.

0:04:47.8

MF: This would be a 110?

0:04:51.4

HA: Yeah; in other words these freezers that you get at Wal-Mart, this chest type that you see, they've got small and big ones--they've got smaller chest type freezers.

0:04:58.2

HA: Yeah; you have a choice--a big, big range of choices however you want to wire it--if you want me to wire it for you, I'll be more than glad and there won't be no charge--I'll be glad to get her going. And this is--this is the choice you have. These are all the different choices you know.

0:05:17.0

MF: Yeah; okay.

0:05:19.8

HA: And the schematics; it's nothing to it.

0:05:21.7

ME: Hook it up to 110--no problem?

0:05:23.4

HA: No problem, and we can get her--we can get the water--okay; now this is the problem--
what I ran across. Now we want to get this milk cold--cold.

0:05:35.6

ME: We want to get it down--

0:05:35.9

MF: Well and you also want it to be stored there where--

0:05:38.7

ME: We want to store it.

0:05:41.0

HA: But the thing is you remember; she might can go ahead and say get this thing at 34-degrees where that will water--just to be a little icy.

0:05:48.6

ME: Right.

0:05:49.1

HA: And then maybe in about four or five hours she can come and say okay; we hit it hard and program it at, say, 40-degrees. You can say--or maybe it's okay just to go ahead and have the water at--at 38-degrees and put the milk in there. You see what I'm saying?

0:06:08.1

ME: I'm thinking you could probably have the water at 35 or something like that; it would cool it down and then that way it wouldn't--wouldn't freeze the milk.

0:06:14.5

HA: It won't freeze, right. And then she'll have a safe temperature for the--for the milk too. But no, I'll be more than glad to do that for you.

0:06:20.8

ME: See that little freezer you know we was thinking about, it's got a drain on it, okay. She can plug it in; so she can maybe make some kind of liner you know maybe--it wouldn't have to be a stainless or something to set down in there or--it's got--it's got an aluminum liner in it now.

0:06:36.6

[All Parties Speaking at Once]

0:06:38.2

ME: But we're just figuring, you know, over time you go to--you might bang it up or something like that.

0:06:44.6

HA: But the thing is, when she's not--she's always going to use it.

0:06:48.2

ME: Well I mean when she's milking she'd be putting--she'll be putting milk in there every day you know--twice a day.

0:06:53.5

HA: Well like I say again even if you--you know--

0:06:59.2

MF: Now those freezers, we--those freezers, I mean--

0:07:02.2

ME: They're not expensive I know.

0:07:02.9

HA: No; \$160 brand new.

0:07:05.3

ME: Well this is even a small one; it's smaller than like you--way smaller than the one you got out there.

0:07:11.8

HA: Yeah; those are about \$160.

0:07:13.1

MF: They are about \$160?

0:07:14.2

HA: Yeah; in Wal-Mart. But, like I said, if ya'll want me to help you I'll be more than glad to. Just give me a call.

0:07:18.2

ME: Well at least we know you can do this--see, that was our question. We didn't know whether you can raise the temperature on a freezer and--and have it where it wouldn't freeze, you know.

0:07:26.2

HA: I've got--I've got some friends I built that thing for. We operate a chicken plucker with that thing.

0:07:34.4

MF: All right!

0:07:34.5

All: [*Laughing*]

0:07:34.8

HA: All right; for a chicken plucker the water has to be 160 degrees. If the water is hotter it will scald the chickens. When you kill the chicken you don't want to put it in scalding water, because it gives that--so I mean that thing--that little piece of instrument--

0:07:50.5

ME: It's a good little instrument--perfect instrument.

0:07:51.5

HA: --it's just perfect for every little controller you want.

0:07:54.3

ME: All right; well--

0:07:55.7

HA: And, like I said, we need to get her one of them--go to Lowe's and get maybe a six-foot cord, and cut it in half, and let me wire it, and then you'll have one receptacle going to the plug and the other one plugged into her freezer--and she's ready.

0:08:11.6

ME: She's ready to go?

0:08:11.1

HA: And she don't--and then she got to drop the probe in the water. The probe is the brain, now--that little white thing.

0:08:17.6

MF: All right; okay.

0:08:19.0

HA: And that's it.

0:08:22.2

MF: How much would one of these run--

0:08:25.1

HA: [*Sighs*] I think that might be a little cheaper. I think that's about maybe \$72--\$73.

0:08:34.1

ME: That ain't bad.

0:08:35.7

HA: And then the extension cord is what--\$4 or \$5. I don't blame her for asking; I'd want to know how much, too, because who knows? That thing—I've handled things like this in my hand that cost thousands.

0:08:52.5

MF: Well, especially with the stuff that you deal with.

0:08:53.5

HA: And it's good for 15 amps, so it's just as big as actually a single circuit coming off of your panel. I mean it--it will control 15-amps.

0:09:11.9

ME: Well we appreciate it; we don't want to hold you up.

0:09:15.1

LW: Oh this is interesting; I'm learning.

0:09:18.8

ME: Well, like I said, we in this business, when people are going to the small operations like this, it's so hard for us to tell somebody, "You've got to buy a bulk milk tank or a commercial pasteurizer," when they want to do five gallons of milk and it costs more than it costs to do a thousand gallons.

0:09:39.3

LW: Now are you guys working with a Department of Agriculture project that's encouraging small businesses to grow--?

0:09:48.3

ME Oh we're working--we're not with the Ag. Department but we're working with them--

0:09:49.4

LW: How are you involved in this?

0:09:50.2

MF: --helping them get set up.

0:09:53.0

[All Parties Speaking at Once]

0:09:55.9

ME: Now if somebody wants to go into business, we have the standards that they have to meet, and we work with them and inspect them.

0:10:03.7

HA: These two people are not common. You will see--let me tell you this.

0:10:06.6

LW: That's the feeling I'm getting.

0:10:08.1

HA: This isn't, "Call me when you're ready," like that. And also, you don't see two people come over here to try to help somebody get started. That's the difference between the others and these two.

0:10:17.1

ME: That's not part of our job really.

0:10:18.6

LW: No; you really are going above and beyond.

0:10:20.7

HA: I say they are--they are different because most of the time inspectors will say, "You need this, this, and this; call me when you got it." And you're swimming in the ocean by yourself. And what they're trying to do here—they're helping people trying to get started and be clean and safe.

0:10:35.0

ME: And we want to see these little businesses start up; it gives up job security too!

0:10:42.0

LW: [*Laughs*]

0:10:44.3

[All Participants Speaking at Once]

0:10:45.8

ME: Well, I'm about to retire--

0:10:49.7

[All Participants Speaking at Once]

0:10:51.3

ME: I go till August of next year and then--

0:10:52.7

HA: Twenty-nine more days--I might come work with ya'll. **[jokingly]** I don't know, man, I don't know how I'm going to be around that woman all day.

0:10:59.2

All: **[Laugh]**

0:11:01.6

MF: Well you stay busy out here, though, that's for sure.

0:11:06.5

ME: That's right.

0:11:07.1

HA: But like I said; whatever ya'll want to do. And then for another step, if she really wants to roll with it--

0:11:15.9

LW: [*aside to Mike*] Can I get your full names? I may want to call you for more information.

0:11:20.7

HA: The next step, then, we can go ahead and get a house air-conditioning unit, we can plant those--those regular you know central units and put a--a different extension valve and we can actually send water through that thing. That thing will chill water to about maybe 28-degrees and then you can circulate it.

0:11:47.5

ME: Oh yeah; that's kind of the way the old can coolers work; you had coils and you had ice-backed water built up in there and you set the can down in there and cool it and you know this--I don't know why I didn't think of a chest freezer until you know Mike and Gary went and visited a lady yesterday and was trying to think of something that you could you know cool down some water that you could sit--

0:12:13.8

HA: We can do it. They make a hell of a beer can cooler. They'll get that beer cold in that water. Like I said, we always keep an extra one in case one goes down. I believe I had one in the last 10 years that went bad.

0:12:37.7

MF: Oh okay; so they hold up pretty good?

0:12:40.1

HA: Yeah.

0:12:42.2

MF: Well, you gave us some good ideas Henry; we appreciate it. When I was over there yesterday in St. Martinville I said, "I know somebody who might can put us on the right track. I know this guy--." You do it all and--everything you built around here, you done all of it yourself, huh?

0:13:02.6

HA: You got to.

0:13:04.4

MF: If you want to stay in business you got to, huh?

0:13:07.7

Male Speaker: Mike opened his place in Destrehan, or--

0:13:10.8

MF: Yeah; that's it.

0:13:11.6

ME: --where this guy makes these little--

0:13:13.6

MF: It's a little slurry like--

0:13:16.5

ME: Kind of like these Minute Maid frozen things; it's not milk, but frozen desserts come under our jurisdiction, so we have to do that too.

0:13:25.0

LW: Oh darn. [*Laughs*]

0:13:27.5

MF: Like a lot of plants, you know--ice cream, popsicles and stuff like that--but go ahead--

0:13:34.1

ME: He needed a way that he could fill the cups with the liquid and then cap them without all this being exposed and doing it by hand, and some guy fabricated him a little unit.

0:13:51.2

MF: Pretty good--a welding man.

0:13:54.1

ME: Then you stack the cups and then--I don't know how you got them--

0:13:58.2

MF: He rigged them up where they would fall in and he had three little hoppers that the liquid went into, and then he can open this valve and it will fill up three or four at a time, you know what I mean. He improvised and made this thing; I mean it was--

0:14:14.0

ME: It worked pretty good.

0:14:15.9

MF: --like a pinball machine that he pushed the cap down in and it landed just right on there.

0:14:19.7

ME: And he could push down and--

0:14:21.0

MF: He had something else to cap it; that way he wasn't handling anything--

0:14:27.4

ME: But anytime you get a welder, you know--like I said, he could figure out something that would work.

0:14:31.9

LW: Yes; it must be so gratifying to have the plan in your mind of how you want something to be, and then when it finally works and just goes [*gestures*] --

0:14:40.1

ME: [*gesturing toward Henry*] This guy, I'll tell you what; he's pretty good.

0:14:41.7

HA: No... I'll tell you, I'm kind of excited to get another cheese (maker) you know.

0:14:44.8

MF: Yeah.

0:14:45.0

HA: St. Martinville--that's not too far from here.

0:14:48.1

ME: No.

0:14:53.3

LW: What are they hoping to specialize in; do you know?

0:14:55.6

ME: Well she--she's operating now but she wants to expand. She's making feta cheese and a couple other ones, strictly goat cheese. She sells at a little market, a little farmer's market in St. Martinsville and a lot of tourists go there. It's Cajun country and she said they buy the cheese; they'll pay \$12--\$11--\$12 a pound for it you know. She said they don't blink an eye.

0:15:25.5

LW: Does she do the Creole cream cheese and that kind of thing?

0:15:26.3

MF: No; she doesn't do that. We--we have some places here—John Folse does it over there, you know that's made a big comeback.

0:15:39.4

LW: And it's really popular with tourists.

0:15:40.2

ME: Yeah; and Henry Mauthé (Mauthé's Dairy) started it back and he really hit the ground running with that. He sold that stuff, you know [*Claps*], and it's just out of the area of New Orleans.

0:15:54.5

ME: Well, we'll let you go.

[Goodbyes all around.]

[End Henry Amato-1]

[Begin Henry Amato-2]

0:00:00.1

Laura Westbrook: All right; I'm in Independence, Louisiana talking with Mr. Henry Amato of Amato Winery; it's November 3rd at oh about a quarter to three in the afternoon and the interviewer is Laura Westbrook.

0:00:22.8

LW: Will you tell me a little bit about how you got started in the wine business? You grew up in the Independence area, so you grew up with the Italian food traditions. Were there wine makers in the community that you knew?

0:00:35.1

HA: Well, at that time everybody in this area had strawberries, and then everybody made a little barrel of wine. It was small farms and everybody made their own little wine in this area.

0:00:51.9

LW: And did your family do that?

0:00:53.3

HA: Oh yes, oh yes; see, it's legal to make 250 gallons a year per family.

0:00:59.6

LW: Has that always been the case?

0:01:02.3

HA: I think so; uh-hm.

0:01:02.4

LW: Were people careful to stick with that or were there--?

0:01:07.3

HA: Well, that was a lot of wine, so most people didn't even make that much.

0:01:10.0

LW: I can imagine that. When did your parents allow you to start, one-consuming some of the wine, and, two-participating in making it?

0:01:23.3

HA: Well, we was around it so much, I never remember not being around wine because we was involved in actually making wine as kids. In fact, this thing goes back so far that the schools was set up for the kids to be off during harvest season of strawberries. We used to go to schools in different times than you (in New Orleans) because they had us out for the harvesting of strawberries. So I mean it--it goes back a long ways.

0:02:03.2

LW: So your year would last a little bit longer because you were off for the season--?

0:02:06.3

HA: Not longer--different--different months.

0:02:08.0

LW: Different months?

0:02:08.1

HA: Yeah.

0:02:10.6

LW: And you were one of the kids that picked? Did you pick strawberries for your family?

0:02:14.5

HA: Oh yes, oh yes.

0:02:16.2

LW: And your family had strawberries?

0:02:18.7

HA: Yeah; every year-- in this area they always had some--three and four and five-acre patches of strawberries. Everybody had it; that was just a little extra income. The men mostly had jobs in New Orleans and Baton Rouge in the plants and we used to stay with the moms and the grandmas and, you know, do strawberries.

0:02:40.9

LW: How were the strawberries marketed?

0:02:44.6

HA: Back then the only way you could market them is get out on the road yourself and sell them, or bring them to the association. And that's it.

0:02:54.8

LW: The Strawberry Growers Association?

0:02:56.8

HA: Yeah, yeah.

0:02:58.3

LW: Where was that headquartered?

0:02:59.2

HA: They were--they were all over; the little associations, they had a few in Independence, a few in Hammond, Ponchatoula had theirs; see, it was a bunch of them.

0:03:09.2

LW: I've seen some of the little tickets that the pickers were given when they would bring in full bushels--

0:03:18.8

HA: Right.

0:03:19.1

LW: Did your family use that system, too; how did that work?

0:03:21.8

HA: We--they gave us wooden nickels and it's the same as the tickets; it's a token. You know it was a token but it was used more or less the same way as the credit cards they have today. Now, they have a machine. When they take the berries from the picker, it scans their card and adds an extra flat so they just keep one card now, one plastic card.

0:03:53.5

LW: Hmm; I bet people were nervous when that system went into effect; at least if you have the tokens--

0:03:58.8

HA: You'll see--yeah.

0:03:59.0

LW: -- you can hold onto them. So your family grew the berries, and with some of the extra berries that didn't go to market, they would make strawberry wine?

0:04:09.7

HA: Strawberry wine, strawberry jelly, and put them in the freezer, you know.

0:04:13.7

LW: What about other strawberry recipes? What were your favorite things that your mother made?

0:04:18.1

HA: We made strawberry jams and jellies and the fresh strawberries during the season, we made strawberry shortcakes and whatever.

0:04:29.2

LW: Yeah; what about--. [*Phone Rings*] You want to catch that? [*HA indicates "no"*] What about some of the other things, some of the family recipes your mom made not related to strawberries? What were your favorite things that your mother made that you remember from when you were growing up?

0:04:45.4

HA: The breads and the cheeses.

0:04:49.6

LW: So your mother made cheese?

0:04:51.2

HA: Oh yeah; we had our own cow and--

0:04:55.7

LW: Cow--singular?

0:04:57.7

HA: No; we had about two cows but we used to--

0:05:00.0

LW: Do you remember their names?

0:05:00.4

HA: [*Laughs*] No.

0:05:02.2

LW: They didn't have names? [*Laughs*]

0:05:02.2

HA: They had names. We had two cows and then we had--we used to raise our own meat. We had chickens; yes, I remember all that.

0:05:12.8

LW: Sounds great.

0:05:15.7

HA: It was.

0:05:16.2

LW: Did you have responsibilities that you had to take care of before you went to school in the morning related to them?

0:05:22.1

HA: That was--yeah; that was a necessity yeah, yeah.

0:05:24.8

LW: What did you do?

0:05:25.8

HA: Well, we used to raise baby calves. In the morning you had to go and, you know, feed the cow and let the calves suck the cow and then turn the cow out, keep the calf locked and, you know, that was an everyday thing.

0:05:40.8

LW: So did you always have kittens around your place?

0:05:42.5

HA: Kittens?

0:05:43.2

LW: Uh-hm.

0:05:43.8

HA: Not that many cats; we had cats but not that many. [*Phone Rings*]

0:05:47.4

LW: I've heard people who had cows say that there are always cats hanging around at dairy time.

0:05:55.2

HA: The cats--we had cats hanging around. We didn't try to get friendly--we was told not to get friendly with the cats because the cats actually was there to kill the rats because you had so much feed there.

0:06:08.5

LW: When you were asked, or allowed, to start doing chores around the farm, what were the ones that you really liked doing and what were the ones that you would rather somebody else would have the honor to do?

0:06:25.9

HA: It wasn't a question of liking to do it; you had to do it.

0:06:30.7

LW: [*Laughs*] How many siblings did you have?

0:06:33.5

HA: We had--it was four in our family--two girls and two boys.

0:06:36.9

LW: So there wasn't too much you could get out of doing with only one other boy?

0:06:40.2

HA: Right, and I was the oldest.

0:06:44.2

LW: Ah, and what were your jobs? Now you--you took care of the calves and watching that the calf was fed in the morning?

0:06:50.4

HA: And working the fields in the evening, and then the schools got out just in time to harvest the berries. And we planted cucumbers and bell pepper and, you know, the whole nine yards.

0:07:05.1

LW: And when you started helping your family do the wine, how did that go?

0:07:13.7

HA: It wasn't a big thing back then. It was just a little bitty room and the wine was actually stored in wooden barrels. Now they didn't store the wine in the wooden barrels just to get the oak-y taste; that was a cheap container. That's the only reason why they stored it in wooden barrels. And that's, you know--

0:07:37.5

LW: And was the wine for every day, was it for Sunday, was it for just Christmas and Thanksgiving; when did the family enjoy the wine?

0:07:47.3

HA: It was big in the holidays and so on. But I remember they did make some dry wines out of strawberries and the elderly people, during their meals, had the wine they made, you know. And of course, they made blackberry wine, too.

0:08:21.4

LW: Your winery makes strawberry wine. What are the other wines that you make?

0:08:25.8

HA: Well, we make strawberry, blueberry, orange, muscadine, and blackberry.

0:08:31.9

LW: And what's your most popular?

0:08:33.4

HA: Well it depends on where you're at. **[Laughs]** Now, if you're in Ponchatoula it's the strawberry wine; New Orleans is heavier on the blackberry and the muscadine; Belle Chasse, up in there, they were hitting the orange wine. In fact, we made the orange wine for the Festival Board.

0:08:49.1

LW: For the Orange Festival in Plaquemines Parish?

0:08:51.1

HA: Yeah; we sold the wine to the Festival Board and they retailed it and made the profit off of it, which was great. It promoted the wine and all, but two weeks before the hurricane hit we donated the wine, so they had their fund-raising and all, and at this time of the year we would be getting ready to make wine for them for the festival.

0:09:13.2

LW: Yes, for December. What do you see as the differences in the way that people in the Independence area make wine from the time that you were coming up to today? Are there as many people who do it?

0:09:40.3

HA: No, I don't know of any of them anymore that does it.

0:09:46.6

LW: So you don't see very many families where the young people are interested in it?

0:09:50.8

HA: No; that's gone.

0:09:52.0

LW: That's gone?

0:09:52.3

HA: Yeah.

0:09:52.7

LW: Do you see that as a loss, a cultural loss, in this area?

0:09:58.4

HA: Well you've got to understand one thing. When we was coming up working those fields was tough, and we was told, "Don't you ever grow up to be a farmer." Now that was pounded in our heads. And the older people wanted better lives for us, so that there kind of turned the-- wanting to be a farmer around right there--because it was a rough life for them and it's still a rough life. But you've got one hell of a lot more opportunity now to get your prices for your products, through the markets and all this. Two, way back then we picked strawberries and we used to bring it to the Association and they had federal inspectors there because the strawberries was shipped to Chicago and other states, and a lot of our strawberries got turned down.

0:11:00.8

LW: Why was that?

0:11:00.9

HA: Well 'cause they was a little crooked, too small, just various reasons. Now people are just glad to get strawberries and nobody is grading any strawberries anymore other than that they don't put no rotten ones in the basket or nothing, but you don't mind to eat a crooked one now because you don't have a choice. You either keep the crooked one or don't eat none at all. Back then it was tough times—and, too, the certain of the year the strawberries do get small.

0:11:37.9

LW: I'd like to know a couple of other things about what it was like growing up in this area. What was the center of community life? Would that have been the church or were there other places that people would gather that were really important to people in Independence?

0:11:56.8

HA: Well way back then, the word *crime* didn't exist. At about one or two o'clock we'd finish picking the berries, and we'd get on our bicycles, and all these roads was gravel and we'd ride to town with 50 cents and go to the picture show and buy us a soda pop and then come back home. I mean you know *crime*--I mean it was no problem going to town and--and the parents not worrying about the kids. So we used to do that and then we had football here and we had baseball and we had churches, but basically it was just run-of-the-mill for the kids, you know. We'd get up in the morning and we'd have nothing to do and we just hit the creek and walk for miles down the creek. But you can't do that no more.

0:12:54.6

LW: What about holidays? What were the holiday times like?

0:12:57.4

HA: They were great, yeah, yeah.

0:13:01.0

LW: Were there things that you experienced, growing up here, that later when you visited other places you realized that they just don't do there?

0:13:13.9

HA: It's just like you; when I'm ashamed to say about Katrina, but even you, I'm sure, got closer to your family without electricity. You sat down in the dark and--and mumbled and grumbled about, "It's hot," and all this, but it was such a good--a togetherness, and that's what it was like way back then. And then when the electricity go on you forgot who you was talking to, right?

0:13:45.8

LW: [*Laughs*] So the holidays were times when the whole community would come together and people would really--

0:13:49.7

HA: Yeah, yeah.

0:13:50.6

LW: --reconnect and they would be probably more special because then you see those people again later?

0:13:56.1

HA: Yeah; we--no televisions, no computers.

0:14:02.3

LW: Mmm. Did you go into another business before you began doing the winery?

0:14:13.3

HA: Oh yes.

0:14:13.9

LW: What did you do, and how did you decide that being in the wine business would be really attractive?

0:14:19.5

HA: One time when I first started out, I used to work for a company in Baton Rouge—it was called Gulf State Utilities, and now it's Energy, and I worked on the underground crew putting underground services down. Then I got a job with NCR, National Cash Register, and I was introduced to mechanical posting machines, and then computers came out and this, that, and the other and then I wanted to move. I was in Baton Rouge and I wanted to move home. And then I got a job over here. At one time Sears had a plant that made work shirts, Kellwood, it was a subsidiary of Sears and I got a job being a mechanic on their machines. It was pneumatics and electronics. Then I wanted more money. I went and got me a job at the plants. And then I was in instrumentation and pipe fitting. And then I quit there and I come home; I wanted to be home and I started my own business, an excavating business. We had done landscaping and dozer work and the rest of it, and then we got in the demolition business, and then after that I just got tired. Years back, they had a winery here called Pioneer Winery. And it went over well; that's all they made was strawberry wine 'cause I used to pick the strawberries at the last of the season and we used to sell the strawberries to the winery. And so I decided to do the winery.

0:16:13.9

LW: And that was in 1993 you said?

0:16:15.7

HA: Yes.

0:16:17.5

LW: Nineteen ninety-three?

0:16:18.5

HA: Yeah.

0:16:18.5

LW: And what was it like in the beginning? What were your adventures?

0:16:26.6

HA: In the beginning I had my wife, she had a full-time job.

0:16:32.9

LW: What was she doing before this?

0:16:33.5

HA: She's--well she always did work for the Civil Service. She's a secretary for the School Board, so she had a nice job and that gave me the opportunity to try different things and, of course, I kept my excavating business a few years after we started the winery to get the winery kicked off, but in the last I'd say about five years it's been full-time.

0:17:01.2

LW: Did you start with strawberry wine or--?

0:17:08.4

HA: We started just with strawberry wine, yeah.

0:17:08.3

LW: Just with strawberries?

0:17:09.6

HA: Yeah.

0:17:10.4

LW: And what was it that encouraged you to branch out?

0:17:16.7

HA: Well if that's all you have to offer you couldn't actually do full-time off of strawberry wine, so we went to blueberry wine, and then from blueberry wine we went to orange wine; orange wine we went to muscadine, and from muscadine we went to blackberry, so we have all them.

0:17:38.1

LW: What's your favorite?

0:17:41.6

HA: My favorite is the one that sells the best! **[Laughs]**

0:17:50.6

LW: **[Laughs]** Spoken like a businessman! And what would your wife say? Does she have a favorite that she'll admit to?

0:17:57.5

HA: She loves dry wines, yeah; she's a dry wine drinker. And you've got to understand; we're in Louisiana and we do well with fruit wines because they're hot, spicy, and sweet. Now, you do have your everyday wine drinkers, and I respect them, but we always try to target the wine that hit the shelf at around \$5--\$6 a bottle. That way everybody can afford it. And that's what we've really been trying to push. to keep the price down for people.

0:18:36.3

LW: How did you find people received your business in Independence? Were people happy to see a winery starting up; were local people supportive of you?

0:18:49.7

HA: Yeah; the Tourist Commission, Miss Betty Stewart, a great person really, really pushed this thing. In fact, I'll take you and show you parts that she really pushed. We built a new building out there that actually can take care of busloads of people--a whole busload at one time.

0:19:14.2

LW: I know Betty is really big on the busloads; she likes to bring--

0:19:16.4

HA: Yeah; the tour--the tour buses, yeah. We'll probably have one of her tours in the next few months, you know. That starts out the tour buses. Earlier we tried to do it in this first building here but we just had one little bathroom and it just didn't work out. But this other building--we got a big bathroom for the ladies and the men and a big tasting room--.

0:19:44.3

LW: What's the experience like when a tourist comes to visit Amato Winery? What happens?

0:19:50.6

HA: Okay; I love the tourists to come when we have fresh fruit in the fields. You remember most tourists is 50 plus in age and the older people they'll tell stories--like if you bring them in the blackberry fields and pick some blackberries, they'll tell you tales about when they were little girls and little boys how they used to go in the woods, and I mean that's great. I like to do tours, especially when I have something extra to show, to give them. Like when they go out there and I say, "Well, ya'll pick ya'll a handful and eat them," you know. And for the strawberries the same way and the muscadine is the same way, so that's why we try to really plant all our own fruit, or some of the fruit, here--to take them out in the field and let them see how it's done.

0:20:43.4

LW: Mmm-hmm; so they get to do that when they first arrive and they're--they're just off the bus and looking to stretch their legs?

0:20:48.5

HA: Yeah; uh-hm, yeah; we had people out in the fields with oxygen masks on. They were so excited to get out there.

0:20:55.3

LW: And then they come into the winery?

0:20:58.2

HA: Yeah; and they sample wines and they buy what they want.

0:21:02.7

LW: And you personally give them the tour?

0:21:03.7

HA: Oh yeah; I'll show them how we process the berries and all that. But it's fun; I was really nervous and all at first, because you never know when you might get attacked by a little wine snob or something like that, because our wines is--you know, not even close to any of that type of fine wine.

0:21:26.7

LW: But they're everyday wines; they're wines that you have as part of your life.

0:21:31.1

HA: Well our wines are for people who are occasional drinkers. They're fruit wines; our wines don't have any vanilla, no oak-y taste or nothing. It's what the fruit tastes like.

0:21:43.9

LW: Uh-hm, yeah; very nice. Well, I would love to see the process.

0:21:49.3

[End Henry Amato 2]

[Begin Henry Amato-3]

We have been walking through the fruit orchards and are about to visit the tasting facility that Mr. Amato has recently built to accommodate bus tours.

0:00:00.0

Henry Amato: Before July hit.

0:00:03.0

Laura Westbrook: Before July hit you were going to get the fields planted--what's going to happen in the fields now?

0:00:09.6

HA: I don't know; it takes money to run an operation like this.

0:00:14.8

LW: These were not, though, the fields that supplied the fruit to make your wines? These are just for the tourists to enjoy when they come?

0:00:24.2

HA: The tourists, yes; it was going to be the potential field to supply the fruit to make the wine.

0:00:29.9

LW: Right, right; some of it.

0:00:33.3

HA: We tried to get it to where, when somebody comes here, they can go home and say, “We experienced a Louisiana winery.” We had all the doors specially made here—these large doors.

0:00:49.4

LW: It's gorgeous.

0:00:54.6

[End Henry Amato-3]

[Begin Henry Amato-4]

Touring the winery.

0:00:00.0

Henry Amato: This here has wheels that turn the crusher through; it has an empty bin here and this is an actual crusher.

0:00:13.2

Laura Westbrook: So the fruit goes into the top, it's like a hopper?

0:00:16.0

HA: Right.

0:00:16.1

LW: Which is what this is?

0:00:18.2

HA: And they've got two wheels here--two big wheels here that's stainless steel that crushes.

And then the juice is pumped in the tanks here, and this tank here is full of strawberry wine.

0:00:36.1

LW: Right now?

0:00:36.9

HA: Right now. And this is the labeling machine that actually takes the bottle. You sit the bottle here without the label or the caps, and it goes here and it puts the caps on, it heat-shrinks the caps, and goes here and puts the label on, and then the operator puts it in the case.

0:01:11.9

LW: Neat. And this machine also corks it?

0:01:21.6

HA: No, no, no.

0:01:21.5

LW: No?

0:01:22.1

HA: That's not sanitary.

0:01:23.7

LW: How does that happen?

0:01:24.0

HA: I'll show you. This unit here is full of blueberries. You get up there and--skimming pole--if you can reach it.

0:01:58.2

LW: I can. Mmm; it smells delicious and I can see myself.

0:02:06.6

HA: It's fermenting, and then all this is at 55 degrees to make it slow fermentation and, you know, it tastes like the actual fruit.

0:02:19.2

LW: Is that something that winemakers strive for--to make it taste like the fruit, or do some of them like to bring the taste farther from the fruit--?

0:02:33.9

HA: Well, we like the wine to taste just like the fruit. We don't try to discourage that, and that's why we keep it cold-- and we use the ripe yeast to keep the fruit taste. Now if you go in the other side of wines, you know, the wines that got the charcoal taste and oak taste and all them, that's a whole different ballgame. This--this is a fruit wine.

0:03:12.0

LW: Does the fact that you use a cooler fermentation process--does that make it take longer to ferment?

0:03:18.1

HA: That wine sits there about a year and a half, yes.

0:03:22.8

LW: Hmm.

0:03:23.1

HA: And then--now fruit wines after that--you need to drink them. They don't get better with age; you drink it.

0:03:30.3

LW: Like the fresh cheeses, the unripened cheeses, you consume them right away while they're good.

0:03:35.2

HA: This is the bottler and this is the filler and the corker. And what happens--the empty bottles come in here, the operator puts this here--there, and it goes around and comes back with the cork and put it in a box.

0:03:55.9

LW: Yes.

0:03:56.4

HA: We can do 400 cases a day.

0:04:00.3

LW: Hmm.

0:04:09.3

HA: And that's our little laboratory.

0:04:13.2

LW: And that's the orange wine?

0:04:14.5

HA: Orange wine.

0:04:17.1

LW: That's a nice picture, too; that's--that's pretty. Have you ever done peach wine?

0:04:22.9

HA: Yes, one time.

0:04:23.8

LW: One time?

0:04:24.9

HA: No wait; I'm lying to you, no, no, no; I've done peach juice.

0:04:28.4

LW: Ah.

0:04:28.8

HA: The grower didn't want me to make wine; he said we could do it into juice.

0:04:34.5

LW: And how long ago did you build this?

0:04:52.9

HA: This building was built in '92.

0:04:56.3

LW: Ninety-two?

0:04:56.6

HA: Uh-hm.

0:04:57.7

LW: But you went into the wine business really in '93?

0:05:00.0

HA: Ninety-three yeah.

0:05:00.6

LW: So you were prepared.

0:05:01.5

HA: Oh yeah.

0:05:02.2

LW: This was something that you had decided, before '93, was something you wanted to do.

0:05:06.9

HA: Right.

0:05:07.1

LW: You just opened the business in '93?

0:05:10.3

HA: It takes a lot to make a legal wine. I mean you have to have equipment, you know.

0:05:19.5

LW: From the time that you thought this was something you'd like to go into; how long did it take until '93? How many years went into the making of Amato's Winery?

0:05:36.3

HA: Well, it was like the label says--it was established--we got our last permit in '94, okay, but the wine was fermenting in '93.

0:05:50.6

LW: And you built the building in '92 and started preparing, business-wise.

0:05:54.3

HA: Well, this building was started in '90. You know, we done all our work ourselves.

0:06:00.0

LW: Can I ask you about either or both of the storms, and how they've affected your business?

0:06:08.7

HA: Well when it affected New Orleans--we had a lot of customers in New Orleans.

0:06:17.2

LW: So it's affected your market. With the cheese business, too, though--

0:06:21.7

HA: Yes, yes; it did--it really tore up the cheese business because we had some real nice customers--real big customers in New Orleans.

0:06:29.7

LW: And you sold to some of the really fine restaurants in New Orleans, too.

0:06:32.7

HA: Right; we sold to Palace Cafe and a lot of it went to other--the other restaurants and then we done a big cheese business with Brocato's for the Cannoli cookies and--and all that's gone--you know right now all of it's gone.

0:06:51.0

LW: Have you talked to the folks at Brocato's? Do they--do they have any idea what they're going to do?

0:06:56.7

HA: Oh, yes. We passed there last Saturday and it looked like somebody is cleaning--you know they're cleaning up. So we don't know what the future holds there.

0:07:05.0

LW: Oh boy; I know people are anxious for them to come back.

0:07:08.6

HA: Yeah; because they was getting ready. We was getting ready to help celebrate their 100th birthday.

0:07:14.7

LW: Uh-hm; when was that? What's the anniversary date?

0:07:17.2

HA: [*Sighs*] It's--in fact Mr. Arthur himself was really remodeling the whole front of the store to look like it once did—oh, it was beautiful, what they were doing.

0:07:27.7

LW: I had seen some of it the last time I was in--I'm a regular there. **[Laughs]**

0:07:31.2

HA: Yeah.

0:07:33.2

LW: And I have seen that they're opening it up and--

0:07:36.3

HA: Yes; and had a little stage and it was--it was nice. But like I said, I don't know; I didn't go in. I just passed down the street and, in reality--I had to see it myself. I mean, I didn't live there and we lost some real good customers, and a lot of people that we knew got hurt, you know, but I had to see myself just what we're in for on getting the business back, if any. If the store even opens up--I didn't see very many people in the area.

0:08:09.0

LW: No, no.

0:08:11.3

HA: So you need people to make a business work.

0:08:15.5

LW: Well, we haven't really talked about the cheese very much. When did you add cheese to your repertoire?

0:08:23.9

HA: I guess we've been in the cheese business about six years and I don't know why we got started, but it kept on going and going and it got real good.

0:08:45.9

LW: What was the first type of cheese you made?

0:08:49.2

HA: The only thing we ever done is ricotta and salada ricotta and then I have people from Mexico, they introduced the quesadilla jalapeno cheese. We make those three cheeses, and a

little while ago you got to taste the cheese that we'll probably be getting in and I don't know what you call that.

0:09:10.7

LW: It's fantastic.

0:09:12.2

HA: [*Laughs*]

0:09:12.4

LW: It's really something; you just have to keep doing that. And your family made cheese when you were growing up too.

0:09:20.8

HA: Oh yeah; we had our own cows.

0:09:21.3

LW: And your family made cheese?

0:09:22.3

HA: Oh yeah; definitely we made cheese. In fact, when I was growing up I didn't know what Romano or Parmesan was until I was about 13 or 14 because we always aged the Ricotta cheese and which is called Salada Ricotta to grade and put on pastas and all. So we made cheese.

0:09:45.0

LW: Whose job was that in your family? Was that something your mother did, or your grandmother?

0:09:49.9

HA: Well the biggest thing about the whole cheese business is milking the cow back then. We had to get out there and milk the cow.

0:09:57.2

LW: And that was your job?

0:09:57.1

HA: I milked the cow some but my mom did it too.

0:10:01.9

LW: Mmm.

0:10:02.0

HA: That was a pain; I didn't like to milk cows.

0:10:05.0

LW: Uh-um; it doesn't sound like it.

0:10:04.8

HA: No. [*Laughs*]

0:10:08.7

LW: So how is the way that you make your cheese now--how does that differ from the way you all made them in your family?

0:10:17.1

HA: It's not very much difference other than we're under the state health codes. I'll take you in the cheese room and everything is stainless steel; everything is inspected, which is good. I mean I'm not complaining; like I said you just--I just introduced you to the state inspectors and they--they're hell of a nice people you know. And basically it's the same thing.

0:10:42.9

LW: So what's the process; you get--you get the milk?

0:10:45.7

HA: We get the milk and I'll take you--.

0:10:52.9

LW: Okay. It sounds like the way Kathia does hers; she makes such tiny batches that she's getting her hands into it. And my neighbors make butter and I watch them, but that's totally different.

0:11:20.9

HA: It's—okay, you bring the milk in, and you let the milk sit for about an hour, and you scrape that thick stuff off of it. Your neighbor makes butter?

0:11:33.3

LW: Uh-hm.

0:11:33.7

HA: You made butter yourself?

0:11:34.0

LW: Yes.

0:11:35.8

HA: Well you know how to do it--shake, shake, shake.

0:11:37.9

LW: And you just keep doing it until it's no longer butter and it starts to become cheese?

0:11:41.9

HA: No, no, no.

0:11:44.0

LW: Well see that's--that's the part I don't know.

0:11:46.0

HA: Okay; no you made butter before, huh?

0:11:47.2

LW: It's been a long time.

0:11:49.6

HA: Okay; you shake, shake--do you shake it by hand?

0:11:51.6

LW: With the churn.

0:11:53.3

HA: Okay; the same.

0:11:54.8

LW: So actual hands were not in it?

0:12:00.4

HA: No.

0:12:00.7

LW: But I've seen people make butter like dough, where they're kneading it and the buttermilk is coming out.

0:12:07.2

HA: No; you wash the butter off. That's why you're doing that. Okay; let me show you how to make cheese. Okay; this is the cheese pot. The milk comes in here; it goes into the pot. Okay; it goes in this pot; it's heated up to 185 to 200 degrees; the rennet and the salts go in there. The

cheese clabber, the cheese is put in these molds and they drip dry. The next day we put them on that table and cut the cheese. And that's cheese!

0:13:29.0

LW: [*Laughs*] You make it sound so easy, and clearly it's not.

0:13:33.8

HA: Well, it's easy now since we've got the set-up, you know.

0:13:39.5

LW: Did you start making the cheese before you had the fantastic set-up that you have now?

0:13:49.7

HA: Oh we made cheese all our lives. Remember way back there we used to make cheese for us.

0:13:53.1

LW: Well yes. How did you do it then?

0:13:56.8

HA: In the house, instead of having all the stainless steel and all, we used to have old Community Coffee cans with a bunch of holes. We would get the curds and put in the coffee cans and let them drip dry overnight and then it was cheese.

0:14:14.6

LW: Yes.

0:14:17.6

HA: But now that's not the Food and Drug way of doing it--the coffee cans.

0:14:21.8

LW: No.

0:14:23.5

HA: It's stainless.

0:14:25.1

LW: Now, that wonderful cheese that I tasted a little while ago, how is that different from the others?

0:14:32.5

HA: Well that's aged. It was aged on this machine here. That was aged 150 days. And that was just a trial.

0:14:41.9

LW: I'd say that was a successful trial. It was really delicious. So you said that now you're going to work on the consistency; you want it to be a little bit different in consistency or--?

0:14:52.9

HA: I need it where you can slice it better because the cheese--it's crumbly.

0:14:57.2

LW: How would you address that?

0:14:59.8

HA: I don't know.

0:15:01.9

LW: [*Laughs*] You'll find out.

0:15:03.6

HA: I'll find out.

0:15:04.8

LW: And what is this machine?

0:15:05.1

HA: This is the vacuum pack machine.

0:15:08.4

LW: Oh.

0:15:09.4

HA: It vacuum packs the cheese. And then from here it goes to the stores.

0:15:14.9

LW: So do you also market the cheeses the same way as you do the wines; I mean they go to the same markets--markets and stores?

0:15:23.8

HA: Oh yeah; uh-hm.

0:15:25.4

LW: Well that's neat. And it plastic-wraps them?

0:15:34.7

HA: Well, you put the cheese in bags, the little plastic bags that are put in here. You close the lid--

0:15:39.0

LW: It vacuums; it sucks the air out and seals them?

0:15:42.1

HA: Uh-hm.

0:15:44.3

LW: Neat; and so why is the water pouring into the--the machine into which you put the rennet?

0:15:53.8

HA: Do what now?

0:15:54.7

LW: You said that you have left the water on that was going into there.

0:15:59.4

HA: Well it was just you know right now we don't make cheese that often so she cleaned up here this morning and I come home and I didn't--she didn't have enough water on that pot and I just cut the water on and I forgot it.

0:16:12.1

LW: So that's not part of the process; that's just part of the cleaning?

0:16:14.5

HA: No; that was just part of the--a mistake.

0:16:17.9

LW: Yeah; well this is really impressive, and what was this room before you started making cheese?

0:16:27.9

HA: Oh, just an extra room we built when we built the winery. That we didn't need anymore.

0:16:33.0

LW: Uh-hm; well it came in handy, didn't it?

0:16:33.4

HA: Oh yeah, yeah.

0:16:37.1

[End Henry Amato]