



Bob Bruggner

Palmetto Island Oyster Company

Havana, Florida

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Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Today is Wednesday, December 15th. I am at the Planters Exchange in Havana, Florida with Mr. Bob Bruggner. Mr. Bruggner, would you go ahead and introduce yourself for the recording? Tell us who you are and what you do.

Bob Bruggner: Yes. My name is Bob Bruggner, and I am from Havana, Florida, although I run an oyster farm down in Panacea part time, and it's called Palmetto Island Oyster Company.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And for the record, could you give us your date of birth, please?

Bob Bruggner: Yes. I was born September 14th, 1950, in Bradenton, Florida.

Annemarie Anderson: Great. Before we get into how you got here, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about your growing up years. Where'd you grow up? Did you grow up in Bradenton?

Bob Bruggner: Yes. I actually grew up on a place called Anna Maria Island, which is a little island off of Bradenton. And back in the [19]50s it was a little like Dog Island.

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There wasn't a lot out there. It was just a dirt road down the middle of an island. So as a boy, it was a wonderful place to grow up. And we spent a lot of our youth in the water doing things like crabbing and fishing and so on. Yeah, so that's kinda where I grew up. We had a little house out there back then. People who lived on the island were not considered rich like they are today. It was kind of where the poor people lived, but it was a great place to grow up.

Annemarie Anderson: What did your parents do?

Bob Bruggner: My father was a merchant marine, so I didn't see him much, and my mother worked for the post office. And so she raised two boys, and my dad was at sea most of the time. And then he died when I was fairly young, and my mother never remarried. Yeah, so we kind of raised ourselves, but it was a good place to do that.

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Hard to get in too much trouble when you're living on an island, but always lots to do.

Annemarie Anderson: How did your family get to Anna Maria Island?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah, it was kind of interesting. My mother graduated from college, Macalester College, which was up in Minnesota, and she and a couple girlfriends got in a car and came down to St. Pete. This must've been during the very early [19]30s, I guess. And that's where she met my dad, and he was from New York. And he was down visiting his sister, and long story, they hopped on a train and went to Valdosta and got married, and there you have it. Yeah, so that was kind of interesting. Yeah, I think Florida was a little different back then. You had a lot of people that would come down and a lot of prospecting going on.

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But I think my mom enjoyed not being in the snow and she enjoyed kind of being out on her own, and that was it. So it was a good place to grow up. Real exciting. Back then we had a boat, we would go over to Longboat Key, and we'd camp and hike, and we fished. It was quite a nice place, yep.

Annemarie Anderson: I bet. For the record, what were your parents' names?

Bob Bruggner: My mother's name was Mary Huber Bruggner, and my dad's name was Ferdinand Bruggner.

Annemarie Anderson: That's nice. Well, I think you've already kind of touched on this, but I'd like to maybe have a larger discussion about it. Could you maybe talk a little bit about your relationship with the environment or outdoors growing up and how that kind of formed? Does that make sense?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah, sure. That makes a lot of sense.

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As a kid growing up, especially back then, we didn't really have TV. TV was just kind of comin' in, and when it did there was one channel, so you always tried to find things to entertain yourself. So back then it was let's go outside and play type things. And when you have an environment around you, then you naturally start doing things like that. Our house sat right on the bay, right on the water, and across the bay there was a little fishing village called Cortez, Florida. And in Cortez there were a lot of people that had moved down from North Carolina. They were basically fishermen, and they did mullet fishing. And that was the big industry back then. It was the same. So as a kid, we would do a lot of those same type things, 'cause that's what all of our friends and all of their parents were involved in. So we would go out and we made boats, we had boats.

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Course, we had lots of engines that very seldom ran, and we would always try to keep those running. But we could go off our dock and go right out behind our house and pick up a washtub

full of scallops in two hours, 'cause they were just everywhere. At low tide you'd just walk out and pick 'em up. We spent a lot of time fishing for redfish and snook. So I really enjoyed that. I did a lot of surfing as a kid 'cause we were right at the beach. So I think the environment was extremely important as a kid. And back then, Florida was still fairly undeveloped. You could go to places like Longboat Key, which was totally deserted and there was a lot of wildlife. As a child I had pet raccoons, I had all kinds of stuff like that that you normally wouldn't think you could have nowadays.

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Yeah, so I think growing up outdoors you get kind of an appreciation for the environment and what it has to offer as far as richness in your life.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, it sounds like it. I'm wondering about your education. Where'd you go to high school and what were your kind of interests that were formed there?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah. I went to Manatee High School, which was one of the only high schools in Bradenton at the time. I was in band. I loved music so I was a drummer all through high school and college as I went through. And we had our own band, so we did a lot of that. I played four years on the varsity baseball team, so I did that. Yeah, I think high school was, believe it or not, a pretty good experience.

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I enjoyed it, so yeah. Mostly music. I liked service clubs. I was in quite a few service clubs, president of a couple, and then the baseball team was kind of my thing.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And did you go to college?

Bob Bruggner:I did, yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Could you maybe talk about going to college?

Bob Bruggner:Um-hm, yeah. I went to Florida State and got a degree in business, and then I decided that I really didn't want to go into business right away and then I went back and got a master's in mathematics. And then I was a teacher for a few years after that, so yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Did you stay around this area to teach?

Bob Bruggner:Yeah. I taught in Leon County for about twenty years. I was with the gifted program, so I taught the gifted math and science, mostly middle and high school kids.

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So I did that for about twenty years, and then I got into technology, and when computers were just coming out, the TRS-80s and the Commodores and so on. So they were these little desktop machines that nobody had ever heard of before. We were using these big TTYs-- and you're way too young to remember this stuff-- but anyway, punch cards and everything. So when the minicomputer first started coming out, I was the first one to have them in my classroom 'cause I was the gifted teacher, so I got to understand those a little bit. I taught myself to program. I started writing some programs for kids. So I did that, and then I moved over to the Department of Education as a instructional technology specialist for the State of Florida. So I did that for about three years, and then I decided that I might join a private company. So I joined a group that was developing instructional software for kids out of Ireland.

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So I spent five years with that company developing a math program that went nationwide. So we implemented that, did a lot of traveling for many years to probably all fifty states teaching teachers and working with state departments on how to implement that. So I did that for about five years and then I went to another company and did pretty much the same thing, so that's how I spent most of my career was in education and developing computer software that was implemented to districts across the country.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. What year did you graduate from FSU?

Bob Bruggner: I graduated from Florida State in [19]72 the first time, and then I got my master's, I think, [19]74. Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. And why stay in the area? What interested you about Leon County?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah.

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Well, I actually went home and worked after I finished my bachelor's, and I went to Sarasota and worked. And the area was growing so fast, and I just thought that there might be a little more to life than just working a business life and then living in Sarasota, which was very crowded. And that whole area was developing so fast. And after growing up in that area, it's kind of hard to watch all of that happen. So I was much more comfortable up here in Gadsden County. I actually lived in Leon County first, and then when I got married, we moved to Gadsden County and so on. Yeah, so I just thought that this area was a little more relaxed, a little slower, much more appealing. Then, when we moved up to Havana, I kind of liked this town 'cause it had a sense of

community. A lot of these people have been around here forever. I've been here for over forty years, and I still consider myself a stranger 'cause I don't go back six generations.

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But there's something refreshing about living in a town where you kinda know your neighbor. I think a lot of these people are very committed to their community, so it's been nice, yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, that's great.

Bob Bruggner:Um-hm.

Annemarie Anderson: Well, I'm wondering maybe if we can get into oysters?

Bob Bruggner:Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: I'm wondering if you could maybe take us back to that point when you first started thinking about becoming an oyster farmer and why?

Bob Bruggner:[Laughter] That's a great question, yeah. Have you interviewed Bob Ballard yet, do you know?

Annemarie Anderson: I have not, but I've heard a lot about him.

Bob Bruggner:You kinda know who he is, yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Bob Bruggner:Well, I was working with a group of entrepreneurs out of Florida State that was trying to help some folks get started with some grants, and I was reviewing some grants for him and advising him.

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And there was a group down in Cedar Key that they were writing a grant for, and they were trying to get a grant for freezing clams. It was called Clamtastics. And so I was helping them with the grant a little bit. And they were successful. They got a hundred-thousand-dollar grant. And then I had heard about Bob Ballard and the oyster program that he was thinking about starting. They were still at TCC. So I went over and talked to him about it, and Bob and I kinda became friends and I kinda became interested in what he was doing. So I told him I would help him kinda get things underway as far as a class goes, and how to start. So I met with him a few times and was helping him on a few things. And then they had their first oyster class where they were training oystermen, so I kinda sat in on that and took some notes and was kind of curious in the process 'cause by nature I'm a teacher at heart, and I think good training is very important and communication is very important.

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So when I found out they were starting a second class, my son, my youngest son said, "Man, I'd really like to take that class." And I said, "Well, I'll see if I can get you in." So he and his friend actually were gonna be oystermen, so they started the class. And they went through it. And I wasn't in the class, I was just kinda auditing the class. I would sit and take notes and make some suggestions and so on. So my agreement was that-- I had retired at fifty-seven and I was not planning on going back to work, so my agreement with those two was, well, I will help you get your business going 'cause I think I can help you with that. So anyway, his friend decided that maybe he didn't want to be an oysterman after about a year, so I was helping. [Laughter] So here I am later on.

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I'm still working with my son, which I think is great. I get to work with him, but not something I'd planned on doing long term, but I really enjoy it and I think it's meaningful work. And there are some real benefits to it. It's been good for me anyway in a number of ways. So that's kinda how I got started. It wasn't like I on purposely thought that I would go ahead and become an oysterman, 'cause that was one of my life's goal, but I was very interested in the process. And I was also very interested in what it can do not only for the environment, but for the economy in Wakulla County. So I think it was a good thing to do, and I think there's a lot of benefits to having a vital program like that going down there. As far as I'm concerned, oystering can be a win-win situation for everybody if it's done properly.

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If it's done the right way, it should be good for the environment, it should be good for the economy. It's the only kind of aquaculture where you don't have to actually feed the things you're growing, which is kind of nice. It's really good for the environment as far as providing foundational reefs and stuff for things to grow on and habitat in and so on. [Sound of train approaching] I think there's a train coming so it's gonna get loud here in just a second, so I'll pause here for a second.

Annemarie Anderson: [Laughter] [Pause] Okay. I'm wonderin' if maybe you could take us back to the first time that you were on the water helping your son and working the oysters?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah. When we first started oysterin', of course, you go through the classes. And quite frankly, everybody was kind of learn-by-doing back then.

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There were a lot of experts around back then that really had no experience, so I think we kind of intuitively knew what we should be doing but as in any craft that you do, it takes experience. And quite frankly, there weren't a lot of people when this whole thing got started that had any experience in this at all. I went over to Mobile and visited Bill Walton in the lab, but visits are different than actually going out and doing it. So people were telling us how to set up our lines. They were telling us what equipment to use. They were telling us how we had to defoul and things like that. But until you actually go out there and do it for a year or two, it's really hard to know what works in your area.

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All of the leases out there are at different depths, so what might work for my lease doesn't work for another person's lease. So it was exciting, and it was kind of a trial by fire. And we would go out and we made a lot of mistakes. I've got a driveway full of dead oysters that will testify to the fact that we killed a lot of oysters the first few years. But yeah, so it was nice going out there. I remember the first time we went out to see our lease, we didn't even have a boat, so we put a canoe in at Spring Creek-- actually, Oyster Bay right there-- and we paddled across in the canoe to see where our lease was. There was nobody out there. Nobody had put any lines in there. So Phil and I got in the canoe and paddled over there.

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Of course, we got caught in a horrendous rainstorm with lightning and everything. So we're in an aluminum canoe, so we had to go over and find an island. And then we threw the canoe over our heads and waited till the lightning stopped, and then we paddled back. But yeah, we made a lot

of mistakes when we first started. [Laughter] We bought a Carolina Skiff. Somebody made us a good deal on it. And the boat was great, but the motor lasted about a week, and then we had to get a new motor and so on, so learned through that. And I think equipment-wise, when this program first started, they provided you with equipment to get going, and it was SEAPA equipment, which was okay for some people, but if you had a deep lease, there's no way you could put that on there. So we were all kinda locked into one group of equipment. So it took us a while to figure out that, oh, there are some other alternatives like floating bags and things like that.

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Yeah, but we started by stringing a few lines. And then we had to learn what it takes to grow a successful oyster, and that takes a few years to figure out what works and what didn't work. We did a lot of experimenting. I think the real important part if you're an oysterman is to think about and reflect what you're doing out there so you don't keep making the same mistakes over and over again. And many of these guys are so resourceful that they have done that. Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. What year did you-all start farming oysters?

Bob Bruggner: We're in our sixth or seventh year, so it was probably [20]15, maybe, I guess. Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Okay.

Bob Bruggner: Yeah, we were one of the first people out there. In fact, I think we put some of the first poles down in Oyster Bay.

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Annemarie Anderson: And I'm wonderin' if you could maybe, for people who will never get to go to Oyster Bay and see your lease like I have, could you maybe describe your lease, tell us a little bit about what it looks like and what Oyster Bay is like?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah. Well, what the state does is the Corps of Engineer goes out and they will look at an area and they will-- I'm sure they have a checklist or so on about what would qualify as a suitable area for growing oysters or farming oysters. So if they find an area where they think the water quality is nice, the depth is okay and things like that, and it's not obstructive or obtrusive to anything that's out there, they'll go ahead and map that out and they set it up into acre-and-a-half leases. And so that's what you have out in Oyster Bay, you've got a series of about-- so there's probably, I don't know how many, maybe fifty or so acre-and-a-half leases out there that are mapped out with poles and markers.

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And you basically make an application for the acre-and-a-half lease to grow on. Once your application is approved, they will lease that to you for a ten-year period. You have the rights to use it for a ten years, but it's renewable every year contingent on whether or not you worked that lease correctly or not. So the state has the right to take it back from you if you're not farming it or you're not meeting certain specifications or stipulations that they put on as far as what they need for you to maintain a proper lease. So if you don't put enough oysters on it or if you don't keep your boundaries marked or if it's all trashed up, they have the right to take it back, which is great. 'Cause certainly what you don't want is you don't want people going out looking at areas that are not maintained properly and so on, or cages floating all over the place that become hazards and so on.

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So yeah, when you get out there, you'll see that there are lines strung, and we use what's called a full water column process which means that you're allowed to grow them off the bottom. And as you know, oysters naturally grow on the bottom or on top of each other in beds. But if you can grow 'em off the bottom, then there are some advantages. The advantages such as they stay cleaner, there are not as many predators. Also usually there is more food on the surface of the water than there is where there's low flow down at the bottom. And then, the temperatures change a little bit, too. So we'll have lines strung between poles. And when we first started doing it, they told us to pound in-- and they were basically these great big wooden poles. And they supplied 'em for us.

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They were, like, twenty-foot poles, and we were supposed to figure out a way of getting those poles in the ground at each end so we could stretch a line. So we bought big water pumps and we tried to pressure 'em in. We used a sledgehammer and we spent all of our time just splintering poles and everything. And it was not a successful situation 'cause it's hard to do by hand. Now, some people actually got some dock builders out there and they had the proper tools where they had a crane, a lift, and they could knock the ends in, and they did a pretty good job. We were not rich enough to do that. I think if they really wanted to do that right, they would probably hire somebody to go and set those leases up with those poles, or at least have 'em available. So we finally went to metal poles, and we got these three-inch metal poles. And we were able to get those in the ground much easier and so on. So you put those-- and they're usually two-hundred feet apart. And then you'd string a line between 'em.

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And what we do is we put what are called riser poles, which are PVC pipes that come every ten feet, and those PVC poles will have a clip on 'em on a certain level. We'll clip the line onto those poles and then we put a number of cages between each one of those ten-foot sections, so they'll be twenty of those. When we first started, we put way to many cages on 'em and the lines got way too heavy as the oysters grew and they would tip. So we reduced that level quite a bit. We put three to a section now, and that seems to work out much better. And yeah, so we'll string a number of those. You'll usually do them in sets of two, and then you leave a space for your boat, and then you put two more on the other side, and you leave about five feet between the sections. And that way you can get your boat up and down and you can easily reach the cages without having to stretch across lines and so on.

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So right now I think we have eighteen lines, so we have nine sets of two out there. And then, we also have some floating cages which are bigger wire cages that you're allowed to put mesh bags inside. And everything we have is designed so that if a hurricane comes, we're able to sink it. And the reason, you want to get your cages off the top when a hurricane comes because the turbulence below is not as great as if it's on top. So people that don't sink or prepare for hurricanes, their stuff gets usually scattered all over the place and it can be quite dangerous for a lot of things. So yeah, that's what we have. We use them for different purposes. We like our floaters to kind of finish them off, so once they get to a certain size, then we'll have a sorter that sorts them.

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And we'll move 'em over into those floating cages and they tumble, and they get a nice shape to 'em, and then we're able to market them after that, so yeah. But we've learned a few things from growing oysters. I think if I had to give some advice to people about growing farm-raised oysters, there's really three or four things that you really need to be conscious of. One is that you need to make sure you watch the density in your cages, especially during the summer. If your cages get too full then your oysters will start to die. So we keep ours anywhere between a third and a half. Once they get up to a half we'll start splitting 'em again. The other thing we do is we bought a small sorter and we have different barrels on that sorter with different size holes that allow us to run them through and sort by size.

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So the smaller ones will fall through, of course, and the bigger ones come out the other end. So I think it's very important when you're farm raising that you do sorting because you don't want a lot of big oysters in with your smaller oysters because they dominate the smaller ones, and they can't grow. So keeping the density down in the cage and keeping your oysters sized is extremely important if you want to grow a good oyster. And they all grow at different paces, so it's not like if you start with a hundred thousand, they're all gonna be ready at the same time or grow at the same rate. And then, I guess the other thing that's extremely important-- and this is, like, the biggest challenge for most people, and that is defouling oysters. So what you have to do is you have to get 'em out of the water a certain number of hours a day so that barnacles and other oysters don't grow on 'em.

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So one of the things that was a challenge for us is how to actually do that, and that's been extremely hard for us to figure out how to do that efficiently. When we first started doing it, we would go out there once a week and we would unclip our lines and we would raise them up and we would let them stay out of the water for twenty-four hours, and then we'd go back the next day and unclip the line and put it back down. But that became really a burden for us because it was a lot of work, and those oysters were heavy and so on. So what we decided to do is we decided to come up with a new method, and somebody invented this in the class. It's just a slip sleeve that will go up and down on-- we have a two-inch riser pole, but we would put a three-inch tube over that with a clip on it so that it could move up and down.

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And then what would do is we would just take a pin and pin it up and so it couldn't fall down, so we didn't have to unclip and pull it, so that worked out a lot better for us.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Bob Bruggner: Yeah. Yeah, so that's click. It's called a Seidler's sleeve, 'cause there was a guy named Robert Seidler that came up with it.

Annemarie Anderson: I talked to him on Monday. [Knock on door.] Do you want to take a break?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah. [Pause] Okay. All right.

Annemarie Anderson: Well, I think you've talked a little bit about the process of farming oysters. I'm wondering if-- and I think you've maybe touched on this-- if you could talk a little bit about the surprises, either happy surprises or maybe some of the challenges of doing this work?

Bob Bruggner: Yeah. Well, of course challenges of oystering is always how to get enough seed to grow. And that's been an issue for us. [Pause]

Annemarie Anderson: We were talking about challenges and maybe happy surprises, and you were talking about seed being a challenge.

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Bob Bruggner: Yeah. Well, I think a couple challenges that go on out there, having enough seed to grow properly. And it's really kind of a shame that you've got a lot of people working hard out there and they can't necessarily get the seed or the resources that they need to make a go. So that is certainly a challenge. Another challenge, I think, is labor. I think when they started this program, they gave the impression to a lot of people that all you had to do is go out there and put a million oysters on a line and everybody was gonna get rich. And I think people found out that, first of all, it's hard work and that it takes discipline in order to do it, just like any other kind of farming. You get out what you put into it.

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So you can't just go out there and throw a bunch of oyster seeds and leave 'em and come back and harvest 'em. It just doesn't work that way. I think some people also found out that there's not enough money in this to actually hire people to do the work for you. So I think a lot of people, when they got started, thought, well, I'll just hire two people for fifteen bucks an hour. It doesn't pay off. So that's one of the things I really like about oystering is that it's really hard to parcel this out, and I think for that you're never gonna get into big oyster company type of operations 'cause you see about farming, there's such a big emphasis on these mega farms where they mechanize everything and they hire it all out, and it becomes a big process.

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The small oyster farm is still dependent on who's working that farm, and I really believe it's hard and I don't know of too many people in our area that have been able to kind of parlay that out by hiring three or four people and grow. There are some big farms, but you also have one or two people doing all the work on those farms, and it's usually people that are the owners of that farm. So that's been kind of interesting. I always think, yeah, I heard a lot of people say, well, I'm just gonna hire three or four people and we're gonna go ahead and grow a million-and-a-half oysters and we'll all be happy. So I don't know if that's ever gonna work 'cause, first of all, it's very labor intense, and you really gotta stay after it. And I don't know if you can pay somebody to do that kind of work. The profit's actually in the labor that you put into it, so that's been kinda interesting.

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So let's see, what else on the surprises? I was surprised at the demand and the market that's out there. We've never once had any issues selling any of our oysters. There's never been an overabundance of oysters, so we haven't had to worry about that. Everything we grow there's usually a demand for. Yeah. We concentrated very early on on marketing our own and building a brand name. We used to drive 'em up to restaurants and drop 'em off and do that. We kinda found out that it's hard enough growin' 'em without being your marketer, as well. So we decided that in the long run it would probably pay off for us not to be in the distribution ourself. We would much rather just take 'em to a shellfish house, put our name on 'em, and let them do the distribution.

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It is nice to bring 'em to local restaurants and have your name out there, but it just got to be a lot of extra work, so we found that out, too. So, yeah, there's some real niches in there. The grower is one thing, the supplier is another. If you had a nursery that could actually grow 'em up and get 'em to you, and they were quality, that would be great. Then the shellfish house and the distribution is a whole different game that you really have to put some work into that. That takes a lot of work, a lot of record keeping, a lot of upkeep. So I think that's another area that is pretty well taken care of down there. We've got two or three people that do a great job with that. So yeah, I think all in all, I was very surprised at how successful you can be growing oysters down there, you know.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

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Bob Bruggner: We've had some ups and some downs. We've had hurricanes and storms and things like that. We've never lost a cage, believe it or not. And when storms come, we sink 'em. We have floats on ours right now 'cause it's wintertime and we think the hurricanes are passed, knock on wood. So we'll keep 'em on the surface on floats. But come around probably June we'll take the floats off and get 'em off the surface and get 'em down a little more. So I think if you do some planning and you do some thinking and you're aware of what you're doing, and you think about it, I think it's pretty easy to grow a good quality oyster. I really think that the area that we grow in, I think we're extremely fortunate. A lot of people can grow a good quality oyster in eight to twelve months. And I don't know where else you can do something like that. It's much harder to do that.

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So yeah, I think it's worked out well. I think there's a good future for that down there, as long as you have good farmers and they're supported correctly.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. What distributor do you work with?

Bob Bruggner: Well, we take them over to Tim Jordan. And what he does is he'll brand them. We have our own brand, and he puts them on there. And then he usually sells them to Evans Food Company, and they take them up to Birmingham, and then they distribute them. So the guy that runs Evans, he'll text us during the week, and he'll say, you know, "I sent your oysters to Memphis," or "I sent them to New Orleans." And then we'll look at the different restaurants and they'll be on the menu under our brand, so that's nice.

Annemarie Anderson: That's cool!

Bob Bruggner: Yeah, yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: And then, I think you touched on this when you were talking about the small purveyors, but I'm wondering if you could maybe talk a little bit about the community of oyster folk and your relationship with them?

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Bob Bruggner: Yeah. I tell you, most of those oyster people down there have just been great. They share ideas. We're all in this together and it's a little different business because no one's in competition with each other. It's not like you're trying to outsell the person next to you or their success doesn't influence your success at all. So that's what's really nice. These are businesses that are coexisting side by side, but they're not really competing with each other. We're all competing against ourselves to grow a good oyster.

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And then, run a business sound enough where we can make business sense out of it and we can make money, but it's not like if I do well it's gonna affect the person next to me. They're in control of their own destiny, and I like that. It's good for everybody down there because that means people don't mind sharing information, or they don't mind helping the other person out. So when somebody goes down to get seed and you know they're going down, they'll pick up seed for you and bring it back. If you're having trouble with something-- I have people come out to our lease all the time that are just getting started that are having trouble with different issues, and we try to not preach to them or not tell them how to do it, but we at least make them aware of what we've been through and how we dealt with that problem, so yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. I know you have to go, but I have one last question.

Bob Bruggner: Okay.

Annemarie Anderson: Then I'll open it up for you for anything you want to add.

Bob Bruggner: Okay.

Annemarie Anderson: I'm wondering-- and this is a larger question that I always ask everyone.

0:39:02

Bob Bruggner: Um-hm.

Annemarie Anderson: I'm wondering what you hope to see for the future of oyster aquaculture, either in Oyster Bay of the Gulf of Mexico in general in Florida?

Bob Bruggner: I think the future is extremely bright for the oyster aquaculture. I hope that we can continue to grow the business in a professional way. I do think there's probably a need for more of a professional approach as far as maybe having some organizations and some way of sharing the knowledge that we have out there. I mean, we'll have meetings once in a while where oystermen get together and gripe about things, but it would be really nice if there was a central organization that could kinda help with maybe governance of the oyster growing a little bit.

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I always thought that it would be nice to have a resource where especially new growers could go and ask for advice without having to call somebody up and going out there. But I think the future is bright. It would be nice to be a little more organized and have some more support for these people because a lot of what you're doing is you're kinda gunslinging it out there by yourself. So to have that kind of centralized support-- I'm not sure what that comes from, if that comes from TCC or it comes from a University. It'd be great if Florida State, in addition to their oyster restocking project going down there, could grow a few seed for us so we'd have a reliable resource. So yeah, the future is bright. I think maybe institutionalizing the process a little more down there, providing a little more support would be a good thing.

0:41:00

Annemarie Anderson: That makes a lot of sense.

Bob Bruggner: Yep.

Annemarie Anderson: Thank you so much for giving me your time today. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you'd like to add?

Bob Bruggner: No, I think you've asked some great questions and I hope I gave you a few answers.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. Thank you so much!

Bob Bruggner: Yeah. No problem.

0:41:21

[End of Interview]