

JAY DENHAM
The Curehouse, Louisville, Kentucky
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Date: February 17, 2014
Location: The Curehouse, Louisville, KY
Interviewer: Sara Wood
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: Fifty-seven minutes
Project: Cured South

[Begin Jay Denham 021714 Interview]

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Sara Wood: Okay; so it's February 17, 2014. I'm sitting here with Mr. Jay Denham. We're sitting in Louisville, Kentucky at The Curehouse off of Preston Highway and let's see. So, Jay, could you say hi and introduce yourself for the tape and tell me where we are right now?

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Jay Denham: Hello. I'm Jay Denham. We're in Louisville, Kentucky. This is The Curehouse which is a new, or a new venture for us that we're opening to do cured and processed meats. We started with Woodlands Pork which is the product that we are currently producing but we will also be adding other lines to supplement The Curehouse.

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SW: Yeah; and we're also enjoying some of the awesome delicious stuff here.

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JD: Sorry; I had some pork fat in my mouth.

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SW: That's okay; that's never a problem. Oh for the record will you tell me your birth date please?

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JD: October 24, 1977 born in Maysville, Kentucky, the birthplace of bourbon.

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SW: That's a pretty neat place to be born.

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JD: Yeah.

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SW: Will you start by telling me about growing up here, growing up in Maysville and—and what it was like and just what your surroundings were like?

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JD: Well I grew up on a beef farm believe it or not. My dad was a farmer. He had some farms in Kentucky and Southern Ohio and we raised primarily Angus but some different crosses as well, some different hardy breeds for warmer climates. So I grew up on a beef farm and we always had freezer beef available all the time. We had a huge garden that my grandfather kept and would work in the garden with him. A lot of fond memories of getting off the school bus and heading straight to the garden to work with him and then him using us as an excuse to go get candy or ice-cream.

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So lots of fresh vegetables. I remember running behind the tractor digging potatoes and hoeing rows forever. We had a small little orchard I guess—peach and apples and cherries and different fruits as well. So yeah just growing up and always being around really fresh, tasty ingredients. I didn't ever know any different. And I remember as a kid I always begged to go to McDonald's and couldn't—wouldn't get to go very often, but now I'm grateful that I didn't come up in that kind of culture where I was eating that frequently and that became a norm for me. Most all our meals were prepared at home by primarily my mother. My dad would always cook breakfasts a lot on Saturdays. And then working with my grandmother cooking a lot. She did a lot of canning and pickling so did a lot of that with her as well. So I don't know. It was just normal for me. I guess that's where my culinary attraction first started was just eating at home.

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SW: And what happened to the culinary attraction? I mean did you want to work with food at a younger age because of being around all that or did that come a little later?

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JD: Well I always enjoyed cooking as a kid myself. Never thought that that's what my profession would be. In high school I always thought it was really cool to go out to eat and experience different food and the culture that surrounds it. And so actually I decided to go to culinary school because I wanted to open a restaurant and entertain people and show people you know the culture and experience around a dinner table. So I went to culinary school basically to learn how to hire a good chef so that I could always know that I had a good chef in my restaurants and ended up becoming a chef and working in a lot of different restaurants. I guess

the culture behind the ingredients is what really drew me to cooking. So you know expanding on that curing meat is really set in those same principles.

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You can't produce a really great product without really great ingredients and so finding the perfect pig to cure the meat is essential in everything that I do or that my partners do or anything. So, I've had kind of the same philosophy in the restaurants that I do now as making sure that I source and have the greatest ingredients. And then you don't have to really do a lot to them. You just have to enhance their flavors and then expanding on that the culture behind raising the vegetables or the pigs or what have you and even where that culture came from whether it came from the French when they settled here, the Germans, the Africans. I mean everything has a root somewhere. So just experimenting and studying that through the process of teaching myself and learning from others how to cure products, how to prepare products, why certain ingredients go together culturally as well as flavorfully is something that's always kept me very passionate in what I do because everything comes from somewhere and it's to be handed down those recipes or techniques or learn from the people that have learned it from the people before them is very important to me to make sure that you know I keep that tradition and that same vein going and kind of introduce my practices and stuff as well to it, so—.

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SW: Where is your family from? Do you know where your family roots are from?

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JD: Maysville. *[Laughs]* My family is Scott/English I guess, but don't really have any like strong cultural ties. I do have some family that live in England but everything I know is from rural Kentucky. So my grandfather was born and raised in probably the most impoverished county in Kentucky. So at a very young age, you know, he went to two little two-room schoolyard or schoolhouse, sorry. He often talked about how he would ice skate down the creek to get to school or go hunting for food and stuff before or after school.

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So he came from an impoverished family in rural Kentucky and went onto become a surgeon and a doctor. He actually played basketball for Adolph Rupp at the University of Kentucky so he went on to do some great things and initially—or he's basically my mentor. He had did so much with his life that if I could do a tenth of it I'd be happy. So rural Kentucky I guess are my roots.

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SW: And you talked about growing on the cattle farm. Did your grandparents or did your parents have curing traditions? I mean did you guys cure meat?

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JD: We didn't really cure meat on the farm. Country ham and—is a staple for anybody in this state or area of the country. So I mean it's at every special event. So there's—there's always been country ham around. I've—it's primarily the focus around Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving. Everybody has their certain ham that comes from a certain place that they get

every year, so yeah. The importance of cured meat has always been in—instilled in the family and everything but we didn't really put away a lot of hams growing up on a beef farm. But yeah; in Maysville and Mason County that's still a very big tradition is still putting hams away. So yeah; it's always been around but I didn't really—.

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I guess my—I've always been interested in it. My real passion for curing was I guess—started in culinary school when I was working in garde manger and which ended up being like my most passionate in the—all the restaurants as well because you're pickling or curing or creating something out of, you know, the other stations and areas in the kitchen's trash like and you have to come up with something really flavorful and tasty.

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So I thought—I've always thought garde manger was my favorite area in a kitchen and I think you can basically contribute more of your personal flavors and ideas through food in that specific area. So that's where it started, so it started—I started carrying simple smoked and cured fish and then started getting into the whole meats and in loins and hams and stuff like that. So I think it basically all starts with garde manger and the practices of preserving food in that way. And then understanding it because I've always been around cured meats and country hams and stuff, so and known how well revered they are back home. I went to school in Providence, Rhode Island at Johnson and Wales so it wasn't as popular there but there is a strong Italian community there so there it was the prosciuttos and things from Italy.

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So yeah; I think that's probably where it started.

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SW: Now did you learn how to cure in culinary school or was it just a learning curve and you sort of taught yourself how to do it?

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JD: It was a learning curve. In culinary school they don't really—or when I was there they didn't really cure a lot of stuff other than like sides of salmon. I don't know whether that was a safety issue that they didn't want people just curing meats and stuff, but I didn't—they didn't teach a lot of that in school. That was more me doing it on my own, on the side, and teaching myself. And then when I had the restaurants [Park Place, Brownings, Blu, and The Oakroom – all in Louisville/Viand in Chicago, IL/Latitude in Nashville, TN] and moved back to Kentucky working with Nancy Newsom and had a restaurant in Nashville working with—and so I worked a lot with Allan Benton, two of the great curemasters of North America, so working with them and understanding how they did it and their practices and their passion and what they learned from the people before them, what they've learned—so then I started curing even more meats. And then actually took a very expensive wine room of one of my restaurants and turned half of it into a curing and aging facility. And then moving to Italy and working with them to understand how the Italians do it and how it's been done since basically the Etruscans because the oldest form of preserving food—so just learning from everybody I can.

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SW: And can you talk a little bit about that? What year did you go to Italy and—and why?

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JD: I went in '08—'09 [2008/2009], basically because I knew that this is—I mean I had curing programs in all my restaurants and cured all my own meats for service. I was extremely passionate about it then so when the restaurants that I was currently at closed after the 2008 financial fall, I decided that I wanted to really focus on what I needed to do to open a curing facility and expand what I was doing now into a business. So basically I went over to Italy for—I was planning on about a month and made connections with different farmers and curers and stayed for about six or seven months working for all different areas, basically from casing manufacturers all the way to the farmers and I wanted to know everything there was to know about everything.

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So I raised pigs. I worked at different places and then I ended up working for—at Massimo Spigaroli, Antica Corte Pallavicina on the Po River who is revered as the maestro of cured meats. He specializes in culatello. So working with them for a good portion of my time learning how they made their salamis and different cured meats there and then came back here to work with Woodlands Pork who had already previously been acquainted with and working with their products and kind of helping them get started—

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SW: Can you talk a little—I don't mean to keep cutting you off, but could you talk a little bit about how you and Woodlands Pork—?

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JD: Okay. So, Woodlands Pork is basically the brainchild of Nick Heckett. His initial idea was to import the finest meats from Tuscany and Italy that he, being from that area of the world, could not find here in America.

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So he went over there and started researching to find out what hams he wanted to start bringing in and found out that he basically had to open a USDA facility in Europe in order to import into America.

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So that set him back a little bit. So he came back here and started doing more research and found out that the Appalachian Forest Range is the most diverse forest, deciduous forest range in the world producing the most amount of food for a pig. In Europe they pride themselves on their acorns and different fed pigs. Well here we have acorns and walnuts and hickory and paw-paws and persimmons and all types of different fruits and nuts in order for those pigs to eat that grow naturally and in the wild across our Appalachian forest range. So then he did some more research and read about Dr. Chuck Talbot who was doing research at NC State [North Carolina State University] on pigs and genetics and animal husbandry and stuff and had written

extensive amounts about Heritage breed pigs and things. So he contacted Chuck and told him about his idea of raising pigs here in America for the purpose of curing.

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So Chuck said he thought that was a brilliant idea and not only did he think it was a great idea but he already owned a farm in West Virginia to raise the pigs on which would be ideal for the hickory and walnuts and acorns. So they started off with just a few pigs, started curing—or started raising pigs and then sending them down to Broadbent to cure. And started off that way very small and that's when a friend—a mutual friend of ours who was doing research and is a chef at the University of Kentucky for sustainable agriculture introduced me to Chuck and Nick because he had been in my restaurants and knew that I was curing meats and knew how passionate I was and they were at a point where they needed more direction in what to do with it 'cause at the time they were just doing basically country hams. And then the rest of it was all fresh meat.

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So then I came in and we started doing all these other products so that now we're basically curing the entire animal. So now we have the collar, or the coppa, the back bacon which would be called the lardo or lomo. We have the mountain ham or prosciutto. We have the jowls or guanciale. We have the belly, belly bacon as well, so now the only fresh meat that we have are the tenderloins and ribs and stuff like that which we actually work with restaurants before we even harvest the animals so that we know where that meat is going beforehand, get the fresh meat to the restaurant and then we keep all the other meat to cure. So then I came aboard

and started utilizing all these other cuts and curing and changing things—changing cuts and the way that we butcher and stuff.

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And then from there in order to make Woodlands Pork feasible we have to be able to also produce year-round and create even more products to pay the bills basically.

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So then Nick and I formed The Curehouse which is where we're sitting now where we will be producing everything from hotdogs and fresh sausages all the way to mountain hams. So we'll be able to diversify our product as well as our price range and be able to use the pigs that are finished in the Appalachian Mountains on fall mast all the way to spring and summer finished pigs on pasture, so we'll be able to utilize many different techniques and many different breeds, many different feeds that the animals are finished on and be able to produce a product that you can actually taste the difference in what the animal is actually eating and what different characteristics come out in different breeds and things of that nature, so—. It's exciting.

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SW: I wanted to ask you before I forget; could you told me in there but just for the tape, can you tell me some of the restaurants you were with?

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JD: Well actually I just got back from New York last night. We did a dinner at one of Daniel Bouloud's Restaurants up there so his different outlets are using our products, MomoFuku is using our products; our biggest base right now is the New York area.

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SW: Why is that?

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JD: Well right now we're only capable of selling whole hams, whole shoulders, whole bellies, so in order for a person to commit themselves to purchasing an entire ham at \$25 a pound is quite an undertaking. We do have families that have hams sitting on their dining room tables all year round. But for the most part it's better—and as you've tasted, I mean the flavors are extremely powerful. So you—I guess you could sit down at a table and just eat a ton—a whole plateful of ham that—I mean the flavor profiles would I mean—you'd wake up the next morning with that flavor still on your palate. So the flavor goes a long way.

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So you don't really need a lot. So having a ham sit around your house or whatever is probably going to be there for a long time which is good because our product is shelf stable and you can just lay the fat cap that you've cut off of it back over top of it and just carve off of it every day or what have you if you want. It's a—that's basically a common practice in Europe.

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But it's not as well known here in America to have a cured piece of meat that you just cut and eat directly. A lot of the country ham styles is—you soak it for hours, change the soak water and then cook it. So some of the people that when I tell them some of the more rural people that are used to country ham only being eaten as a basically raw cured product is obscure. It's alien to them. So they don't trust it. So even when I take my products to some of my family even they want to fry them up or cook them; so it's just that learning curve basically to understand that you know there is this product and even with the more meats coming over from Europe now is basically educating them to products we're producing as well. So it's—in a sense a healthy competition because they're bringing over meats that have always been traditionally eaten as crudo basically and introducing them to Americans who are—didn't find out that this other—that is made in America on the diverse wood lots of Appalachia which produces a phenomenally flavored pork which the pork that we produce you can see how much darker it is than traditional pork. Sometimes when we're butchering you could hold our raw meat up next to the beef and it would be darker than beef in some instances.

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So yeah; it's just a different product and different quality that we have worked very hard to get to, so—. Every year we're learning more. Every year we're planning on improving it. And I plan on doing that for the rest of my life. There's always something to learn and always something to improve on, so—. It's a fun project.

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SW: It seems like being in your line of work where you're curing it takes a lot of patience because you don't get instant results. You kind of just have to wait. You have to do and then wait. I mean how does that feel to you? Is that accurate to say?

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JD: Oh yeah; I mean like I was saying earlier, this is a 2012 ham and it's the first time I've tasted it was last week. So and actually in 2012 actually I was the farm manager that year so I was on the farm raising those pigs, feeding them every day, building them shelters, making sure they're watered. So I have a very close personal bond between that ham right there.

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But yeah, I mean to be able to look at pigs while they're on the ground. We looked for animal husbandry so we look for really good mothers in the sows. We look for really good confirmation in the animal while it's running around. We want to make sure that they're all healthy running around and having fun, eating basically whatever they want. We look for what the ham is going to look like while it's still on the pig, so 'cause working with pig genetics is in a sense quicker than any other breed. I mean it takes an entire year to produce a steer or a beef where a—you can change a piglet or—every basically three months, three weeks, three days is about—is how long it takes to birth a pig.

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But so yeah; choosing the different genetics to get the characteristics we're looking for that's a whole process. And then you have the butcher, the harvesting and the butchering of the

animal where you get to actually see what that pig has done characteristically with the formation of its fat. There's a few different characteristics that we always look for as far as the fat and the lean meat go. How it puts on the fat, what color the fat is, what color the protein is, and then all the way to salting it to hanging it for another—we keep all of our hands for at least eighteen months before we release them—most of them two years, so yeah it's quite an ordeal.

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What we have in front of us is a culmination of about three and a half years to get to sitting in front of us right now, so—.

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SW: How does that make you feel?

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JD: It makes me feel like I don't know, like a proud papa. *[Laughs]* I guess; I don't know. I have any kids but it's—yeah it's a long process so to taste something at the very end and it comes out well is very rewarding 'cause there's lots of ways that it could go the other way. And there's very few ways that it can go in the right way, so being able to make sure that you just have those controls in mind that you're creating a really great quality animal to begin with is really key to the whole project really, just always coming back to great ingredients, so—. The pig is the most important part of our whole project.

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SW: And you were talking about—you were the farm manager at Woodlands for a while? Do you need to get that [*Phone Rings*]; sorry.

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JD: No.

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SW: Hey that's a cool coffee pot.

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JD: What's that?

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SW: That's a cool coffee maker. I just noticed that.

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JD: Sam's across the street.

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SW: I just like the color.

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JD: That's the Mario Batali coffee maker.

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SW: Oh. I just like the orange.

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JD: Yeah; that's why I'm saying—for instance orange clogs.

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SW: Yeah; oh yeah. Do you have time for a few more questions? Is that okay?

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JD: Yeah; uh-hm.

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SW: I just wanted to ask you were the farm manager at Woodlands and you talked a little bit about this but I mean can you talk a little bit more about your relationship with the pigs and what that's like from that end?

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JD: Yeah; so all our pigs are raised currently on my partner Chuck Talbot's farm in West Virginia and have probably one of the best lifestyles of any pig on the planet. Basically the way that we raise our pigs and the practices that we use we basically, the pigs are born and raised in farrowing huts which is the terminology used for birthing. So each sow has its own little hut that it can be build its nest in and farrow inside that hut and raise its litter up out in the open on the

field which we basically—actually just this past week we had five pigs that all farrowed all in one week, so—.

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Yeah so in that we looked for really great mothers that really take care of their pigs and have really good sized litters and really healthy babies, so from then we train all our pigs. We basically just move them around with single line electric fencing and we plant all of our hollows with barley and rape and corn and beans and squashes and a myriad of different food sources. And instead of harvesting any of that well other than some for our own consumption we basically move the pigs through and let them harvest it and mow it all down and then we just follow them again and reseed it and move them back down. And then move them up into the sides of the mountains in the fall after all the masts has dropped to the ground, so they're all running around all throughout the woods. We make sure that we move them enough that it doesn't degrade the soil or any of the plants or trees, which also brings me to the forestry program. We try to cull off any trees that don't produce mast so that the ones that do their canopies can open up or smaller trees can grow to produce more mast for the animals. So basically it comes down to feeding and watering is pretty much the most important thing and paying attention to, you know, your pigs and making sure they're healthy and running around.

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We go out and spend a lot of time just walking around and talking to them because they get—they start assimilating people with food and we go out and you know just talk to them. There's very intelligent animals so we'll go around and they'll follow you around when you're hiking around in the woods and so forth. So it's—yeah it's a very close connection with Chuck

and our farm manager, me and the pigs; you get to really know the animals. They have huge personalities. I had one pig that used to follow me around all the time and lay at my feet and wanted her belly rubbed all the time.

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So you'd be—you get a strong connection with pigs. They always say it's the second smartest animal on the farm, the second to the Border collie. Yeah it's kind of like having a dog but you have all these pigs running around so yeah it's a very strong attachment. You get to know their personalities and know what they like to do. I mean they crack you up just running around and playing and stuff, so yeah. Yeah; there's a very strong connection to the pigs. So which in return you make sure that you want to respect that pig as much as possible, so from the time that pig is harvested to the final end product you want to make sure that you can do everything in your power to make sure that does not get wasted or adulterated. You want to make sure that gets expressed across in the final product as much as possible because you—there is that connection and you know how hard it is to raise that animal to produce the quality that we're looking for. So yeah it's— there's a strong connection but it also creates a very high level of respect for the animal.

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SW: And from what I understand I mean, you have taken parts of the pig and done things with them when most people haven't. Is that true? I'm just—because I wanted to ask you about curing things that aren't traditionally cured that you just experimented with and found something great.

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JD: Right; well it's not that they haven't been cured but there are different muscles that we pull out of the animal to cure specifically for a certain thing. Whereas, for instance the way the butchering is done now in America is primarily on a band saw so you're cutting through solid muscles and bones and things where we do more of a seam butchery where we're pulling specific muscles out. For instance, this collar right here that we have comes out of the Boston Butt, which is one of the best loin cuts in the entire animal. But we cut right through the middle of it and put it—and leave it in a Boston Butt. So we cut that shoulder differently. We cut further back on the back in the ribs to pull a larger portion of that loin out. And then we actually pull that muscle out of the shoulder to cure it. So there's a lot of instances like that just aren't practiced and there's a lot of different muscles that we could pull out to produce a different product as well.

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It's kind of like you can't make a t-bone steak and have filet and strip. You have to have one or the other, so it's the same thing with some of the muscles that we pull out of the pig as well. If I cured the lardo I can't have what we call back bacon because it's missing the fat. So there's different things so there's different practices and different ways to pull different muscle groups out in order to get the end product that you want to make.

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So that's the main difference in how we butcher and pull muscle groups out. I mean I—my wife's grandfather always asked me 'cause he grew up with the tradition of slaughtering pigs in the wintertime and preserving everything. So he always asks me to bring him the brains 'cause he loves brains and eggs growing up because that meant you know fresh pork harvesting, they

always canned their loins, so they would cook all their loins and then can it and can it in the rendered fat from the pig. They did the same thing with like meatballs and stuff. And cook everything and preserve the entire animal so that it lasted through the summer and things as well. So it's still a very strong practice in Kentucky and across the South to this day, but it's just not seen as much.

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So being able to bring interpretations of some of those canning and preserving procedures back and highlight them is kind of a focus of mine as well to kind of bring back the traditions of the rural community throughout the American South. So because when you look at it a lot of these different dishes that they used to do, the canning of meats and whipped meats and stuff is the same as rillettes and different types of things that are cured in Europe as well. So you can see the cultures, the culture of where it came from and how it was interpreted here before refrigeration and things as well. So it's really interesting to see old cookbooks and—or handwritten recipes of how people used to care and preserve things. It's quite interesting. And when you see the commonalities between that and the way that the Europeans still practice it you can definitely see the—where it came from.

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So especially here in Kentucky was settled a lot by the French and Germans and Africans and things of that nature, so being able to see like where your food came from and why it's done that way is very exciting to me. I mean that would be like some of my dream vacations would be to follow the food back to its heritage going back to see you know where all these things that are commonplace in our food diets and trace them back to the cultural heritage that it came from and

watch the evolution of where it came from. So that's kind of exciting to me, so—. That also helps me to drive to like create products or figure out you know different things and the similarities between my food culture and where I got that from, so—. It's exciting.

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SW: Yeah; that's great. And I just wanted to ask you; you know you had talked about the commonalities. I'm wondering you know you were talking about bringing the things that are done in rural Kentucky that have a lot of commonalities between what's done in Europe. Is there anything else that is particular to Kentucky in terms of curing that you think is specific to this part of the South that you know—as opposed to like Virginia? You just said a lot about Kentucky but that was something I wanted to ask you.

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JD: Uh I think here it comes across more in like the feed from the animals and the pigs. I think it—like coming across the country you're mainly going to see different breeds of pigs and things changed based on what you could grow in that area.

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So like Virginia they were already raising a lot of peanuts and stuff like that so that became a huge food source for the pigs there. Where here there was a lot of natural forage. I mean there's pigs that like the Mule Foot breed was—has evolved to that specifically because of why it was—how it was raised. It was raised on islands in the Mississippi and Ohio River so that the farmers could put them on the islands and they knew they weren't going anywhere and then in the fall they could go back and harvest their animals.

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Well over that time the pigs living in all the marshy land from the islands, the hoof actually fused together to look like a single hoof which is they call it the Mule Foot. The same thing with the Ossabaw pig; it was taken to Ossabaw Island by the Spaniards when they first settled in America so that they would always know where they could stop to get protein in their pork instead of bringing pigs over on every single voyage. They could just stop on this island. Well over time that pig living in brackish waters and on a small island started getting smaller and things of that nature.

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So there's a natural evolution of the actual species and pig that comes out of different areas. And so then that also goes back to the farmer; if the farmer is looking for pigs to cure then they're going to look for really nice big hardy hams, really good fat cover; if they're looking for a lot of bacon they look for really long pigs that are really long in the belly. So I think it all bases—all comes down to what breeds were hardy enough for their living conditions, where they were across the country. I mean Cincinnati was—it's called Porkopolis because it was the largest producer of pigs, largest—had the most amount of slaughterhouses and—and things in the country.

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So especially around this area going up into Ohio, Northern Kentucky, West Virginia—there was—there's always been a lot of pork production when there were—when it was coming from small farms and taken in for harvest. Now most of that's gone. Every—most pigs are raised indoors on confinement and wouldn't survive in any of the outdoor living conditions.

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So I think it really comes back to the actual pig, the breed, and what they were raising that for. A lot of pigs were raised for oil for lamps and different things as well. So there's—there's a whole strain of breeds that were just larder pigs. They just raised them for their fat for fuel and different things as well. So it really just depends on what end-product you're looking for. Ours just happens to be that we want to cure the entire animal. So we're looking for really highly-flavored, well-fattened pigs. So we take a few different crosses and every year you know we play around with the genetics and see you know what the end-product is out of that so I think it just basically depends on what you're producing your pigs for and what food supplements that you can raise in your area is probably the biggest thing to answer that question I guess.

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SW: Yeah; thank you. And I wanted to ask you, too. I mean, I don't know if you get this a lot but you know talking to the people who have been curing like Allan Benton and you mentioned Nancy Newsom, I mean they're a little older and not like you're fresh out of the cradle or anything but, you know, you're rather young. Do you see this tradition of like what you're doing as something that people are coming around to? I mean it seems like there was this time where people were disconnected from it and then people came back to it—not in terms of actually curing but just the demand for it?

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JD: Well I think not just curing but everything. I think people are starting to want to know their—what their food really is and where it came from and what they're consuming because for

years we've gotten away from that and we've been so disconnected with the agriculture of our food.

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And so kind of out of sight, out of mind; there's a lot of stuff out there that if you knew where it was coming from you would not be consuming it. So I think it's across the board people want to know more about where their food is coming from and they are starting to understand that the quality comes through—all the way through. So from the time that you plant a seed to the time that you put a pig in the field matters a lot. And people I think are starting to realize that—that you can't you know have a bunch of supplements and different unnatural things and still come out with a really good quality product. So this takes it even further all the way back to the beginning of preserving food and starting with a really great quality product, minimally processing it and then having that final product at the end. So I don't think that it—I think that in the American South it's been preserved more than anywhere else in the country because of how rural it is and how the agrarian lifestyle has been a part of our lifestyle for so long there haven't been a lot of cities to migrate to. There's been tobacco and cotton and different products that have kept people on the farms and kept small farmers farming for a living.

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So I think that we're a little bit more connected geographically to our food than a lot of the rest of the country but yeah, I think there was—and there still is a big disconnect with the food. When I was in Italy I was even having old-timers over there telling me that they'll basically be coming to the US for their cured meats and cheeses and stuff because there is such a lack of interest in younger people to produce that over there.

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Most of the people that I worked with were more than happy to tell me everything that they knew because nobody there wanted to learn it. So they were—I've had more than one guy—more than one producer tell me that you know our grandkids will be coming to America because they're the only ones that want to learn it right now. So yeah; I don't know where all of it is coming from but I'm hoping that people just want to know what they're consuming and want to preserve their food culture and you know keep a really good quality product viable.

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SW: Well Jay I've really exhausted the bigger questions for you but is there anything else that you think is important that you want to add or any stories?

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JD: Yeah; I think everybody should be eating Woodlands Pork. [*Laughs*] No; I think it—you did a very good job at covering basics of why I'm doing what I'm doing really and why Woodlands Pork is what it is. My partners Nick and Chuck and Nadine [Perry]; Chuck and Nadine on the farm, it's just been a very long process in order to create the product and it's going to be an even longer process to continue on improving and doing things better, sharing the knowledge with other farmers and bringing them onboard to raise pigs for us as well, creating new product lines, different—different things from fresh sausages all the way to the cured meats so I don't know. I'm just excited to start producing more product. So it's an exciting road to be on.

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SW: And just before I forget you mentioned this in there but I just wanted you to mention it for the tape. You don't really smoke your hams but you do smoke other things when you're experimenting?

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JD: Oh yeah; we do a lot—I mean we've done a lot of different things with our different products and research for our production. We've done everything from taking like our coppas and collars—or our collars and belly bacons and back bacons and different things and doing everything from smoking them to fermenting them. So that yeah; I mean it's always a learning experience and just kind of experimental so that we can create—I mean with just the collar alone we could create, you know, a dozen or so different products with it just by changing molds and yeasts and temperature and humidity and different things of that nature. So I mean just one single cut can become so much that it's fun to just play around and experiment. And everything has its own unique characteristics and flavor profiles that you can then enjoy really.

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SW: Before I forget, will you tell me your parents' names and your grandparents' names?

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JD: Well I grew up, my grandfather Dr. Harry Denham and Minky Denham in Maysville; that's who I grew up with on the farm and in his garden. And my dad and mom, John Denham and now Jane Fay; my parents are remarried, so it's John and Fran Denham and Jane and Pat Fay living—and they all are still in Maysville. My dad is still on the same farm, so I still have a lot of old

memories of building forts in the woods and playing with my brothers, so—. It was a good childhood.

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SW: How many brothers do you have?

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JD: Two younger brothers; we're basically all two years apart.

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SW: And what are their names?

00:54:33

JD: Reese and Sterling. Yeah; my youngest brother lives here, Sterling. He lives in Louisville. And then my middle brother lives in Birmingham and is married with my two little nephews down there. They're adorable. So this weekend is his birthday—one of them—birthday actually. He'll be four.

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SW: Oh fun.

00:54:54

JD: Yeah.

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SW: And I think that's all I wanted to ask. Oh just to clarify; I think you mentioned this but I just wanted to make sure. Did your dad sell to grocery stores or is it more just like—it's a family—?

00:55:09

JD: Yeah; more of a family thing. He sold to a few restaurants and stuff but mainly it's sides and whole freezer meats and things of that nature, so—. We're still working on that aspect. Hopefully I'll have all my HACCPs written where I can make some bresaolas and beef hotdogs and corn and pickle some briskets and things of that nature as well, so—. It's a whole other line of products that we'll hopefully be producing here as well.

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SW: It just keeps growing. And when do you guys expect to—I mean you're there but when do you—the rest of the whole facility is there like—?

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JD: Hopefully it will be done by this fall.

00:55:55

SW: Okay wow; well Jay thank you for one, showing me around and two, cutting all of this delicious goodness, and three, sitting here and taking the time to do this. I appreciate it.

00:56:06

JD: Yeah; thanks for coming out.

00:56:09

[End Jay Denham 021714 Interview]