



Veeral and Vishal Padalia

Forgotten Bay Oyster

Spring Creek, Florida

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Location: Veeral Padalia's Residence, Spring Creek, FL

Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson

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Project: Saltwater South- Forgotten Coast

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Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Today is December 16th, 2021. This is Annemarie Anderson recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance. I am here with Veeral and Vishal Padalia. Did I say your last name correctly?

Veeral Padalia: Yep, all right.

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Good. And we are in Spring Creek, Florida. Would you all go ahead and introduce yourself one by one? Tell us your name and tell us what you do.

Veeral Padalia: Hi. I'm Veeral Padalia and I'm a oyster farmer and I do a few other small businesses, as well.

Annemarie Anderson: Great.

Vishal Padalia: I'm Veeral's younger brother. We're three years apart. I'm a oyster farmer, as well. Me and Veeral work together, and we also share our other businesses together. And I live in Tallahassee.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And for the record, will you give us your name?

Vishal Padalia: I'm Vishal Padalia.

Annemarie Anderson: Great. And could you all, for the record, as well, give your dates of birth, please?

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter] It's 11/19/1980.

Vishal Padalia: I'm 11/19/1983.

Annemarie Anderson: Great. All right. Let's get started and maybe talk a little bit about growing up.

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Where did you-all grow up? Tell us about that.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. Born and raised Tallahassee. And I laughed at our birthdays, 'cause we have the same birthday. We're exactly three years apart. Yeah, just Tallahassee, in and out.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. Veeral was born in 1980, and then he also claims I stole his birthday in 1983. Just grew up being Florida State fans. Went to Lincoln High School. Both of us graduated from there. Veeral did attend Florida State for one year and then I think he went to University of Florida, where I went to Florida State and finished over at Florida State. And just been around. And we both-- same thing, same story, we both traveled overseas to pursue med school, and we eventually went to Chicago for a little bit for rotations and we found our way back to Tallahassee, our roots. And we just absolutely love it here in Leon and Wakulla Counties, so it's just brought us back to our roots.

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Annemarie Anderson: That's great. I'm wondering if maybe we could talk a little bit about your relationship with the outdoors or the environment of Leon and Wakulla County growing up. Did you spend much time outside?

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, a lot. I think fishing was our main thing, right? Since second grade we had a little pond in our neighborhood and our neighbor's father-- our parents are not really fishermen, outdoorsy, so it was always our neighbor's father or someone else taking us out or

camping. So we got into fishing and then, as we got older, we were able to go ourselves. And I think that was a huge part of the outdoors--

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. I mean, Veeral is my fishing partner.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: Everything from we go fish down in Key Largo, go grouper fishing out in the gulf, and that's been our primary interest anytime we have time--

Veeral Padalia: And we go camping. Outdoors, yeah, we're big outdoorsmen, I guess, [inaudible 0:02:59].

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Vishal Padalia: Yeah. We each go up to North Carolina to do trout fishin'. We've been out to Utah to do ice fishin'. And any chance we get we call our friends to go fishin'.

Veeral Padalia: I think around these parts, if you don't have a little bit of outdoors in you then I think you get bored.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. And then, I think primarily all the friends we've made and kept in touch with, too, are all outdoors related. I mean, even Veeral is my hunting partner, as well. So from living in Leon County, you got some of the best fishing and duck hunting and all that. And not growing up with a history of your parents doing that, and for Veeral I'd probably say he would get the most credit for that, for figuring out how to fish, figuring out how to hunt.

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: He blames me for abandoning, I guess, in the last couple of years-- just getting married and having kids-- he's, like, I lost my hunting partner.

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So that's a really big part-- I think just being outdoors is definitely the direction to where we are right now in life.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. That's why oysters fell right into--

Vishal Padalia: You know how to drive a boat, you know how to repair a boat, you know how to be confident out in the water, enjoy it.

Veeral Padalia: But really, oysters kind of tied it all together because it was something, like, dude, we can do this and get paid and make money maybe? It's been tough, but . . .

[Laughter]

Annemarie Anderson: I hear that, yeah. What was it about fishing and hunting that really drew you-all in? What is it now that you like about it?

Vishal Padalia: I think just the skills aspect of being confident to be out on a boat and to understand the elements of when you're out on the water things go wrong, or maybe you have a fear. But just going twenty-five miles out to catch a grouper, to being out on the water, diving the water, not being scared of sharks.

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To understand those elements that-- I think to go out and oyster and jump off your boat into the water to put down lines and work these oysters, you just have a different sense of confidence, I believe. Like nothing fears-- we go out at night and--

Veeral Padalia: I don't know, man. Your answer is so long I forgot her question, man.
[Laughter]

Annemarie Anderson: I'll restate it. [Laughter] What was it that you liked about it, or what do you like now about being outside, about hunting and fishing and being in nature?

Veeral Padalia: Oh, yeah. Just I think the nature, the challenge of it. It's like these days life kind of becomes easy. You can go in the grocery store and just get your food. So kind of like the fishing part, I was, like, hey, look, maybe we got dinner today, right? Like that. I kinda like that part about it.

Annemarie Anderson: That's good. Those pair together well.

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter] Do you do outdoors? Do you fish or anything?

Annemarie Anderson: I'm not really good at it, no. But my brothers do. My brother is one of those people who-- we'll kinda rib him 'cause he'll sit in a deer stand and let a deer go by.

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Veeral Padalia: Yeah. 'Cause he appreciates that, right. Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: He's not just a . . .

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: Cool.

Annemarie Anderson: Not gonna kill it for the rack and backstrap.

Veeral Padalia: Right. No, of course. No, I totally agree. If I keep a fish, I'm making sure I'm gonna eat it. There's no wasting. I don't know, when we were little kids, I guess we were a little bit worse, like killing bugs and this and that, but now I totally appreciate the outdoors and animals.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. I can tell. You grow them. [Laughter]

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, yeah, right.

Vishal Padalia: [Laughter]

Veeral Padalia: Yep.

Annemarie Anderson: Well, I'm wonderin' if maybe we could talk a little bit about-- you were sharin' with me a little bit before I asked, "Why oysters?" and we'll get to that, but could you talk a little bit about-- maybe go back to the end of school for you-all and making the decision to come back to Leon County, to Tallahassee, and what you decided to do, I guess?

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Veeral Padalia: Yeah. I mean, I think after grad school and stuff and maybe looking in a different direction, it was just back to Tallahassee, back to Mom and Dad's to figure it out. And like he was saying, Dad was a really good help in everything. Just, "Okay, what are you gonna do next?" And we were working for him for a while in between. And then, like he said, this just

kinda came out of nowhere. Not out of nowhere, but we knew about it, the oyster farming and aquaculture, but the opportunity came by, and we were, like, okay, this is it.

Vishal Padalia: For me, I lived in the Caribbean, and then we moved up to Chicago and it was cold. And then, just growing up here, we know what lakes, what bodies of water. And like I said, my hobbies really were fishing and being outdoors and just knowing all that. And I was, like, well, it's so much easier to come back here and know what I grew up doing. And that's what I missed. Just being away from home, you realize what you miss.

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You get older.

Veeral Padalia: And plus, also with that is, like, we came back, and we know this area. It worked out for our other projects like the B&Bs and stuff. I graduated with a business degree, so I knew in the end that if everything wasn't gonna work out with med school or whatnot, at least I have a business degree.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah, I've been kayak fishin' Piney Island, is literally where our oyster lease is, way-- like, ten years ago, so literally it's my back yard. I'm, like, oh, I got a oyster lease there. As far as oysters go, I've been eating oysters since I was a kid. The funny thing is, I would go to restaurants, and I would order oysters and even all our friends would be, like, let's go get oysters. And, I mean, this opportunity is just great, to grow them through biology and just being the outdoors part of it, I think putting all the elements together, finding what works, what doesn't work. Meeting the people in the industry has been a huge part.

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But, yeah, just going back from my childhood to coming here, I think all of it lines up to what we're doing now, and it all makes sense.

Veeral Padalia: Your answers are so long, man. You gotta, like, concise it.

Annemarie Anderson: That's okay. [Laughter]

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, but it just sometimes drives me crazy. He's, like, ahh . . .

Annemarie Anderson: I can also restate the question.

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter]

Annemarie Anderson: I'm wondering if maybe we can get into that. You guys have talked a little bit about this, but what drew you-- well, I guess you've already kind of answered this question, but--

Veeral Padalia: He probably did, you know, somewhere in his answer. [Laughter]

Annemarie Anderson: No, no, that's great. Maybe we can go back to the first moment or the first time when you-all decided that you both wanted to get oyster leases. And what year was that that you-all bought leases?

Veeral Padalia: That was 2019, I believe.

Annemarie Anderson: Great.

Veeral Padalia: And then, like I was saying, our first season was, like, nothing.

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And then we kind of went into COVID, 2020, and that was pretty tough. But, yeah, just getting seeds and just equipment and just the startup, you know.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: I mean, it was real good. To where we are right now, we can finally say we're successful to growing oysters, confident in our products, to people liking it, getting feedback. But it was like Veeral said, from 2019 to now, you can always say there's road bumps in anything, and for sure those were road bumps, but that's all past now. What we are doing now - I mean, me and Veeral will fight all the time just being brothers.

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter] You can probably tell, yeah.

Vishal Padalia: And we're getting along so much better because it's a success. And I think that goes for anything. Once you're successful then you can high-five. And when you're not successful then you start blaming each other.

Veeral Padalia: Um-hm.

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Vishal Padalia: But I think to this day I'm pretty proud of both of us to what we've done and accomplished.

Veeral Padalia: And I think everybody in this whole industry's a help. You've talked to so many people and, I don't know, just everybody you meet just, like, gosh, I feel like I know this person, they're so helpful with information or just anything.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah, so it's been great. I'm happy for everybody, for me and Veeral. I love what we do. I'm excited for this next season and it seems we got so much more knowledge. And oysters is definitely something the more you learn the better you can get at it. So I couldn't be happier right now.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. I'm wonderin' if both of you could take me back to the first time that you remember working oysters. Could you maybe describe that experience and what you were thinking and feeling during that?

Veeral Padalia: Right. So we had so much time in between actually getting the babies and getting everything else, like the lease and equipment.

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Because we didn't get the babies that first season. So I just read and-- I just ran out of stuff to do, figure out. And so when we finally got the babies, we thought we-- like, okay, then we got it. But gosh . . .

Vishal Padalia: And then the phone call came to me, and he's, like, "Hey, the babies are here."

Veeral Padalia: Right.

Vishal Padalia: And I'm, like, "Okay, what do we do?"

Veeral Padalia: No, I'm just saying once we already got them and we thought we had everything figured out, but it was always just something different, something we didn't know, this, that. So, yeah, it was definitely intense, I guess.

Vishal Padalia: I'll put in my perspective is, like, the babies finally came, and we'd been waiting on them for a long time. Well, definitely Veeral because he was the leader of this project. And then he calls me, he's, like, "The babies are here. I'm comin'. You need to show up." That was, like, day one. So we came and we were making cages and the equipment, putting it together. And I had no idea what I was doing. I was just listening to Veeral.

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Veeral Padalia: Me, neither! [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: Yeah, but at least you knew somewhat. And to make it even funnier-- I don't want to say worse, I'd say funnier, to put it in a better way-- was we had such a small boat--

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, I was telling her about our first boat.

Vishal Padalia: -- and we were getting on that boat and going out to put a line down. I remember the first time Veeral's, like, "How do we even use this crimp machine?"

Veeral Padalia: Um-hm.

Vishal Padalia: And it was just me and him figuring it out together, and we did it. We did figure it out. And we got all the oysters out there. And then, I was still not ready for a full-time job for oystering 'cause it was just, like, hey, we're starting today. And I remember Veeral would call me and say, "You need to come down here now! We got so much work!" And I never realized the reality of it. And I think it took me a while, and Veeral held it together for sure. And I think a lot of success-- and now I don't think there has been a day we've not gone out together.

Veeral Padalia: All right. You gotta wrap it up, man. You can't go . . .

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

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And so that was the story from the beginning is that Veeral started it and then now we--

Vishal Padalia: All right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We got it. You already said that. [Laughter]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, I'm wonderin' if maybe you could talk about-- that was a great answer. Thank you.

Vishal Padalia: Um-hm.

Annemarie Anderson: I was wonderin' if maybe you could talk a little bit about Spring Creek, as well, and how you guys found this place and why you're here as opposed to anywhere else?

Veeral Padalia: You can go ahead.

Vishal Padalia: I'm probably better at this than you. Spring Creek, that's a different story, a spin-off. I think for the reality of it is that we had got that RV and we needed a location to put it. And so that's kind of like where I met Mitch and made a relationship with him. And that was before even oystering came around. And it's just fate-- I guess you can put it like that-- that the oystering came sometime after that and it kinda became the homebase.

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He's got a boat ramp. And I will give definitely a ton of credit to Mitch Spears to allowing us to be here and do what we do because if it wasn't for that it'd be commuting home and driving. And that's kinda how we found Spring Creek was--

Veeral Padalia: And actually, this is the most convenient. It's probably the closest.

Vishal Padalia: It's closer.

Veeral Padalia: You can go from Panacea the other way but it's a little bit trickier. But when we go through here, we're just going through all these flats and sandbars, so it gets shallow at times.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. And even Mitch Spears, he started oystering, too, so it was just kind of a relationship built through meeting him and--

Veeral Padalia: Didn't we come fishing here long, long-- when we were younger, right?

Vishal Padalia: So long ago I don't even remember.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: So for sure. And I mean, just that RV, to meeting Mitch, to the oyster timing was really how we found Spring Creek. And I don't think there's a better place we could've found. Really, every other place would've been a public boat ramp where you're driving your boat back.

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And this has become a home base, absolutely beautiful, and we're blessed to be here.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, it's great.

Vishal Padalia: Um-hm.

Annemarie Anderson: I'm wonderin' if maybe you-all could talk a little bit, too, about the community of oyster farmers in Spring Creek and just, I guess, in Wakulla County in general, and your relationship with them?

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. I think, like we were mentioning, it's just been great. We're kind of the new guys, maybe, the newbies a little bit, but everyone we meet-- you just meet 'em on the water, you meet 'em here on land. They're your neighbors. You don't realize that you've probably already known 'em or seen 'em or something. And just, yeah, everybody's just real nice and just knowledgeable.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: 'Cause it's all like a learning process, like, everybody's learning together, 'cause it's a new industry.

Vishal Padalia: And I think the first people we met was Denita and Blake.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: They're with Outlaw Oysters. They helped us, I mean, getting equipment from them, and they would give us the opportunity to ask some questions.

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And Denita and Blake were absolutely amazing to guide us in the right direction in the proper way. And the funny thing is there's been a fence right here from where we live in Spring Creek, and we've never looked on the other side. You know all the oyster farmers, but it's, like, where do you go step on someone's feet, right? You're kinda just doing your own thing. And so randomly, I don't know, we just decided randomly to drive on the other side of the fence and there was Jody and Dewey with Cypress Point Oysters. And we also met Cainnon--

Veeral Padalia: Well, there's a lot of people that work out there because it's like you can park your boat in the water. Really nice operation they got there.

Vishal Padalia: And you never know who you're gonna meet.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: It's, like, thinking in the oyster industry, we don't know what to think.

Veeral Padalia: And plus, the leases are just for them. It's just two miles right out here.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: It takes them, like, five minutes. I don't know, have you been out on the water in a boat?

Annemarie Anderson: I have, yeah.

Veeral Padalia: You have? All right. That's awesome. How was that?

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. Beautiful.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah?

Annemarie Anderson: And all the leases all there.

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Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: Isn't it something?

Annemarie Anderson: It is!

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: And so I think in the industry, everyone that we've met, literally everyone that we've met has been great. And I think that's a huge part of why I like this industry. And I was, like, wow! So we went up to Oyster South, and I think everybody we met there was just friendly. And if I was even to ask Veeral, I was, like, have we ever met anyone that's not friendly, and that's not true. I mean, Tim Jordan, great. Everybody. And I think even though you work so hard in the industry, but everything is fun, everyone is helpful, and you just feel like you get a little bit more sense of confidence through everybody kinda helping you. And that's kinda like-- to answer your question-- just many of the people--

Veeral Padalia: I think you've already answered it. I know, but-- all right. You gotta wrap it up, man. You can't just go on and on and on.

Vishal Padalia: All right.

Veeral Padalia: Geez, we'll be here all day.

Annemarie Anderson: [Laughter] Well, if you could maybe also introduce me to your lease.

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Where's your lease? Where do you farm oysters?

Veeral Padalia: Well, this whole area is under one AUZ, I think they call it, and it's Oyster Bay. But then there's kinda two groups. So you saw the one in Oyster Bay, I believe, where they're all together. But then, just on the other side of Piney Island there's a few more leases in Skipper Bay. I guess technically geographically it's Skipper Bay. And there's, gosh, maybe twenty more leases over there.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. And you all both have your own separate lease.

Veeral Padalia: Right.

Vishal Padalia: Um-hm.

Annemarie Anderson: Okay.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. We're just a couple leases apart.

Annemarie Anderson: Okay.

Vishal Padalia: Which is a blessing. Not far from each other helps a lot.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, I bet. Especially, yeah, when you need another person out there helping you.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: Oh, yeah.

Veeral Padalia: I couldn't imagine doing it alone.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: You could. A lot of people do do it alone. I've seen some hardworking people. But I guess it could maybe get boring. I like arguing with him.

Vishal Padalia: [Laughter] Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: I know he knows it.

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Vishal Padalia: Yeah. That's what the joke is-- I think if you even go to Cypress Point Oyster, we do some business-- we get our oysters processed through them. And I think on the

board they have V and V brothers instead of Forgotten Bay Oysters. And it's funny because Jody was asking us, "What's your guys' names?" And that's kinda hard to come up with. We started arguing and Jody was there and she's, like, "Um, I'll come back later when you guys finish arguing."

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: And we were, like, how about Fighting Brothers Oysters, you know?

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: But it's good. Like I said, I trust Veeral. I hope he trusts me. And it's just part of our nature, but that's what keeps us successful, so it's good.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. That's great. I'm wonderin' if you could take me through a typical day of work for you-all on the water? And there's probably not a typical day oystering.

Veeral Padalia: Right. No, you're totally right. There's maybe something different. But for the most part, in the morning he's commuting from Tallahassee, so he'll get down here. He had the only truck that was able to tow this boat until I just got a truck now.

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So now we both can tow, we can put it in the water. He might bring breakfast for me if he's not running late. We'll get out there on the boat usually morning, or we abide by the tides. We like to go mid-tide, low tide, right?

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. So first thing we'll do is look up tides and then we'll coordinate with each day before what time we're gonna go out.

Veeral Padalia: But then we can get in the water and have the cages right here at your-- you're not either bending over or the water's not too high.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. So we drop the boat in the water. Veeral usually drives. We'll get out there. I'll be tending other stuff on the boat. And then we'll get out to our lease, which is probably about a ten-minute drive. The drive to our lease is pretty intense, just with shallow spots and weaving in and out of oyster bars, but . . .

Veeral Padalia: And I guess technically it would be two choices, whether we're harvesting to sell or we're just maintaining or changing cages.

Vishal Padalia: You're on the babies, yeah.

Veeral Padalia: Right now we're closed due to the red tide, so lately we've just been going out there and maintaining, shaking cages, checking for broken gear.

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Vishal Padalia: Yeah. So we use a floating bag system, which our bags are about, like, three feet by two feet.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. Yeah, something . . .

Vishal Padalia: And then, so it's not that there's a ton of 'em. We'll have anywhere from six-hundred bags, somewhere around in that average, I think. And we'll go out there, and when we get out in the water, we literally get out of the boat in the water and Veeral will be attending, and we just maintain stuff, bring oysters back in the boat. We'll run it through our tumbler, re-sort all the different sizes. We refill the bag, zip tie 'em, throw 'em back in the water, and we'll

click 'em back on. Usually run anywhere from about four to five hours a day. And then we'll come in, and I commute back to Tallahassee and Veeral stays down here.

Annemarie Anderson: Nice. Great. And I'm wonderin' if maybe there are any other challenges or maybe happy surprises that you've come across while doing this since 2019?

Veeral Padalia: Many. Many, yeah. Gosh, I'll start from the top.

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COVID, I guess, that really hurt in the supply chain.

Vishal Padalia: Boat maintenance, so we couldn't get our boat repaired.

Veeral Padalia: Oh, man. Hurricanes, critters like blue crabs. A lot of the stuff was also our own fault just because we kinda fell behind or we maybe put too many oysters in one bag. Yeah. Gosh, there was a lot I can't think of. [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. I'll speak for something real recently, which is what we absolutely love is tough is we give a majority of our oysters to a distributor and that's fairly easy. You can just get all your oysters and you either go drop them off at Tim or Outlaw Oysters. Tim is Saucey Lady. And recently we've been wanting to retail our oysters ourselves, and so Cypress Point Oysters has allowed us to process our oysters. And what we do is we go pick them up, and we were selling them roadside.

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So we recently sold over nearby Costco. We set up at Marathon gas station. We set up a booth.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, that was somethin'.

Vishal Padalia: And we sold quite a bit of oysters that way. We've been selling oysters organically through meeting people, through marketing online. And I think that's a new chapter in our life.

Veeral Padalia: But that wasn't even part of this question, so . . .

Annemarie Anderson: That's okay.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: He's preemptively answering the questions I had.

Veeral Padalia: I know. [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: No, but I'm saying that's just part of the challenge, because setting up at the gas station was not easy. He was, like, this is a waste of time, and it was, but I was, like, how do we know that? And doing the organic selling, I think trying to create how to sell your oysters on your own is probably going to be the toughest challenge, but we're gonna get our own product. And then, I think selling your own product is a huge part of-- I don't care what industry you're in. If you can achieve that I think you [inaudible 0:24:57].

Veeral Padalia: Do you even remember the question?

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

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Something that's a challenge, and that's selling oysters.

Veeral Padalia: No. The question is your just typical day on the water. I don't know what you're talking--

Vishal Padalia: No, that was the old question, right?

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. I did ask about the challenges and . . .

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. That's the old question.

Veeral Padalia: I know, but . . .

Vishal Padalia: No, no. She was, like, what a challenge is, remember?

Veeral Padalia: I know, I know. But just say-- you don't have to do, like, a ten minute . . .

Vishal Padalia: No. But I can't believe you're on the old question, still.

Veeral Padalia: I know, but you've confused me. Concise, please.

Annemarie Anderson: That's okay. [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: No, but I wanted a corporate selling-- that was a huge challenge for me because maybe I did a majority of the work trying to get all this sold on Facebook and this and that. And I think for me that's my story of challenging was how to sell these oysters organically rather than dropping it off somewhere. So you can speak for the other parts, which is probably tough for you.

Annemarie Anderson: Any happy surprises?

Veeral Padalia: Happy surprises? Yeah. I think just actually from start to finish, we actually had something to sell, because I've heard some horror stories of people just . . . everything. Or, I mean, what, two, three hurricanes we . . . how many?

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Vishal Padalia: Storms, yeah.

Veeral Padalia: A lot of stuff. I think one hurricane was really bad. I forget the name. Broke one of our lines, so we panicked a little bit when we got out there. That was a challenge. A happy one? Yeah, I think it would just have to have been that we sold oysters.

Vishal Padalia: I think happy for Veeral is that he got this house, and he lives down here. I think that's cool, even for me to just come down here and he lives down here, it's just great. Because we were pretty bored in Tallahassee, to be honest.

Veeral Padalia: A move out of Mom and Dad's? [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: Yeah, that's what— I wasn't gonna say it that way.

Veeral Padalia: I guess that's a happy surprise.

Vishal Padalia: I was kinda beating around that. But absolutely, I think from Veeral's standpoint, he owns this, he lives down here, and that's great. I come down here every day and he's got a place down here, and I think that's great. I think that's huge happiness, I guess is a good way of putting it.

Veeral Padalia: All right.

Vishal Padalia: I think what else from me, a happy point?

0:27:02

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter] Man, you're just rambling.

Vishal Padalia: I think for us as a job going through med school and stuff like that, I think going out on the boat doing what we do here, I absolutely love it. So I'd put this whole oyster project and business as a happy point for me.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. I'm wonderin' maybe going back to your marketing and distribution, 'cause I did have that as a question, I'd like to maybe talk a little bit about that. So you-all started with Tim Jordan over at the Panacea area oyster co-op?

Veeral Padalia: Oh, no. Well, in the very, very beginning we were selling to all them, just some people want on certain days, some don't. So we were selling to all the distributors.

Vishal Padalia: We still sell to everybody, whoever needs it.

Veeral Padalia: Right. So that's great, too, because everybody has different needs. I'm not sure how restaurants deal with it.

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But yeah, and then, like he was saying, already told you about, we wanted to try to get a little bit more for our oysters, and so then we moved into the Facebook and retail and, like, the roadside.

Annemarie Anderson: So in that marketing, how are you doing that other than kind of by word of mouth? What is that like?

Veeral Padalia: Well, no, just, like, Facebook. He's good at that stuff.

Vishal Padalia: Facebook, Instagram.

Veeral Padalia: Right.

Vishal Padalia: Neighbors. It's crazy.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, word of mouth is really good, too.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. I have signs over kind of where I live. I live in Buck Lake area, which they've got a park there, the greenway, and I literally just put a sign there with "fresh oysters." I mean, it's not like we have unlimited oysters. And just to get a few phone calls from a few people is just enough to sell the volume we have.

Veeral Padalia: Right, yeah.

Vishal Padalia: And everybody we've met-- I sold oysters to a car mechanic and he gave us a call back a few days later and it was the greatest call.

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He was just so appreciative. He loved the oysters, first of all. Second, I delivered 'em to his shop. And his communication was great back, and I think we're kind of learning a lot. And it's just the beginning. And like I said, we do still sell a majority of our oysters to any distributor that wants 'em because you have a sheer volume of 'em that you need to offload. There's no way you could get organic sales to that volume. But you just do a little bit of both, and we've been learning, I guess, as we go along.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. That sounds great. And I'm wonderin' also-- let me make sure I've asked everything that I need to ask. Let's see. I'm wonderin' also what you hope to see for the future of Forgotten Bay Oysters and oyster aquaculture in this area in general?

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. I think first is the whole thing--

Vishal Padalia: The environment and the industry.

Veeral Padalia: -- the aquaculture in general, because it's still young, right? And like we've already talked about, everybody's so helpful. And I think it's going in a great direction growing. Everybody still has some growing pains. I think it's even like the state of Florida is also learning all this. I think 2012 is when the first leases were done, and I think everybody is just figuring it out together. And it's getting better, maybe not as fast as people would like, maybe. And then, for us, Forgotten Bay Oysters, yeah, I just want to grow with everybody.

Vishal Padalia: Veeral always mentions environment, and it's like if you put all that together there's so many elements of not over-harvesting natural oysters in Apalachicola.

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Veeral Padalia: Yeah. It's really hard to find a negative about oyster farming.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. Even if you go out to our lease there's just a new breed of fishes.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: There's sheepsheads.

Veeral Padalia: Right.

Vishal Padalia: You're just creating other elements that-- you're helping everything, the entire environment out. You're helping the fish environment, helping the shrimps.

Veeral Padalia: The best thing I like, I think one oyster can filter fifty liters of water per day or something like that. And then, actually, I think in Dewey and Jody's article they had mentioned-- I read in there that in Maryland they pay, like, eco-credits. So depending on how many oysters you grow they're gonna give you a little bit of money for just cleaning the

environment. And that's what they're doing in New York. They're actually planting oysters in the harbor, not for eating or consuming, just to clean up the bay.

Vishal Padalia: You could see shrimp out there on our leases, and they're using our equipment to habitat, and the other fish.

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You might not be able to get any data now, but in the long run is everything is benefitted by this.

Veeral Padalia: When you were out there, did you see any of the black drums out there?

Annemarie Anderson: Yes!

Veeral Padalia: Did you see how massive and big they are?

Annemarie Anderson: Yes. [Laughter]

Veeral Padalia: Oh, my gosh. The first time we saw them I had to double take. I was, like, what is that? That thing is huge. Yeah. I thought that's one of the fun things. Every day there's something different, right?

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: Eagle, dolphin, manatee, black drum, sheepshead.

Vishal Padalia: This county, FDAC, all the other oyster growers, us included, I think you can be proud of yourself. It's helping the environment, and we're also happy what we're doing so I think win-win for sure. In the beginning tough, but from now it's great. We can't help to keep moving forward.

Veeral Padalia: I think the one hurdle that when you talk to everybody-- I don't know if you've noticed it-- their one complaint has been getting seeds, babies.

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Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: Has that been a recurring answer for-- have people complained about that?

Annemarie Anderson: Yes. But I'd love to hear about your experience in trying to obtain seeds.

Veeral Padalia: Oh, yeah, yeah. So season zero, right? That's what I like to call it. Actually, I stole that from Jody. She taught me that, season zero. Everybody has-- their first season is bad. So yeah, I put in orders to multiple hatcheries. And when you're new you're kinda just last on the list. Or maybe it's not that, maybe it's just they just ran out or a bad season; who knows what it is. So we didn't get any seeds. So then, the next season, I was, like, all right, man, we're getting seeds this season, and so I over ordered. And so then, of course, the second season everybody's like, yeah, we got seeds! So it ended up working out because then Mitch, he was having problems with getting seeds, so then I sold some of our babies right away to him, just transferred it over to him.

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So he got taken care of, which was great for me and him.

Vishal Padalia: He got started, yeah.

Veeral Padalia: And for us because I was, like, ugh, we can't do this many oysters. And so that was good. That's another thing. And then people will actually-- if you order seeds from

somewhere like Tampa, there'll be someone else coming with seeds, someone will just bring you seeds, someone you don't even know. This hatchery guy was, like, yeah, so-and-so's coming and he's just gonna bring your seeds. So I'll just meet up with someone, and they have, like, a hundred-thousand oysters. I don't know if you've ever seen them in beginning. They're, like, just this much. So somebody brought us seeds once.

Vishal Padalia: What's Curt's company's name?

Veeral Padalia: Bay Shellfish.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. A lot of people like him.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. He's a good guy, a smart guy.

Vishal Padalia: He runs a really good operation. And that's primarily what we're growing out there is the seeds we get from him. And he's been a blessing, let's just put it that way.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. So I think just in the beginning getting to start. And then, there's no hatchery nearby here us.

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Apalachicola would be the closest one. So I still think it needs to happen close by. That would be nice. But I think all this will happen in time, I hope.

Vishal Padalia: These seed companies, these people, it's just a person, right? You can call it a seed company, but behind the company name it's a person and they're struggling.

Veeral Padalia: But technically it's spat, so let's be technical here, right?

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: These guys don't know what they're talking about saying "seeds." Oyster spat.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. And what my parents call it is "Veeral's babies."

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, babies.

Vishal Padalia: I got a human baby. Veeral is not married so . . .

Veeral Padalia: It's actually not oyster farming, it's like oyster ranching because they're actually alive. I read that somewhere and that's pretty cool, we're ranchers.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. So behind all these seed companies there's a race and they're struggling. It's whether they have a successful season or not, that's a lot of money that goes into it, time, effort.

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And so it would be great for them to get funding or grants or whatever that system is because it would help us out to get better seeds, to get more successful seeds. Veeral's the technical person to answer that.

Veeral Padalia: No, no. Getting it is great. I'll be grateful after that first season just even getting it, but it would also be nice-- if you get seeds late in the season you're really at a disadvantage. But some people who have been doing this forever, which makes sense, they get seeds earlier, a couple months earlier, and they have a way better start. So stuff like that. I think that'll all fix itself as we grow in this industry, make more contacts. But anyways, yeah, oyster seeds, babies, spat, yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: I like it. I've heard it called all of it.

Vishal Padalia: Veeral's babies. [Laughter]

0:36:58

Annemarie Anderson: [Laughter] Well, I do have one question about learning, and I think you guys have kind of done this on your own, but were there any classes or any things that you--

Veeral Padalia: Internet. Internet.

Vishal Padalia: Who's the guy from the YouTube videos that we met in Oyster South?

Veeral Padalia: Oh, yeah. Bill Walton. He's good, yeah.

Vishal Padalia: Bill Walton.

Veeral Padalia: A lot of these scientists and people, they put a lot of good stuff on their Instagram or YouTube or whatnot, just good videos, because they do have those meetings and seminars and stuff. You've been to probably some of those, right? So when you don't make it to those, they just film it all. The people that are on that stuff know what they're doing, what they're talking about. So, yeah, internet. [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: Even hands-on in the beginning with buying equipment from Outlaw Oyster.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, learning our own lesson.

Vishal Padalia: And Denita and Blake were there.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, they helped us a lot.

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Vishal Padalia: I swear, we'd literally pull up in our car to get something, whether it was hammer or equipment, and then we'd be, like, hey, Denita, what do you think about how often you need to do this or that? And she would give you a very good answer. And it was, like, this is what you're supposed to do, but you guys are gonna learn a lot as it goes. There's no right answer.

Veeral Padalia: The best lesson is your own way. People have told us stuff that we made a mistake on beforehand.

Vishal Padalia: Everything's different.

Veeral Padalia: But you kinda get overwhelmed sometimes.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. So they were a lot of help just telling us that, you're gonna learn as you go. Because where your farm is has different elements than someone else, and there's just so many elements. There's no right answer or right technique. You're gonna see what works for you. And that's how we've gotten to where we are, figured out through mistakes for sure, but that's also what works.

Veeral Padalia: Also in the beginning is hard because you don't have anything ready.

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Our biggest thing was we didn't have any of our equipment built. This stuff-- I don't know if you saw outside-- they're flat. You gotta fold 'em up, hog rig 'em, put the floats on. So going into this next season we already have everything built. We just cleaned, and so that just eliminated hours and hours of--

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. [Laughter]

Veeral Padalia: Like he was saying, he's like, okay, are we going out tomorrow? We need twenty cages.

Vishal Padalia: That was a struggle.

Veeral Padalia: I was, like, oh, you build ten and I need to build ten.

Vishal Padalia: And then I get here, and he would have eight and I had nine. I was, like, can't I build one more?

Veeral Padalia: Just make breakfast. I'll fix these last two.

Vishal Padalia: I had my mother-in-law. She'd be, like, "What are you doing till 10:00 p.m.?" She came from Chicago because we had our newborn, and there was no dining room. The dining room became my oyster room.

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: And my wife wasn't happy about that. And we'd be making cages there. And my mother-in-law, she's always worked all her life and she's down here helping us. And she's, like, "I need something to do. Teach me how to make this cage." So at one point it looked so bad because I had my mother-in-law making cages.

Veeral Padalia: I know. I came up and I was, like, dude, you're making her make-- come on, man.

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Vishal Padalia: [Laughter] Yeah. I was, like, dude, she's volunteering.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, she's just passing the time, man.

Vishal Padalia: She feels bad and she's bored and she loves that kinda stuff. And that was, there you go, part of the struggle. And like Veeral said, now we're very fortunate, we have our old cages that was pressure washed, and now that's one element we don't have to worry about, growing oysters a little bit more successful on having what we need. So that was another chapter, I guess you would say, equipment.

Annemarie Anderson: I bet.

Vishal Padalia: Um-hm.

Annemarie Anderson: Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to add?

Veeral Padalia: No. I was just telling Mitch-- I was talking to him about it earlier, that we were doing this oral history and stuff, and he's, like, "Make sure you tell 'em about the seeds and the seed problems." And that's a universal complaint. But I was, like, I don't know if this is the forum for that anyways.

0:41:00

Vishal Padalia: Veeral collects a lot of ancestral . . .

Veeral Padalia: Well, yeah.

Vishal Padalia: I don't know if that's the right word. Veeral would be the better one to put the right words.

Veeral Padalia: No. Just old oyster shuckers.

Annemarie Anderson: Oh, cool! Wow.

Vishal Padalia: He finds Native American stones that they . . .

Veeral Padalia: But, yeah, just small stuff like that. Started a little collection. You said you already saw this, right, Leo's . . . ?

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. I haven't read this one. The first one I went through. And then, what other knickknacks-- I don't know if any of this helps the interview, but-- some oyster cans.

Annemarie Anderson: Yes.

Veeral Padalia: Those are, like, vintage stuff. That's how they used to ship them back in the day, in little pancakes.

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah. Growing full interest in what you do. That's good, man. That's good.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: I think that's cool, man.

Veeral Padalia: It's another baseball card collection.

Vishal Padalia: I'm not spending the money on buying it, but I get the free entertainment of when it comes in.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: Let me open the box!

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Well, is there anything else we haven't talked about that you guys want to touch on?

Vishal Padalia: No, I think that's good.

Annemarie Anderson: That's it?

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Vishal Padalia: I mean, that was pretty cool to do.

Veeral Padalia: And if you have any other questions, our email-- I put my phone number there, too, if there's something you forgot, you can call anytime.

Annemarie Anderson: Sounds great. Thanks!

Veeral Padalia: I'm really looking forward to everybody's story altogether because there's got to be some correlations there, something.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: There's gonna be some great info that's gonna come out of that, and that's what we always want.

Annemarie Anderson: I hope so, yeah.

Veeral Padalia: I hope so. I think so. Yeah.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. There are lots of people.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah. Someone's gotta put it all together, 'cause there's a lot of different stories and it's different everywhere.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: And somewhere in there it's all gonna come together, I feel like.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah, yeah. To what he's saying, I'll add this, is that there's a brewery in Tallahassee that they want to sell oysters on Sundays and stuff. And I think Dewey approached the manager and it was, like, you don't want one oyster farm selling oysters here. You need to go meet all the different personalities behind it. And that stuck with me.

Veeral Padalia: Well, no. Each oyster is different, too.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah, absolutely.

0:43:02

Veeral Padalia: Each craft.

Vishal Padalia: The oyster and the oyster farmer and everything has got its own story, and it's very entertaining, too.

Veeral Padalia: No, I think that angle-- because before it just a oyster. If it came from a general area, wild oysters, pretty much the same. But now, the way people grow 'em different and different seeds--

Vishal Padalia: Craft. That's where the name "craft" comes from. Like beer, every beer is different, right?

Veeral Padalia: That's Jody and Dewey's baby, the "craft oyster."

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: I love that term.

Vishal Padalia: And we have a neighbor that oyster farms literally next to us, our neighbors. And we were at Oyster South, and they put our booths next to them where we're serving oysters to the public and I grab their oysters-- it was Boonedocks Oysters-- and I ate it and then we ate ours, and we were just laughing how different they are even though they're literally next to us.

Veeral Padalia: Have you spoke with Garrett?

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, yeah. That's Boonedocks.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: He's our neighbor out there.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Veeral Padalia: So we just love it. Even on the water, yelling at each other, "What's going on?"

Annemarie Anderson: [Laughter]

Vishal Padalia: Or just even the safety. There's always someone out there.

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: You don't feel like . . .

Veeral Padalia: People turn around for you. One time we were just stopped, our boat, 'cause we were figuring out something, and someone pulled around and came back, "You guys okay?" We were, like, "Yeah, yeah. We're okay. Yeah."

Vishal Padalia: Erin, yeah. I forgot her company name, but Erin, she lives down here.

Veeral Padalia: Yeah, she's really nice, too. Yeah.

Vishal Padalia: Yeah, I think that's it. [Laughter]

Annemarie Anderson: That was great!

Veeral Padalia: [Laughter] We'll talk forever.

Annemarie Anderson: I love that.

0:44:30

[End of Interview]