

**KURT & KAREN UNKEL**  
**Kinder, LA**

\*\*\*

Date: September 12, 2007  
Location: Kinder, LA  
Interviewer: Sara Roahen  
Length: 1 hour, 34 minutes  
Project: Southern Boudin Trail

**[Begin Unkel-Boudin Interview]**

00:00:01

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Wednesday, September 12, 2007. I'm in Kinder, Louisiana with Kurt and Karen Unkel and at their home. And if I could get y'all to say your name how you say it, and your birth date, and then we'll go from there.

00:00:22

**Karen:** I'm Karen Unkel. My birth date is December 14, 1959.

00:00:27

**Kurt:** And Kurt Unkel, and I'm December 6, 1956.

00:00:35

**SR:** All right, thank you. And can y'all describe what you do for a living?

00:00:40

**Kurt:** Well thank you. **[Laughs]** Well I farm for a living. I have farmed; I'm a third-generation farmer. I'm now doing some other part-time jobs since I got out of the—since I've got out of the large conventional farming and started trying to just farm the direct-market where you—. And now we're just trying to farm for our customers and for what they want.

00:01:10

**SR:** So can you tell me a little bit about that transition—what you were doing before you went to direct farming, and then how you—I mean direct selling—and then how you go about finding customers when you make that transition?

00:01:23

**Kurt:** Oh how did we—it was—

00:01:27

**Karen:** Oh that was probably, what? About seven or eight years ago?

00:01:28

**Kurt:** It's long, yeah. Almost 10 years ago I stopped—I gradually phased out 'cause it—you don't just get out of these things. You've got—farming is such a long-term investment. But anyway we're—and as far as finding customers we—

00:01:45

**Karen:** Well probably for the first 20 years you were a conventional large-scale rice farmer and soy beans.

00:01:51

**Kurt:** And cattle.

00:01:51

**Karen:** And cattle, and then decided to make that transition, slowly, by direct-marketing a different variety of rice.

00:02:01

**Kurt:** And well, we started off with the beef. I started raising the grass-fed beef, and I still had—I farmed one little field of rice, and then we milled a little bit of the rice and I brung it and boiled it, and boy the people really liked the fresh-milled rice. And then we started doing the brown rice, and then the brown rice really just—has really taken off. And it's—and then once you, once you get one product going it just—the next thing leads to this, and it just you know—it's just that first product is hard to get going.

00:02:42

**SR:** So what—I mean I guess there were two generations before you that did more conventional farming, which is what you inherited. What inspired you to change your tact?

00:02:55

**Kurt:** The—you can't make a living at the farm. The conventional farm is a tough living right now, and the way the farm programs are set up you can't hardly survive with them, but you surely can't survive without them. And when you really get down to it, you can't ever—you can't ever better yourself. You know you're locked into the—to the government programs and everything. And when I got to looking at it, you get paid the same if you try to do great or if you don't do very good. You know your money was coming out the same. And I said, *This is—*.

00:03:31

**Karen:** And the other thing was we were starting to hit 40 years-old and start thinking about health. Now by no means are we perfect. You know we still hit up McDonald's and things like that, but with trying—we were trying to look at ways that we could incorporate healthier eating here and there. And so, and being farmers for like—well, if we raised cattle we naturally already grazed them, and so we can leave that like that and work with the meat.

00:03:59

**Kurt:** And get away from the grain. And I started grass-feeding and asking questions about this—*How do I do this? and How do*—reading books. And everybody told me, *Do not take your cattle to the sale barn*. He says, *You got a specialty product—a specialty market*; he says, *Direct-market it*. So that's when we started trying to direct-market, and you couldn't give it away. And then I talked to them in Baton Rouge, Red Stick [farmers' market] and they said, *Yeah*. [I said] *Let's go down there*. And then Baton Rouge started moving some meat, and then one thing—. I've noticed that a lot of these cities that have medical schools are much more health conscious than these other cities. And it's just, well, 10 years ago you didn't have near the health-conscious people you have now. I mean it's changed dramatically in the last 10 years.

00:04:50

**Karen:** In the deep South.

00:04:51

**Kurt:** In the deep—yeah, down here.

00:04:53

**SR:** So just to clarify, for the record, by Red Stick you mean the farmers market in Baton Rouge?

00:04:56

**Kurt:** Yeah, the Red Stick Farmers' Market.

00:04:58

**SR:** And who was that—who gave you that advice—*You have a specialty product*, you know?

00:05:05

**Kurt:** Oh we started—we went to the organic conventions. I went to the Grass—the southern grass farmer conventions. We went to the Acres U.S.A. And any of these conventions, when they'd have speakers that was in my area—

00:05:24

**Karen:** Southern SSAWG—that's the Southern Sustainable Agriculture—something [Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group].

00:05:27

**Kurt:** Very good program; yeah, their convention. And then once I started playing with this and trying to grow my legumes and my clovers, and you had to get away from the chemicals, and I saw what it did to my land, I saw the health—what it did to my animals—and I saw when you just started working with nature how things just improved and improved, and I'm like I'll never go back to other ways. It's just—just this—I mean it's really how things have changed here in the last 10 years since you've got away from the chemicals and the chemical fertilizers and everything. And I'm not away from them; I'm just handling them different.

00:06:12

**SR:** And how have things changed, like in what sort of palpable way?

00:06:16

**Kurt:** I have tremendous amount of clovers growing now, where I went three or four years, I couldn't make a clover grow.

00:06:24

**Karen:** And clover is kind of a gauge of how—

00:06:29

**Kurt:** Soil fertility.

00:06:28

**Karen:** —soil fertility. You know, if you have clover it's looking good for your soil.

00:06:35

**Kurt:** It's improved. I'm only getting the white clover now, which is the bottom—I mean that's your poorest clover, but it's—. I mean I plant clover seed in those spots and crawled around on my hands and knees and crawled around, and I never could find a clover for years. And then— and then—

00:06:50

**Karen:** And also starting to see earthworms, which we had gotten—. As growing up, if we went fishing you'd dig in the ground and you'd get your worms for fishing. In the last, what? Five, ten years, it's like no earthworms.

00:07:03

**Kurt:** You could plow 100 acres and not find one earthworm.

00:07:06

**Karen:** And having earthworms is another good measure of showing that your soil is healthy.

00:07:11

**SR:** And was it the chemicals that was making—making the earthworms go away?

00:07:16

**Kurt:** Yeah, and the fertilizers.

00:07:18

**Karen:** And the good bacteria. As in all living things, you have good bacteria, bad bacteria, but your soils need that good bacteria to make the plants healthy.

00:07:27

**Kurt:** And it's just the—the fertilizer—the way the fertilizer program has gone it's like potassium. Your cheapest source of potassium is a potassium chloride they make, and it's—and it's great. I mean it's all right for the potassium, but you've got 40-percent chlorine, and your chlorine, you see, is taking everything out in the soil. And you—and it just—a lot of your chemical fertilizers, if you—you've got to be very careful how you handle them. You can get by using them very lightly. Like this year I used the potassium chloride on my rice field, but instead of 40 pounds to the acre I put 9 pounds to the acre.

00:08:18

**SR:** And did that hurt you at all, to put that little amount on it?

00:08:24

**Kurt:** I think it's one of my best yields I've ever had this year. It's going to be up there. If it's not the best it's going to be up there with one of the best. And the phosphorous, I have you know—you have no sources of—I have trouble getting sources of good—my phosphorous, I only use 9 pounds to the acre.

00:08:44

**SR:** As opposed to, what were you using?

00:08:46

**Kurt:** We normally would put about,=you normally would put about 40 to 50 pounds to the acre, or 60 pounds to the acre.

00:08:52

**SR:** And what does phosphorous do for the crop?

00:08:54

**Kurt:** It's just another one of your central elements. I mean you got your nitrogen, your potassium, your phosphorous, your calcium, your—all those things that you've got to have. And now I do soil testing, and I do—I work more—my minerals and everything, you know—

00:09:09

**Karen:** Our biggest goal was to get away from pesticides and herbicides, and especially right on this 140 acres. The rice is grown off of this farm and the goats work as our herbicide here.

**[Laughs]** They—well you can't tell by our yard 'cause we haven't mowed, but as far as the farm weeds, the goats trim around the trees you know. If you look way out there you don't see the vines, and you know—.

00:09:42

**Kurt:** Well you see the—you see the growth line. You see where the leaves start. I mean 20 years ago you would not—you would not see the highway, you would not see that pasture; this house was completely engulfed. There were fence rolls around were from ground level to 40 foot high. You couldn't see through them. Do you see?

00:10:02

**SR:** And why is that different?

00:10:04

**Kurt:** Well the goats eat it. The goats ate all that.

00:10:06

**Karen:** Instead of putting herbicide chemicals to kill off all the overgrowth—now this is all except our yard where it needs mowing and we haven't—they [the goats] control all the weed growth on 140-acres.

00:10:19

**SR:** How many goats do you have?

00:10:20

**Kurt:** Well we used to have about 100, but now I'm down to about 30. I'm letting things grow back.

00:10:25

**Karen:** And those market all to the New Orleans Vietnamese. They have their Chinese New Year in February, I think, and they come once a year and pick up goats for their fair or whatever—their Chinese New Year fair.

00:10:38

**Kurt:** But that canal levee was just—it was turning to dirt. They were eating all the grass off of it. I mean they were getting—but we went through four or five years of very dry weather here. And you see everything got eaten down, so now that we've had two years, or a year and a half, of rain, rain, rain things are growing back up. But I'll just—when the growth comes back and everything really starts covering back up, I'll let the goat numbers—and I don't really have time with the goats right now. I'm working, we're working try to get this boudin direct-marketed, this beef direct-marketed; trying to get some USDA labels, some rice labels. We just got so many other things going on. You can only do so much.

00:11:24

**SR:** I have so many questions, but let me just, before we move on from the goats—how did the—I mean I've been to that market, and last year they had the goats. I guess those were your goats. They did—they weren't your goats, no?

00:11:38

**Kurt:** No, I didn't sell goats to them.

00:11:39

**SR:** Oh okay. Well maybe one year, maybe it was. Well how did you get connected with the Vietnamese in New Orleans?

00:11:48

**Kurt:** The casinos here.

00:11:50

**Karen:** Yeah, there's families here that work at—for Grand Casino, and they're all—have relatives that are originally from New Orleans, so some of them came over here.

00:11:59

**Kurt:** And when they were driving back and forth they'd see the goats all out in the pasture, and then they thought—they drive into my house. They'd come up here, *You got any goats for sale?*

00:12:08

**Karen:** So we've been doing that for, what? About seven, eight years, selling them our goats.

00:12:14

**SR:** That's really interesting. So you were talking, Karen, about how when you all were growing up, if you wanted to get worms you would just go dig in the ground. So does that mean that, you know, your families were farming maybe closer to how you are now back then? Or is it—?

00:12:37

**Kurt:** Back then you had, a lot of this stuff was rice, and then it would go into a pasture for maybe two or three years, and then it would come back rice.

00:12:46

**Karen:** You'd give it a rest period.

00:12:48

**Kurt:** And then in the maybe—in the '70s when they started this, how the world was going to starve to death and everybody had to start farming more land and everything, and people started—the cattle gradually faded out. There was more money in the—in the grains, and everything went rice, soy beans, rice, rice, rice, soy beans, and just started farming this stuff back-to-back. And I believe basically what we've done is if—we've depleted our calcium levels back; we've depleted a lot of those things back to where the earthworms and that can't live in it. I mean you've got to—and the biggest factors are as your landowners retired and, you know, phased out, tenant farmers have taken over. I mean even—well we farm—well people that are farming family land, the family is owning the land and maybe somebody's farming it, so they're paying rent, you know, to all—you know they're—the farmland is still owned by outsiders. Very few farmers actually own 100-percent of their land that they're farming. And it's gotten to where it's—it's fairly expensive: upkeep and maintenance on your land, just like anything else. The landowners just want the income. They did not really want to share—the farmers did not want to put in the long-term investments of land improvements because they didn't know, and—and

things just through the circumstances, they just basically got neglected I guess. And now when you--once you get it depleted out, you're looking at \$200, \$300, \$400 an acre to get your land back in condition. And it's expensive.

00:14:34

**SR:** Do you feel like you sort of—you said that you started this transition about 10 years ago? And your land is really recovering, huh?

00:14:46

**Kurt:** Yes, I haven't—I haven't sprayed a Round-Up or a weed killer on this farm in probably close to 15 years now.

00:14:55

**SR:** So tell me a little bit about your backgrounds. Did you grow up in this area, or around this land, or—?

00:15:00

**Kurt:** Yeah, I grew up—I grew up across the canal right over there. My daddy grew up about a half-mile down that way, so yeah, this is—or this land here hasn't, but we've got some land here that's been in the family, you know, for I guess 80, 90 years or something now.

00:15:23

**Karen:** My mom was from here; my dad was from Oregon, and he was in the Air Force, so I was born in Japan and we've lived all over the world. And when he retired, this is where my high school and college years started. So—

00:15:39

**SR:** So did y'all go to the same high school?

00:15:39

**Karen:** No, I went to Jennings, and then after that I was kind of—

00:15:45

**Kurt:** But she was two years in Germany, two years in Thailand—a few years; she was all over the place—Maryland. See she—her daddy was military, so she grew up everywhere. And then Karen has got a nursing degree, and then I've just got an animal science degree.

00:16:04

**SR:** And so do you—do you feel like this is your, I don't know, where you're from?

00:16:10

**Kurt:** Home? *[Laughs]*

00:16:11

**Karen:** Well yeah, this is because every time, wherever we were, we'd always come back here, you know. This was where the grandparents were, and we'd come back and always—come back to Kinder. It's home between places.

00:16:26

**SR:** And do you—what is your ancestry? Are you Cajun or Creole or any—?

00:16:33

**Kurt:** I'm almost all German. I'm pretty much German on both sides of the family.

00:16:36

**Karen:** I'm a quarter Irish, a quarter Swedish, and probably Spanish mixed in there, so I'm kind of a variety.

00:16:51

**Kurt:** I got something else. Unkels are German—

00:16:53

**Karen:** And your mom's family is German.

00:16:55

**Kurt:** Mama, the Kuntz side was German. The Walker—the Walker side was not German, but anyway like I'm three-quarters German. I'm almost pure—

00:17:05

**Karen:** And we went to Europe about, oh about 15 years ago and visited the Unkel relatives and went to the little town Unkel, Germany, so it was interesting.

00:17:15

**Kurt:** Yeah, see there was three—my great-grandfather—there was three or four in the family. He came to the United States; the rest of the family stayed, you know, still in Germany over there. So it was interesting that, to get in touch with them and go back. And they toured, brought us around. It was—

00:17:36

**Karen:** It was fun.

00:17:37

**SR:** What is that that I'm hearing outside [a sort of guttural chirping sound]?

00:17:37

**Karen:** It's a frog. When it gets rainy season they, get on our windows. That's why our windows stay looking like that.

00:17:44

**Kurt:** See the green ones? Those little green frogs can make all that noise.

00:17:46

**Karen:** They track all over the windows and they just leave like an oily film on those—those windows. It's hard to get off.

00:17:53

**SR:** Well those are little. Is the frog little that's making that?

00:17:56

**Karen:** He's little. He's not much bigger.

00:17:59

**Kurt:** He's just like these. Look here.

00:18:00

**Karen:** It's just some of them, they start making that—in the rainy weather they do that. I don't know what it is.

00:18:04

**SR:** It sounds like a goose or something.

00:18:06

**Karen:** It's odd, yeah. I guess we're so used to it, we just tune it out.

00:18:12

**SR:** I thought there was some herd of something that I didn't know about out there. So do you have other people in your family who are—who are still farming in this area, Kurt?

00:18:20

**Kurt:** Yeah, I got a—I got two brothers that farm.

00:18:24

**Karen:** There are five boys in his family. And his dad farmed of course, and two brothers farm.

00:18:30

**Kurt:** Yeah, and one is a mechanic. One works—takes care of this irrigation system that actually floods. See, at one time this thing—they got a lot of deep water, and we still have a little bit of rice land and it comes off the surface water—it comes out of the Calcasieu River. And then that big irrigation canal stays full, and you take the water from the canal and then pay a rent to the company. Which they, you know—they pay them—it works on a share of the crop. You pay a share of the crop and they supply the water for the rice.

00:19:05

**SR:** Oh and that's one of your brothers that—?

00:19:07

**Karen:** Well the family owns that canal system, and one of the brothers manages it. How long is it?

00:19:13

**Kurt:** It's probably 10 or 12 miles long, but when that thing first was in its peak and they didn't have these deep wells it flooded like 10,000 acres of rice. Now it's flooding about 2,000, but we've got subdivisions; we've got trees that have been planted. The rice industry has really dropped dramatically around here, and it's going to be interesting to see if it even survives.

00:19:38

**SR:** Do your two brothers that farm, do they do rice?

00:19:41

**Kurt:** Yeah, they do rice and soy beans; cows.

00:19:45

**SR:** And have they made the sort of transition that you've made?

00:19:49

**Kurt:** No, they might be thinking on it. But they—they are—they still in the conventional farming where you work on yield and volume and all that.

00:20:06

**SR:** Now when you were doing conventional farming, were you selling your rice to a mill that would then process it?

00:20:12

**Kurt:** They would—the mill would just, yeah. They would— you'd take samples to the mills and the mills buy it and you're through with it.

00:20:19

**SR:** And so all of the rice, probably, that you were selling them wound up being white rice—polished?

00:20:25

**Kurt:** Yeah, everything on these mills—these big mills and it just—they'll take and everything just gets co-mingled, and they'll keep the quality grades separate. You know a number one rice, they won't—you know they'll keep it in a bin and they'll keep the varieties of that separate. But yeah, your rice just got mixed in with everybody else that had the same variety, and it was easier to sell then. We had, must have had 12, 15 mills back then. I think we've got, well, we must have about four now—four really big—. I mean they're just like everything else. You've got one or two—.

00:21:05

**SR:** Kind of reminds me of the dairy industry where everybody—no matter how you get your milk, no matter what process you use, it ends up all together.

00:21:14

**Kurt:** Yeah, that'—.

00:21:17

**SR:** So now I guess, two things: Does all of your rice end up being brown rice, and—?

00:21:26

**Kurt:** No.

00:21:28

**SR:** No, so you still sell—?

00:21:30

**Karen:** We probably sell about half of our rice or more—a little more than half—to the mills.

00:21:34

**Kurt:** Last year was a little over a half. Now this year I've got a much larger rice crop. I'll have—you see that one, that 70-acre field, there's—let's see, run through that my head—. Dry out finished, it will be at least—what's 30 times 162?

00:22:03

**Karen:** I'm not a mathematician. [*Laughs*]

00:22:06

**Kurt:** But anyway, it's really probably 5,000, 6,000 per acre.

00:22:10

**SR:** Per acre?

00:22:11

**Karen:** Times 70 acres, so—.

00:22:13

**Kurt:** Times 70 acres, so one acre in brown rice will convert to about 3,000-pounds—3,000 to 4,000-pounds of actual brown rice.

00:22:24

**Karen:** Rough rice to brown rice.

00:22:27

**Kurt:** Yeah, you know, so each acre when you—you know it—one-acre will end up putting— on my yields, some yields are higher and lower, but anyway that one acre is going to put 3,000 to 4,000 pounds of brown rice, so it doesn't take many acres to take care of my—.

00:22:44

**Karen:** But needless to say we can't market 70 acres [*Laughs*] direct-marketing.

00:22:49

**Kurt:** You know, because I mean one acre, good gosh there's no telling how many pounds of boudin one acre of rice will make, you know. [*Laughs*]

00:22:57

**Karen:** Yeah, which is above and beyond what we need right now, I can say.

00:22:59

**SR:** And so the rice that you direct-market that's brown, which I bought some at the Red Stick Market and served it to people in Wisconsin and Philadelphia who loved it, I should tell you—what do you—you don't take it to the mill. What do you do with it? How do you get the hull off?

00:23:19

**Kurt:** It's hand-milled in the—outside; that takes the hull off. And it's a small hand mill, and it's electric, but it takes the hull off. Now on my bigger orders when we start going with the stuff, the food, and the boudin and that, there's one little mill left in the Louisiana, in Gueydan, and he has—it's a small family-owned mill, but it's I mean small. He can probably mill 500 pounds of rice an hour, which is—the Farmers Rice Mill probably can do 50,000 pounds an hour, you know. I mean they do a tremendous—I mean they do—I don't know how much they do, but they do a lot.

00:24:02

**Karen:** But we'll contract with him and—

00:24:06

**Kurt:** He will take, he'll mill it and do that. I can do maybe 75 pounds an hour, you know, on mine. But 200 pounds—three or four hours, I can have the farmers' market's rice. You know, those customers made and sacked up and everything.

00:24:28

**SR:** Can you tell, for the record tell us what exactly the difference is between white rice and brown rice?

00:24:35

**Kurt:** Okay, all of your rice is—you got a hull on the outside layer. You've got a bran layer of—and the germ—the germ and the bran layer on the outside of the rice. Then the middle is your starch, but when you take the hull off you have just the rice and the bran and the germ—

00:25:00

**Karen:** Which is brown rice.

00:25:02

**Kurt:** —brown rice, and then they have a polisher that rubs the bran off, and then you have your white rice.

00:25:10

**SR:** So I know the bran has a lot of nutrients in it, and I guess that was part of your decision to get a little healthier, was to—?

00:25:20

**Karen:** That's right.

00:25:20

**Kurt:** That's right, but right now the bran—they've got some more research that's coming out, but right now they've always—. The reason you don't see bran except in the cow feed is it's got a very, very short shelf-life. Once it's milled and the oxygen hits it and the enzymes go to work, it's—it really breaks down fast. I mean I can bring my bran home from Gueydan, and by the time I get home from Gueydan it's lost a lot of its smell and everything.

00:25:50

**SR:** Wait, you're talking about the brown rice has a short shelf-life?

00:25:54

**Karen:** No, the bran. Once they polish the rice and make white rice, the leftover bran. That's not shelf-stable.

00:26:03

**Kurt:** When you take the brown rice, that—that outside layer is all that's touching with oxygen. So it's got a probably two to three months shelf-life. When you take the bran off it turns that bran into a powder. All those little particles of bran, each one of them is touching, but your surface area that's exposed to the oxygen is just greatly increased. So it just—

00:26:31

**Karen:** It's only got a few hours shelf-life.

00:26:33

**SR:** So you can't reuse that?

00:26:34

**Karen:** They do. They—they reuse it for animal feed.

00:26:38

**Kurt:** Animal feed, because it's got such a short shelf-life. There's some research being done—

00:26:40

**Karen:** What it does is the oils in it turn rancid and you know—.

00:26:46

**Kurt:** And the enzymes where that—

00:26:47

**Karen:** You just, you lose some of the nutrition in the bran.

00:26:49

**Kurt:** There's some people at Southern and there's some other people—there's a plant here in Mermentau that's doing some work, and they're taking the stuff and freezing it as soon as it comes off of the rice, and got some processes they're doing which they think they're going to give it maybe a four or five-month shelf-life.

00:27:14

**SR:** So if somebody—I mean I guess brown rice has a shorter shelf-life than white rice in general. If somebody buys your rice, does it increase the shelf-life if they refrigerate it or freeze it?

00:27:29

**Kurt:** You can freeze it. If you can get it down to zero it will stop the enzymes and everything and you'll have at least a year of—of no nutrient loss. Yes, if you put brown rice in the freezer then you can—you can hold up to, they claim a year without any trouble.

00:27:46

**SR:** So how would you describe the difference in flavor between white rice and the rice that you direct-market?

00:27:53

**Karen:** Flavor versus no flavor [*Laughs*] is the issue, I think.

00:27:57

**Kurt:** Yeah, and then it just goes—

00:27:59

**Karen:** Well and ours is an aromatic rice, so when you cook it you know right away something is different.

00:28:03

**SR:** And what do you mean by aromatic rice? What is the variety?

00:28:08

**Karen:** It's jasmine; it's jasmine 85. I think it's not a true jasmine from Thailand, which is the origin of jasmine rice, but it was made in—

00:28:18

**Kurt:** It was developed—

00:28:20

**Karen:** —developed in Beaumont, Texas.

00:28:23

**Kurt:** It was developed around here to compete with the jasmine market. The jasmine—the Thai jasmine is a very large import. They import a lot of rice in the United States, so they developed these varieties to try to compete with that market and it—

00:28:43

**SR:** Is that what you were growing before you made this transition?

00:28:48

**Karen:** No.

00:28:47

**Kurt:** No, we were growing just—

00:28:50

**Karen:** I actually don't know how we got jasmine 85. I don't know what—I think we were reading about different varieties of—possible varieties of rice for direct-markets, and we came up on jasmine 85 and I guess started researching into it.

00:29:09

**Kurt:** Yeah, I have another—Jimmy, a farmer [friend], he was growing jasmine and selling the white rice, and he still is. He grows a little bit of it about 10 miles from here, so I got with him and I'd get seed from him, and he grew a little bit of seed for himself. Well he'd grow—he'd have extra seed so—and then he's still working the white rice. And I strictly went into the—when I started fooling with the Baton Rouge market I had a very, very small percentage of white rice buyers, and I eventually quit fooling with the white rice completely because it's a—it's almost 90, 95 percent of the people all want brown rice.

00:29:54

**SR:** Well because I think it's harder to find good quality brown rice, like, in the store.

00:29:57

**Kurt:** The onliest thing about finding quality brown rice is getting it fresh.

00:30:01

**SR:** So is your entire rice crop the jasmine rice, even the stuff that gets milled?

00:30:08

**Karen:** Right.

00:30:08

**Kurt:** Uh-hm.

00:30:10

**SR:** And did you ever eat brown rice growing up on the rice farm?

00:30:13

**Kurt:** No, no. Years ago, I mean if you go way back in history, if I remember all this stuff right, you had—most of it was brown rice that was made. Then when they did develop the technology to make white rice, only your upperclassmen ate white rice.

00:30:34

**Karen:** You're talking about like hundreds and hundreds of years ago in Asia. The royalty—the thing was to get polished white rice.

00:30:41

**Kurt:** Well in Egypt and you know, in Egypt and all that; rice is a very old crop. I think they can date it back 10,000 years or something. It goes back for a long time. But anyway, then it got to where your very upper-class—. And then as things grew people had that mindset that you—it was—eating the white rice was the upper-class rice, you know, but the—and then the poor people were actually eating the more nutritious rice. And now that this health phase is going, people are phasing back to the brown rice. And I guess now it's kind of your people that are really—I mean the people that are interested in it 'cause it's—. I mean the only, the nutritional value in white rice you'll notice—you'll notice that on a lot of foods now. If it says *enhanced*, *enriched*—all those words they use that means the processing has taken most or all of the nutritional value out of the product, and they've had to put it back on. When you take your

brown rice [*Phone Rings*] or your fresh-grown products, you don't have to put it back on. It was never taken out. I mean if you wash your rice, if you wash these rices, it's going to—you're going to wash everything off in the drain.

00:32:05

**SR:** If you wash the white rice?

00:32:07

**Kurt:** White rice is enhanced or enriched or anything like that—you will wash the nutrition off in the—

00:32:13

**Karen:** The vitamins and minerals are sprayed back on the grain.

00:32:15

**Kurt:** So I don't even know if the natural—I mean they probably—I don't even know if they have synthetic vitamins and minerals that are put back on or if they're—. If I got a sack, then I'll show you what I'm talking about. I've got one bag.

00:32:28

**SR:** It just strikes me to ask, do you still work in nursing?

00:32:32

**Karen:** No, no.

00:32:32

**SR:** But your background might also contribute to the sort of health—?

00:32:37

**Karen:** It helps me understanding when I'm researching some of this stuff, you know, what diseases it would help.

00:32:42

**Kurt:** See [showing a bag of store-bought white rice], that says *enriched*—.

00:32:45

**SR:** Uh-hm, *enriched premium grain*. Oh yeah, there's thiamine, niacin, iron, and folic acid.

00:32:57

**Kurt:** Yeah, well you see it was all added. They've had the—

00:33:05

**Karen:** Which kind of makes me think about the lines that they're trying to get—the rice brands stabilized so that they can, once they can learn to stabilize it—. I was reading about the article, that they could then shift it to Africa to offer more nutrition to the people. And my thinking is,

why go through the technology? Just ship some brown rice. And they'll have the food and the nutrition, so—.

00:33:31

**SR:** Right, just don't ever take it off.

00:33:32

**Karen:** Right, right.

00:33:34

**SR:** Hmm. Is the Red Stick Market in Baton Rouge the only place where consumers can buy your rice, or are there other ways?

00:33:42

**Karen:** No, in Lake Charles at Pure Foods, they started taking it there.

00:33:48

**SR:** Oh that's the—the health food store.

00:33:51

**Karen:** Right, right.

00:33:51

**SR:** I came across that today.

00:33:53

**Karen:** Yeah, well that's good.

00:33:55

**SR:** And what about your boudin? Where can people buy that?

00:33:58

**Karen:** Right now only at the Red Stick Farmers' Market, yeah. That's why we're trying to get labeled, so we can start moving it to stores.

00:34:09

**SR:** Oh it's a labeling thing?

00:34:11

**Karen:** Right. Any time you have a meat product, you have to go through USDA. And since we want to use our own meat, we have to go through a USDA slaughterhouse, which they just opened here in Lacassine. Up 'til a year ago we had no USDA, so we couldn't use our meat, and we wanted to make sure—. Our cows are grass-fed; our pork is free-range grass, rooting around, but they're also supplemented with our rice, so we know 100-percent what they're eating. So—.

00:34:46

**SR:** So they—

00:34:49

**Kurt:** That's what has got me. When I saw how the nutrition changed my animals, it's—I mean it's just so true. I really believe what you—you are what you eat, and you can just—

00:35:02

**SR:** How did the nutrition change your animals?

00:35:05

**Kurt:** It changed—I mean their attitudes even changed. I mean they're more relaxed; they've calmed down. They weren't more nervous, but research has found out the calcium levels had did that. That's—I mean if you're eating grass that's grown on a land that's really, you know, has too low of your calcium, magnesium, boron—all these levels are low—the grass is not going to have it right. And then your PH gets down, and if your PH isn't right in the grass and then the cow eats it, and then the PH isn't right in the cow's stomach and just everything—it just—everything is connected to everything from your one-celled animals all the way up to us. I mean people—I mean it's very complicated, but everything is just connected.

00:36:00

**SR:** Well you can kind of relate to that, too—what it feels like you know, if we're not eating well for a long period of time. It affects my mood, I know.

00:36:08

**Karen:** Yeah.

00:36:10

**Kurt:** So you, here you go; that's what I was—. See, here, when we started this—I mean when you start this, trying to market in this area was strictly an educational program. I mean you had to teach, you know give the reason why. Why is that different? What's the difference with this, what's the difference with that?

00:36:25

**Karen:** Cajuns like white sticky rice. Don't give a Cajun that parboiled rice. We don't like that, and it's—we're used to white sticky rice.

00:36:43

**Kurt:** And change—well the meat was, I mean that was a change too 'cause your grass-fed beef is actually—it cooks different. It's got a little different flavor; it's not consistent because my—my grass is changed seasonal through the year, so their nutrition change is seasonal through the year, so it actually changes the—. You know you'll have—that's one of the big problems with your grass-fed beef. It's very hard to keep it consistent, you know, and it's—.

00:37:20

**SR:** Well I mean, I guess that's only a problem if you're used to not living with the land.

00:37:26

**Kurt:** Yes, and if you're used to—. With grain--these animals are made to—their stomachs are setup for grass on a cow. I mean it's just, they're very—

00:37:40

**Karen:** Well a cow has four stomachs, and that's to digest—

00:37:46

**Kurt:** The cellulose.

00:37:47

**Karen:** The grass or whatever they're grazing. It's not meant to take in grain.

00:37:52

**Kurt:** Grains—and you see, that's another thing. See grains can enlarge—a cow's stomach needs to be about 62 to 64; grains are not that. They're going to bring that down, you know.

00:38:03

**Karen:** PH.

00:38:05

**Kurt:** Your PH, and what—the big, big difference in grass and grain is, as soon as you go on grain you're going to lose your—you're going to lose a lot of your Vitamin E, you're going to

lose a lot of your beta-carotene, and you're going to lose a lot of your omega threes because grains are high in omega sixes; they can't get the omega threes because that's got to come from green. I mean that's got to come from your grass, and it—and then your beta-carotene, that comes from your grass too. But without a green diet you can't—you know you can't keep those levels high in your animals.

00:38:47

**SR:** And have you noticed that your animals are healthier? Do you have to call the vet less, or not?

00:38:55

**Kurt:** I would say yes, and then sometimes no. I think about that a lot. I know I'm not doing any more. I mean when I was doing all the vaccinating programs and doing all this other stuff, you still have—you're still going to have a percentage of animals get sick. You still are going to have a percentage of things happen. You know, but I would say definitely probably less. And I'm not—I still vaccinate. I have a few things I'll vaccinate for. Some years I vaccinate and some years I don't. They've been kind of up and down. But anyway, no, you just—things just, they take care of themselves.

00:39:40

**SR:** How many head of cattle do you have?

00:39:43

**Kurt:** There's about 60-head on this place right now. And if—but I really believe that, you know, you don't have but a few ways to get sick. You're going to get sick from environmental, you know, nutritional, or genetic. Really stop and think: if you—if you could trace an illness back to the origin where it begins, it's almost going to fall in one of those categories, you know. So if you can control the environment and you can control the nutrition—. My [animals'] health problems have just, they've changed. I mean I was just really—

00:40:32

**SR:** And so your pigs—is that what you call them?

00:40:35

**Kurt:** Uh-hm.

00:40:37

**SR:** [*Laughs*] Okay. I mean I know they're called pigs, but I didn't know if—. So they eat your brown rice?

00:40:44

**Kurt:** Oh ,when I give it to them they love the brown rice. I usually don't mill the rice; I give it to them whole.

00:40:48

**SR:** They like that better than the white rice?

00:40:51

**Kurt:** Oh my gosh. Man, I was telling her [Karen]. I cooked a pot of that new field rice yesterday just to—and it's not dry yet, so—

00:40:59

**Karen:** They normally eat it raw but soaked in water, and he cooked some.

00:41:04

**Kurt:** But if you cook some and take cooked brown rice out there, they'll do—they almost do tricks to get cooked—they love cooked brown rice. *[Laughs]* But it's—

00:41:14

**SR:** Well I'm looking at this rice nutrition chart that you pulled out, and it looks like brown rice has more nutritional value even than the enriched white rice in most of the categories. Except for I guess maybe the folic acid is a lot higher in the white rice.

00:41:35

**Kurt:** But I don't know if these—I don't know if these—I hope these are digestible nutrients they're putting on them. I mean you have a lot of nutrition—

00:41:43

**Karen:** The folic acid is more from a grain product, so that's not—. You know rice is not a complete provider of all nutrients, so—.

00:41:54

**SR:** Well tell me about your boudin: when you started making it, and then also describe it.

00:42:01

**Karen:** We grew brown rice; we were selling it. It went well. We had the meat, and somehow it just happened that we're like, *Why don't we value-add our products?* Well easier said than done. So we did, but we got the approval to have it made in a business—a local business that makes boudin—and so that restricts to have them make it for us. We can only sell it at the farmers market, 'cause that's considered a food fair. So we were—you know, and that's been good. It's been going on for about what? Three years, and it's been a good test market for us. And [in] the last year we've seen a lot of growth in the boudin. So now we're ready to take it further and try to get it into some health food stores, and it's kind of a unique Cajun product. I mean it's a Cajun product, but it's moved toward something healthy.

00:42:53

**SR:** And can you describe it for me—the ingredients and the taste, and how it's different and similar to traditional Cajun boudin?

00:43:02

**Kurt:** Well we didn't—I don't know how—

00:43:05

**Karen:** Well the majority of it is rice, like any boudin but it's brown rice, and then we just use our meat. It's just—because we're selling it as our boudin and we have the beef available. We know what the beef has been eating. We know what it has not been receiving. And so we did that and decided to add some black beans just to add a twist to it. Black beans add more fiber, and then of course beans add more—other nutrition to it.

00:43:32

**Kurt:** Well you got a lot of—boudin normally calls for byproducts, liver. I mean liver is a main part of these boudin, and other things. She didn't like liver, and she can—and I've had other people tell me that they won't eat boudin 'cause they can taste the liver, you know, in it. So anyway Karen was like, we got to take the byproducts out and just use the meat. And then, but then what are we going to substitute with? And that's when she came up with that, where you try to work with a bean protein, a meat protein, your brown rice, and get this—get as balanced of a meal as you can. And—and it did good.

00:44:18

**Karen:** And of course all the seasonings are the true Cajun, you know. There's going to be that spicy pepper in there.

00:44:25

**SR:** You use, like, red pepper and—

00:44:29

**Kurt:** See really, the Chadeaux's that makes our boudin, I just let them use their salt and pepper.

00:44:35

**Karen:** Minus the MSG. We ask them not to put any MSG in it.

00:44:38

**Kurt:** And they used whatever, 'cause we didn't work with a lot of—I didn't know how many green onions and how many yellow onions and all that. So I just said, *Y'all just use whatever rates y'all do*. And we took the MSG out. And I have eaten theirs and I like their seasoning, and, but the thing I'm going to work on right now is the salt. That's the only thing I want to work on. Most of these boudins and sausages are very high in sodium, but they sure don't taste good when you take the salt out of them. But there's got to be a happy medium in there somewhere; you can pull the sodium levels down a little bit and still keep—keep the flavor.

00:45:19

**SR:** And I think that maybe, especially if you don't use MSG, 'cause that's sort of—I don't know. It's not salty. I don't know if it's salty, but it's sort of a flavor enhancer.

00:45:30

**Karen:** Yeah, yeah.

00:45:33

**SR:** So do you put pork in the boudin ever, or is just beef?

00:45:38

**Karen:** We occasionally make a batch of pork boudin, and we use—it's all the meat. We just de-bone, like, the pork chops, the roast; that's the meat that goes in there. We don't use any byproducts. And then occasionally we'll make a batch of beef boudin, and that will be, you know, the sirloin steaks, the round steaks. It's the roast—the meat part of beef is what's put into it, so we don't use any byproducts on the beef either.

00:46:08

**Kurt:** And going with this, to put this boudin in the store to sell any volume, we—I do not have the source of pork to supply it. That's why we're going with the beef. The beef—and that's another reason. Your pork and your boudin—sausage and boudin, everybody's is normally pork because pork is a cheaper meat, you see. Beef is—it's more expensive to make the beef, but it's—. But then you got, I mean you have a lot of—you got your group of people out there, you got people out there that aren't pork eaters, you know.

00:46:46

**Karen:** And it's easier for us to do the beef because his family has been raising beef forever. His brother raises a lot more beef than we do, so we're—he's growing his under our standards at

the moment, and so he is going to be a supplier as we grow. We can pull from his herd and use his meat.

00:47:08

**Kurt:** And then if this pig herd works out to where it'll do good, then we'll have the—be able to supply the pork.

00:47:15

**SR:** I think when I bought boudin from you at the market there—I thought there was a little pork in there. Would that be the case, or have you—?

00:47:22

**Kurt:** Yes, it's pork casing. All casings are made of pork. That's another drawback I'm having with my beef boudin. I wanted to do an all-beef boudin, but the only casing we can find are pork. The synthetic casings are the ones—

00:47:37

**Karen:** Labeled not-edible.

00:47:39

**Kurt:** They're the ones you see in—

00:47:39

**Karen:** Like if you, you know, what comes on salami and you buy it bulk and you have to peel it? That's the only thing that's synthetic, is something like that. They're not edible, so our only alternative is to go with the animal pork casing.

00:47:57

**Kurt:** So we haven't found any casing we can [use] so even on my beef boudin, we're going to have to label pork casing.

00:48:04

**Karen:** Pork because of the casing, yeah.

00:48:05

**SR:** But if someone didn't eat the casing?

00:48:07

**Karen:** Then that's fine. They—you know a lot of people—like he likes to squeeze the inside out and put it in a bell pepper and sprinkle it with parmesan cheese and eat it like that.

00:48:20

**Kurt:** You can stuff it in anything because I have a—I have packaged it without casing just in a one-pound pack, and we just make packing—it's like a rice dressing, and you see that did pretty good. And I don't know; we may be able to do some of that again for the people, 'cause some—there's some of these groups that—I mean some of these religions that don't eat pork. They

cannot even eat meat that's—if the pork has touched it, you know it's been considered contaminated. So you see the casing—

00:48:55

**Karen:** And there's people that have been reading a lot on the Maker's Diet, and it does not promote pork, so if you can get to the beef then they appreciate that, you know; if you can offer just the beef. And our future plans are to add Louisiana crawfish and make a—with a little twist. And I'm not going to talk about it yet 'cause we haven't gotten the recipe down pat, but it's going to be a crawfish boudin. Healthy boudins, going to offer some upscale taste to it, so—but that's kind of after we get the beef boudin launched.

00:49:29

**SR:** And so the goal is to get the beef boudin in a store—in the stores?

00:49:33

**Karen:** In health food stores, yeah, because that will be the clientele that's going to be looking for that.

00:49:38

**SR:** But do y'all do the—did you develop the recipe for the beef boudin here in your—?

00:49:45

**Karen:** Kind of, you know. I mean very small-scale sizing, yeah.

00:49:50

**Kurt:** We just mixed all that up, and it was edible, and that's when we—.

00:49:54

**Karen:** But I mean, you know we kind of played with the percentages of what ingredients and then sent it on and said, *Try us a big batch of this.*

00:50:02

**Kurt:** And then that's when we got him, Chadeaux's Boudin Kitchen, to make it for me. And then that—.

00:50:13

**Karen:** But in the future we're going to have a USDA boudin plant making it for us.

00:50:21

**SR:** So you send your animals to a slaughterhouse? You don't do your own slaughtering?

00:50:27

**Kurt:** No, they have to go through—that plant—boy, I'm really lucky to have that. I mean they're about 17, 18 miles from here on the interstate, and it's right across—it's right there at the big sugar mill, if you ever saw the old sugar—the sugar mill at Lacassine. But he's got a USDA meat processing plant, so it's—that will get me to—that will give us the opportunity to go 'cause

you cannot bring—. Louisiana-inspected meat can't go to USDA processing plants. You know, you got to—

00:51:03

**Karen:** A boudin manufacturer, you know. If you're going to a USDA manufacturer, you've got to have USDA inspected meat.

00:51:14

**Kurt:** It's got to go into it.

00:51:15

**SR:** And so that meat, it gets—your animals get slaughtered, and they do the cutting of the meat too?

00:51:24

**Kurt:** They will de-bone it and make boxed meat out of it, just like what they normally buy out of state, and it will be boxed meat with his—.

00:51:34

**Karen:** It will be the size that we'll need for our batches, and then they'll deliver it to the USDA-inspected boudin manufacturing plant. It gets a little complicated—and then they'll make it for us and package it and label it.

00:51:47

**Kurt:** Once—if you make it—if I would make boudin in the kitchen and then sell it over the counter; you see, you walk in there and you buy it and you can see the kitchen, you can see the store, you've got an option—.

00:52:01

**Karen:** Because that's how you buy it most of the places you buy it. They've made it there and they sell it right over their counter.

00:52:04

**Kurt:** And you're exempt from all these regulations.

00:52:08

**Karen:** Because you, as a customer, can walk in and see, you know, *Well I like this place. It's up to my standards*, or whatever.

00:52:15

**Kurt:** But when I—you take that boudin, and like Chadeaux's I wrap it up and package it and bring it to the farmers market, the people don't have a clue of where it was made, how clean the place was, anything. So that's where you got to fall under the—it's got to be inspected on the—you know on the, at the slaughterhouse, and then we ship it over. I think they have to keep track, records, of the temperature to make sure everything stays the right temperature. And then when they get it, it's checked for everything and then their inspectors inspect it again, and then it goes

through that plant, and it really—. When—years ago when they started, the big companies started taking over and the boxed meat came in, and they have to pay for a lot of these regulators and inspectors, most of these plants just went to custom slaughter. And they—and they don't have the inspectors on the floor to—. Most of my meat—well all my meat, it's sold under custom slaughter.

00:53:19

**SR:** I don't—what does that mean?

00:53:22

**Kurt:** That means I have people that want beef, and I'll have four or five people that want more meat, or they will split—each take a quarter of a calf, and so they've actually bought the animal and I deliver the animal to the packing house. It's cut up for them, so they're actually having—they're having to buy the live animal because—.

00:53:46

**Karen:** And then we deliver the meat back to them as part of the buying-the-animal policy.

00:53:48

**Kurt:** Yeah, it's just delivered back as a courtesy. I'm going to Baton Rouge anyway, but I just—I don't charge them for the delivery or anything like that. I just deliver that; it's just a courtesy to bring it in the freezer.

00:54:00

**SR:** Is that how you sell most of your beef?

00:54:04

**Kurt:** All my beef.

00:54:05

**Karen:** That's how we sell all of it.

00:54:05

**Kurt:** You cannot—now if they come and buy off the farm you get exempt from some of that; again, they can buy it out of the freezer.

00:54:12

**Karen:** But we don't do that.

00:54:15

**Kurt:** But I don't have—you can't. I mean you don't have time to do your farm work and then be here to sell stuff and—.

00:54:19

**Karen:** We had one or two, and then it's well, like, it's not convenient 'cause you know they—they may drive up and you're not necessarily—when you're farming you're not sitting at your house, so you're not necessarily right here to take care of that. So—

00:54:31

**Kurt:** I mean I've got a few locals that will come buy meat, but I mean just—it's a very, very—almost doesn't count.

00:54:40

**SR:** And so how do you get your customers when it's the custom slaughtering?

00:54:47

**Kurt:** They'll put their name on the list.

00:54:47

**Karen:** We have never formally advertised, but we sell every calf we grow. I call it a calf; it's—they're two-year-olds by the time they go to slaughter, 800, 900-pounds, you know.

00:54:59

**Kurt:** They're heavy beef.

00:55:01

**Karen:** So they're heavy beef. But it's word of mouth more or less. Over the last few years somebody will tell somebody else, and most—I say most—a lot of the people are either young that are raising young kids and want to start out by keeping their food healthy, or we have older people that have run into health problems and they've found out they need to, you know—we're not organic, but eat under organic standards with no hormones and no antibiotics, and want their food as clean as they can get it.

00:55:34

**Kurt:** And this is very small-scale still. I mean we've been doing this for years. It's been an education program. We know what to do. We have to do something now 'cause we got to get some—we got to get this thing big enough where it can make some money to stay in business with it.

00:55:48

**Karen:** Yeah, right now it's a part-time business, and it's to the point after so many years, it's like okay, it is time to make that leap into full-time.

00:56:00

**SR:** Full-time being the cattle?

00:56:02

**Karen:** The boudin.

00:56:04

**Kurt:** The rice, the whole thing—the rice, the cows; I mean the whole—the whole program.

And it—

00:56:14

**Karen:** Yeah, I mean we have enough rice that we can market even that as a separate item to stores other than the boudin. We told you how many pounds we can make, you know. 200,000 pounds of rice a year, and that will definitely not all go into boudin. But you know, there's options that we could market the rice as a separate thing. But we need to go beyond just the farmers' market, you know; it's time to make that shift and either get into this and make it bloom, or it's small-scale.

00:56:45

**Kurt:** But when we started this—my customers in Baton Rouge have been wonderful. I mean it's just unbelievable how the one-on-one with your customers is what's made this business, because they—they tell you what you want. And I had a lot of them, you know, I've had a lot of them come back and tell me they didn't like this. This wasn't any good. I mean everything you do on these programs, your first four or five times are failure. But then anyway we'd talk to them. Karen would—we'd send our surveys; they would fill them out and mail them back to us. I mean they've just really been—and we found out that most of the people are paranoid of antibiotics and growth hormones. I mean it's—I mean everything is become resistant to antibiotics. When this company spends multi-millions developing this antibiotic it—they don't want to keep it just in the human side or just on the animal side; they've got to get it in—get it

out and get as much money back as they can before it becomes a generic and everybody can market it and that. But anyway. And we found out our customers, most of the people are scared of growth hormones, antibiotics, your pesticides and your chemicals. They didn't care if I was organic or not organic. They weren't really—the grain-fed or grass-fed was not a big issue. Those were the main issues that, you know—. So I went to work on raising them to where they will be chemical-free, hormone-free, and antibiotic-free.

00:58:24

**SR:** And so did your customers' desires, did they surprise you?

00:58:28

**Kurt:** No, I expected—the main thing—

00:58:33

**Karen:** It did in a way 'cause I asked if they would want us to go further and become organic, or were they happy with just knowing that they were hormone-free, antibiotic-free, and they said, *You don't have to go organic. We just want hormone-free and antibiotic-free.* And I just thought they'd [say], *Let's go organic*, you know. I thought well okay, we're moving in that direction; let's go for it. And the customers didn't care, so—.

00:58:56

**Kurt:** But you—

00:58:56

**SR:** Well what would be the difference—it would be what they [the animals] ate?

00:59:00

**Kurt:** No.

00:59:01

**Karen:** Certification and going through all the certification.

00:59:04

**Kurt:** And a tremendous amount of paperwork. You got to keep records on all this stuff. I mean you got to keep records anyway, but as I got into this I went, I'm more interested in the biological farming instead of the organic farming where—you know where—.

00:59:21

**Karen:** The biological farming is more of a sustainable farming for your land, so that's kind of what he's—.

00:59:28

**Kurt:** And that's just—and it—and the big thing too, China has done wonders for my business in the last couple years.

00:59:39

**SR:** In what way?

00:59:39

**Kurt:** In what way? Their crawfish came in that was checked and contaminated. Their toys that come in are contaminated. Their catfish that come in are contaminated. The dog food comes in, it's contaminated. I mean everything they've been checking they've found problems with.

00:59:58

**Karen:** People are starting to want to know where their food is coming from.

00:59:59

**Kurt:** You know and—and the biggest and that—I would say now that may be a bigger issue than the hormones and antibiotics, knowing they can actually drive here and see where these animals came from.

01:00:10

**Karen:** They can source their food.

01:00:12

**Kurt:** They can—there's no—there's none of this co-mingling where everything gets mixed up. The rules and regulations, if people knew rules and regulations they would really—would be shocked I guess, because they set—they set these things up so they can move volume. These companies have to make money. And last—a while back I was told something like anything over

80-percent American beef can be classified American beef. So you see, they can blend a little bit of imported beef in with this American beef and still be classified. That may have got changed, and maybe—it may have—that was several years ago, you know. They have changed the rules on free-range chickens. Free-range chickens can be classified free-range if you leave the barn door open. You know once you've raised that chicken up in that barn, it—you can't make it go outside, you see.

01:01:20

**Karen:** It doesn't know what to do.

01:01:21

**Kurt:** It doesn't, it doesn't—.

01:01:21

**Karen:** It will sit there and wait for its feed, you know.

01:01:24

**Kurt:** It's amazing how when a market takes off, then all of a sudden the rules kind of get changed so the big companies can play the game too. And it's—

01:01:35

**Karen:** The biggest thing we've been hearing lately from customers is they just want to buy food local. You know, they don't want the idea that somebody, like local farmers grow our rice;

it gets shipped to, I don't know, say, California; packaged or whatever under a label, and then shipped right back into these supermarkets right here. So they just, like, why waste? You know that's—

01:01:59

**Kurt:** This fuel thing, I mean—

01:02:00

**Karen:** The fuel, you know, trying to go green and stuff. They want to buy local and support the local farmer and keep things local and save on gas fuel.

01:02:08

**Kurt:** See that's another thing. You got to go back and research these statistics and stuff 'cause you're—you're dealing with a brain here that, you know—you got to remember what source this came from [*Laughs*]. But if I remember, like I said, the average food in the grocery store has something like 1,000 miles on it. You know, or 15—it was a tremendous amount of—from the time it's harvested to the processing, back to the stores. And that and it's just, well freight is your biggest—. But that's what I'm finding out here. We're going to—when we try to market this boudin, our—probably our biggest expense is going to turn into freight: getting it—getting the meat from the—I mean getting the cattle to the processing plant, getting the meat from the processing plant to the food processor that's actually making it.

01:03:02

**Karen:** Yeah, but you have to consider, I mean, that's pretty local.

01:03:04

**Kurt:** It's still local, but it's—it's going to be a big expense and it's—. But I don't know you're going—how you're going to not ship and get the variety, because if you don't ship you know it's hard to—you know you're not going to—

01:03:26

**Karen:** Well we're not looking to supply the nation. We're just going to be here in Louisiana, you know [*Laughs*] picking up some markets here.

01:03:33

**Kurt:** You know 'cause I know people like other—you know you got things that can't be grown down here. You know, so you got to ship a little bit.

01:03:41

**SR:** Like what?

01:03:41

**Kurt:** Let's say you want ocean fish; you know that's—. A lot of these nuts, you know.

01:03:52

**SR:** Black beans maybe?

01:03:53

**Kurt:** Yeah, you see that can be grown down here. I think, I don't know where the black beans are grown heavily at. I know a fellow told me he went to Puerto Rico one time and they had quite a few acres of black beans down there.

01:04:10

**SR:** One thing that's interesting to me is that—I mean what y'all are doing is pretty revolutionary in the area. That—as far as I know, there aren't a lot of people making boudin with black beans and brown rice, and you know and the animals that they raise. But you're still—you still have chosen to get sort of revolutionary with a product that is very deeply engrained in the food culture here. Was that intentional?

01:04:40

**Karen:** Hmm. Well we were growing it and we just needed a way to value-add, you know—carry that product even further.

01:04:49

**Kurt:** And—

01:04:52

**SR:** But you didn't decide to, you know, make—I don't know—black bean sushi rolls, or—you know what I mean?

01:04:59

**Karen:** No, because we wouldn't know a thing about that. That's probably why—what it is, is that we know what the food is local. And just you know, a change from white to brown rice and add some black beans, and you've got something that's all of a sudden diabetics could probably eat because of the whole grain part of it. Versus not a regular piece of boudin.

01:05:19

**Kurt:** And you're limited to your processing. I mean you—whatever you get—you got most of this stuff, it's all processed on very large scales. It's like all—if they didn't have that—if Stancel's Rice Mill wasn't there, I would not be able to get my rice milled.

01:05:38

**Karen:** We could in an 18-wheeler load, which is how many thousand pounds?

01:05:43

**Kurt:** You know they—they got a few more—

01:05:43

**Karen:** Twenty thousand pounds, forty thousand pounds at one time?

01:05:46

**Kurt:** It's 50,000, you know, or a train-car load. Yeah, he says we can stop them and we can mill yours if you bring a sack. Well you cannot keep your rice fresh, you know, and mill that kind of volume, but that—that's these—all the small processing and small mills have all gone out of business. The people that had them, the families either didn't take them over—it was too hard to compete with the big companies, and I mean you're limited to what you can find. I mean we're taught the different things, and when you want to go do something on a small scale, this company is like, *I really don't have time to stop and do this*. I'm—I'm—'cause most of these plants are running full-time. It's not like they have, you know, free time or days off. They are—

01:06:42

**SR:** What about, I'm thinking about Chadeaux's. I haven't been there yet. But I've heard that they have good boudin and they've been around for a while, I think.

01:06:50

**Kurt:** Well the boy that's running it now, he bought it out from—

01:06:58

**Karen:** From the original owner.

01:06:58

**Kurt:** From the original owner, and he kept the same name.

01:07:00

**Karen:** It was called Chadeaux's yeah. But he kept the same name.

01:07:01

**SR:** But what was his reaction when you approached him about making this, you know, very innovative boudin? Does he, you know relate to that or—?

01:07:12

**Karen:** He was like, *We can do it*; you know, *We'll try it*. I mean it—I'm sure it was a slightly different process, you know, to do but they worked on it and they made it for us, and he's been very good about helping us out over the years.

01:07:27

**Kurt:** Yeah, I mean I've known him. We've grown up here together and now he—and he made it for me. And he's got a small kitchen that makes 100 pounds of boudin. See, some of these other kitchens, their machinery makes 400 or 500 pounds at a time, you know. Well that was—I can't—I can't use that. I didn't want to start off with—you can't start off with that amount, you know, to see how all this is going to go.

01:08:00

**SR:** Do you all have children?

01:08:01

**Karen:** We have three. One just graduated from McNeese; yeah, and teaching in Lake Charles now. And one going to Sowela; he's in mechanics. And the baby is in high school here. She's not a baby.

01:08:21

**SR:** So the—neither of the older two are in farming?

01:08:24

**Karen:** No, they're not interested.

01:08:23

**Kurt:** That is a major, major problem. We got—okay daddy's—we got five boys in my family, and out of all mama's grandkids and that, we have one that might be interested in coming back on the farm. It's—I mean you just don't have kids coming back to—. Why would they want to come back to the farm? It's a tremendous amount of work and it's—

01:08:55

**Karen:** Big farming costs a lot of money. The machinery is expensive; the inputs are expensive for fuel, chemicals, everything.

01:09:00

**Kurt:** I don't even know if you could get into farming if you just wanted to come off the street and go into farming, you know. Because it—I mean if you wouldn't have had your parents to use

their equipment and gradually get into this, I mean when you got a, you know few hundred thousand dollar combine—you know your tractors are \$50-\$6-\$100,000. A very small farm and you got—you'll have \$300,000 to \$400,000 tied up in equipment.

01:09:28

**SR:** Has your workload changed at all—gotten more or less—since you've made the transition to smaller farming?

01:09:36

**Kurt:** It's more.

01:09:37

**Karen:** It's changed because he's having to work some odd jobs to make a complete living, if that makes sense. **[Laughs]** This has not turned into a full living yet, so having to, you know fool with other jobs to add to it, so it's kind of a different kind of work.

01:09:57

**Kurt:** It's a different, yeah. It's—trying to do the other jobs and do everything, but it's a—yes. You will not do this on a large-scale very easy without some real good help because I mean, when you go into farming, you work your ground, you plant your stuff, you harvest it, you sell it. You know we're planting our stuff, harvesting it, processing it, advertising it—

01:10:29

**Karen:** We don't advertise, but we market it year-round.

01:10:31

**Kurt:** Well you're marketing. The research—you know, what they want, how to do—. So we're basically doing the research, the marketing—I mean you're doing it from start to finish.

01:10:44

**Karen:** Sure would have been nice if one of us would have had a business degree. We didn't go in that direction back then.

01:10:50

**Kurt:** It's, you have all those—you're doing everything, and it's—and then trying to learn; then you're doing your research to learn how to do all this stuff. Because I mean I grew up to where—what basically the mind said you can't grow this stuff without the chemicals, you can't grow stuff without fertilizer, and that was right. When I was first started converting over, if you didn't put anything out there your rye grass and stuff would actually die. But it was—but as you start working back with nature you have all those sources out there. You just have to have everything set up so you can access them.

01:11:34

**SR:** I mean it sounds like what you do is definitely more than a full-time job.

01:11:39

**Karen:** It's over a full-time job.

01:11:42

**SR:** Right, but then you still have to supplement. I mean with all the rice that you grow—. I guess rice doesn't cost very much in the store, and I guess that's—

01:11:51

**Karen:** That farmer gets even less doing the conventional market.

01:11:52

**Kurt:** Most of that—most of that rice will sell—

01:12:00

**SR:** While Kurt is fetching something, let me ask: Is the cattle a rotational crop in the rice fields? Like do the cattle go in the rice fields?

01:12:08

**Karen:** Not our cattle, but—. Ours stay right here on our 140-acre farm, but under conventional, yeah, that's what you'd normally do after you harvest the crop. They can go on and graze on the stalks or—.

01:12:26

**SR:** But do you have a—I don't know if that's the right term, but a rotational crop with your rice?

01:12:31

**Karen:** With rice we don't. We just let it sit, yeah.

01:12:36

**Kurt:** Yeah, you see rice right now, the farmers are actually—I didn't need a calculator for that—right about 10 cents a pound. You see, \$162 a barrel—we work on barrels; other states work on pocket; some work on bushels. It's very complicated, and why Louisiana—we're doing a barrel, which is 162 pounds per barrel, which makes everything very hard to calculate out in your head. But anyway, 162 pounds, right now I think there's some markets up to almost \$17, but I know there's some \$16. So \$16 for 160 pounds, you're—you're at 10 cents a pound.

01:13:20

**Karen:** The farmer—that's why we were looking for a niche market [*Laughs*] and trying to go our own route. Conventional farmers have to rely on government payments, and the market fluctuates. Every year government payments are up in the air, whether Congress is going to vote them in for another few years or not. So you're literally just hanging every year, you know, like, *What kind of money am I going to make this year?* And that's what we're trying to get away from. We needed to grow our product, market our own product, and know what we're going to get for that product, and know that we worked hard and we're going to get compensated for that product. So—.

01:14:03

**Kurt:** What really got me is, I got an uncle that's—he's a doctor; he's a pediatrician. But he got into the computers and he put me together a tremendous program where I could keep records on—I mean I had some—. He's a really good programmer; keep records and everything.

01:14:17

**Karen:** Good farm records, yeah.

01:14:18

**Kurt:** And it kept very detailed stuff, and when I got the—the way the government program works, if the market goes up your payments go down. If the market goes down your payments go up. So what I found out is no matter—I mean as a yield—so my yields would go up and do good, but you still you got less government per pound of rice. So I'm like, it didn't matter if I did good or did bad. Our money stayed the same.

01:14:53

**Karen:** And look at it this way: back in the '70s when your dad was farming and you were starting out, aren't prices roughly the same?

01:15:04

**Kurt:** Yeah, a little higher.

01:15:05

**Karen:** A little bit higher per barrel, but you have to take into consideration, I was filling my VW Bug up in high school in the '70s for what? Twenty nice-cents a gallon, and now farm fuel is running \$2.69 a gallon.

01:15:19

**Kurt:** When I got out of college we sold some rice, but we started out selling rice at \$21, \$22 a barrel.

01:15:26

**SR:** Dollars?

01:15:25

**Kurt:** Yeah, a barrel. Yeah, a barrel.

01:15:27

**Karen:** So it was about \$5 more a barrel, you know. Back in the '70s it was considered good times.

01:15:30

**Kurt:** And then—then it phased down and it just stayed the same and—

01:15:38

**Karen:** Your fuel costs are—

01:15:38

**SR:** Are people eating less rice, or what is the reason?

01:15:42

**Kurt:** No, rice is a tremendous—it's a—they grow a lot of rice. I mean rice is grown worldwide. Our biggest problem is we've got technology now. They can get on that fax machine or get on that telephone and they can have a ship-load of rice from anywhere. They can get it from Vietnam; they can get it from China; they can get it from whatever, and I really think—well our markets are controlled by that. If you get ready to sell something and you want this, well we can get it shipped over here for that from the other country, you know and—and go by price. It's just like the Wal-Mart got in trouble for—where they're buying a lot of the organic food was from China. And the China—and the organic farmers are like up in arms. They're using the China organic market to control our market, you know. If you try to sell for this, they're like, *Well if you want \$3 a pound we can get it shipped in here for \$2 a pound from overseas.* So it has—it pulls your market back down 'cause you got to compete on the world market. But I mean it's—with the way the regulations—the way everything is checked and supervised, if you want to eat out of the country, you got to not care too much about what you eat.

01:17:08

**SR:** What do you—let me ask what you sell your brown rice for a pound when you sell it at the market?

01:17:14

**Kurt:** It's \$1 a pound.

01:17:16

**Karen:** Dollar a pound.

01:17:17

**SR:** That is a deal.

01:17:18

**Karen:** It is.

01:17:20

**Kurt:** I just went—

01:17:20

**Karen:** But we're point to the point where we don't sell volume.

01:17:24

**Kurt:** I went to the store four or five years ago and I looked at brown rice and what it was selling for, and it was—

01:17:30

**Karen:** We were actually cheaper than what stores were selling brown rice for.

01:17:32

**Kurt:** And it was roughly that in a store, and I've never gone up on my price since we started at that.

01:17:37

**SR:** I mean a deal for the consumer, not—

01:17:38

**Karen:** Yeah, we're cheaper than brown rice in the stores, but it's a deal for us as farmers, you know, to try and make that move away where we can control our prices.

01:17:46

**Kurt:** But it—

01:17:50

**Karen:** But like I said, we don't get to move volume that way, so if we could sell the whole bin—

01:17:54

**Kurt:** And with no middleman, if you can get a little bit of volume you can do—that's a good price for me.

01:18:02

**Karen:** About how many pounds will you sell at the market on a good—on a good Saturday?

01:18:07

**Kurt:** Oh now I'm up to, I'll sell from 160 to 200. And then, and then this last week, I mean I don't—I forgot how much boudin I had. I think I had 40 or 50 pounds; all the boudin went, you know.

01:18:22

**SR:** Huh, and do you think most people are—I mean you told me how to stuff peppers with your boudin, which I did and it was delicious. Do you think most people are doing that kind of thing, or are they just barbequing it or—?

01:18:35

**Kurt:** I don't know. They're probably doing the same thing I'm doing with it. You can take a pack of boudin out—I mean and we're marketing it right now at \$6 a pound, which is probably twice what conventional boudin sells for. I think conventional boudin is around \$2.75 or \$3 a pound. But anyway, you can take that boudin out of the freezer and thaw it out or throw it in a thing of boiling water because the casing will protect it, you know, and put it in there—or in the bag and thaw it out. In 15 minutes to 20 minutes, you can have you a fairly well-balanced meal.

And a half-pound of boudin is a good serving size. I mean you're not stuffed but you've got your nutritional—you know you've got plenty to make it on. And for \$3 a meal for half a pound and 15 minutes, you have it ready, and if you want to stuff it in a bell pepper it's fully cooked. You've still got the stuffed bell pepper and the cheese in 15 to 20 minutes, and it's fast, it's very nutritious, and I think that's where—'cause I've had a lot of my customers tell me they bring it for their lunch. They can warm it up; they can throw it in the microwave and, you know—and warm it up. I've started—it's really not bad cold. I didn't realize that until I was at Chadeaux's and Bob Kingrey, which is the owner now—and he was there and they had some crawfish boudin out, and he said here's the new—was it? I think it was a crawfish—but they made it with something. I don't, anyway he said, *Try this* and he took it out of the cooler and it was good cold because they—the crawfish doesn't keep as good, so they have to keep it in the cooler until they're ready to—. I mean your boudin, they can put it on that hot plate and it sits out half a day and it's—you don't have any problems with it. You know they can't—they can't treat the crawfish the same, so it has to—excuse me—stay in the cooler. And he got that out and I started trying it and I said, *That's not that bad cold*. So—.

01:20:48

**SR:** I just have a couple more questions for y'all. You've given me a lot of time. What, if any, impact did Rita have on your farm?

01:20:59

**Karen:** Hmm, that slowed us down on marketing our beef, I remember that.

01:21:04

**Kurt:** We were—we went a year without selling. We went a long time without selling.

01:21:06

**Karen:** Well probably six months, probably six months.

01:21:07

**SR:** Because the customers weren't there, or—?

01:21:12

**Karen:** Well this is the time of year that you plant rye grass, September, and of course we're always running late because of one thing or another. And then Rita hits at the end of September, and it just ended up being kind of a rainy fall to begin with, and you want your cows right on that rye grass when they can first get on it. Well that delayed all that, and they've got to be on a positive weight gain, so that—that pushed it back even more and—.

01:21:40

**Kurt:** We came into Rita in a drought. Couldn't plant, couldn't do anything 'cause we were too dry. And then like I said, the barn blew down, and by the time all these fences were gone—what? We had—I had 15, 18 trees down in the yard, you know. You could not see the house driving up, there was so many trees down in the front. I mean you couldn't even see the house. And by the time we got everything cleaned up and started putting fences back up and all—the butcher calves normally stay on a good pasture, the finishing pasture. Well everything stayed mixed up, and no

electricity to keep the fences, to keep my electric fences in. I mean by the time we got things going back—and nobody else had freezers. The ones that had meat—

01:22:27

**Karen:** Lost their meat.

01:22:29

**Kurt:** —a lot of them lost it. And oh, it was one thing then another, and then the next thing you know the—I might have taken—I think I took five or six head to the sale barn that year, after that too, because I didn't have any markets right now; I had notes coming due. So I just—I think I just went to the—I believe that's the same year I took four or five head. 'Cause see, I only keep about 15 to 20 butcher calves at a time, is all I've been here, working up. And it's—and then getting—then once you sell something, I mean people don't realize you're three years turning over your money on a butcher calf. I mean from inception to processing, it's—you got nine months in mama and anywhere from 18 to 22 months outside of mama. And then you age it for another two, three weeks. And getting it—I mean you're 22, 23, 24, 25 months seeing return on that cow. And then—

01:23:47

**SR:** By “sale barn,” what do you mean?

01:23:48

**Kurt:** I just went to conventional market. We have—

01:23:50

**Karen:** That's where any normal cattlemen would probably sell their cattle.

01:23:55

**Kurt:** All cattle. They have a big—they have one here in Kinder and you'll bring—well here they're on Monday, and everybody brings their cattle to that barn on Monday. And they've got pens with water and hay and that in them, and they'll—and you're tagged with a number, and then as kind of the order they're brought in they come and go through the sale barn. They have a ring and they'll have buyers there, and they actually—just the live cattle go through the sale barn, and they bid on them and they buy them. And then they'll buy 18-wheeler loads a time, you see, 'cause most of your farmers are smaller farmers, and they'll buy these—

01:24:30

**Karen:** The cattle buyers.

01:24:31

**Kurt:** —the cattle buyers. And then they'll go on, most of them end up going to the Midwest, going to Oklahoma, Texas—going to feed lots. Most of your ranches around here sell your cattle small. And I'm saying small—400, 300, 400 or 500-pounds—and then they'll just be bought by people that will put them in a feed lot, and then they'll finish them and feed them on up and then sell them to a packing house.

01:24:54

**Karen:** That's what we did all of his cattle life [*Laughs*] up until we decided to direct-market.

01:25:00

**Kurt:** Yeah, you know and it's—and I figured we got to get around all that 'cause I mean you got your buyer that's got to make a little bit of commission. Your feeder has got to make his money; you know the packer has got to make his money, and then the store—I mean you start adding a 15, 20-percent mark-up, you know, a little bit of profit all the way through those four or five people. You got expensive meat in the store, but there's no other way to get it to the store.

01:25:33

**SR:** And it's not expensive because the farmer is making a lot of money?

01:25:35

**Kurt:** No, it's—I mean it's just like the rice. You see that—I imagine in a store, if you bought a whole calf in a store, I wouldn't be surprised if you paid \$2,000 for it.

01:25:49

**Karen:** Or more.

01:25:49

**Kurt:** Once you bought all the rib-eyes, the sirloins and round steaks, you know individual packs. I wouldn't be surprised if that calf is \$3,000 or more.

01:25:58

**Karen:** And if you sold that same live cow at the market, at the sale barn—

01:26:02

**Kurt:** You're going to get \$500 for a 500-pound calf.

01:26:04

**SR:** What if you sold a whole calf to a customer, you know, through the slaughterhouse/ How much would they pay for that?

01:26:13

**Karen:** They'd pay around \$1,600 for a whole calf straight from us. And then we'd turn around and we pay the processor.

01:26:27

**Kurt:** Yeah, but anyway but my customers are putting their meat in their refrigerator for about \$4.15-20 cents a pound across the board. And when you divide it equally, everybody gets a few rib-eyes, a few t-bones, a few sirloins, a few round steaks; get that ground meat. It, you know, when they divide that half up it's divided equally between everybody, so you get your chuck roast, your shoulder roast, your rump roast; you got a brisket. You got all those parts, and it—which it turns out to be kind of expensive ground meat, but it's—

01:27:08

**Karen:** But once again, we've been in the health food stores and we know what the same quality level of ground meat runs for, and we're still undercutting what the stores are. So I mean people can shop local or they can shop at the store, you know. They just—they'll know what they're paying for.

01:27:28

**Kurt:** And if I take that calf, it's probably not that big a difference. If I—if you take that calf when it's two years old and get it—get your \$400, \$500, \$550—where the market is, you know—and I keep it another year, you see I got three years worth of investments in that \$1,500. And when you sell that calf, I mean you got a long—you got a lot of labor, you got a lot of you know. So you could—.

01:28:05

**Karen:** Right now if they put them in a feed lot they can turn them out, you know, feeding them corn and just fatten them up. They can turn them out in no time at all.

01:28:12

**Kurt:** They can probably turn those calves over at 16, 18 months old—get them to the 1,200—1,100, 1,200 pounds, where this way it's taken me 20 to 22 months to get them to that [weight]. It enhances the flavor. I mean you've got to—I mean it's just they—you can only push nature so much, and then you're going to lose something. I mean when you grow these chickens out real fast, you grow the pigs out real fast, you grow the beef out real fast, you're not going to have the

flavor where they've been slowed down. I mean take a piece—go buy your pork now; the next time you get a piece of pork or chicken, cook it. Don't put salt, don't put pepper, don't put anything on it, and taste it. And you're going to find a lot of this stuff just as flat—it's bland as white rice with no salt and no pepper and nothing on it. Eat a piece of white rice out of a plate with nothing on it. And it's just—you know, and it's just—and a lot of things I've been finding out that's a very good rule of thumb, and it's easy to follow on nutrition, is flavor. If you have flavor in your tomatoes, if you have flavor in it—yeah, tomatoes is another one. Buy one of these fast-growing tomatoes. You know you could chew on a piece of this paper and you can chew on a tomato, and you're going to have a hard time determining which one—which one had the most taste, and it's cost the tomato company. I mean I've heard the tomatoes are really working to change their genetics and get some flavor back in their tomatoes because they've—they've ran everything so fast to where it's—. So there may be something to that flavor and nutrition. But I believe there's something to it.

01:30:08

**SR:** I would agree, and I don't even know very much, but shopping at the farmers' market is a world of difference from even shopping at, you know, the major organic food stores out there.

Let me ask you both a final question: what is it that you enjoy most about what you do?

01:30:30

**Kurt:** Oh I enjoy working—seeing the improvements on the land and working with the land like it is now, you know. I mean it just—it's just is amazing how, you know God has made everything work, and when you work with it things can just flow. I mean it really can, and then

the next biggest thing is the one-on-one with my customers. I mean that's really—that's really a good point when you—when your customers—. I mean it's not good when they come up and tell you this was awful and this was bad and this was...but I mean you can fix anything. When I send my cow to the sale, I have no clue of what it—good, bad, or whatever. When I send my rice to the mill, it gets co-mingled with everything else. How can I improve when I have no clue of what to do?

01:31:26

**Karen:** Well I think what it boils down to is what we're doing on the farm, we see the end product. You know and there's—there's something to that. You get to see your—the fruition of what you're doing, you know, from beginning to end, and having control over how it's done.

01:31:44

**SR:** That's what—you enjoy that element—that part too?

01:31:43

**Karen:** Uh-hm.

01:31:47

**SR:** Well I guess—I know I said there was only one more question, but I'll ask a follow-up to that. **[Laughs]** What was it that you enjoyed before you made this transition? Because what you're talking about now is all about—is all, you know, in the past 10 years? What—did you enjoy it before?

01:32:03

**Karen:** We were so busy having kids and raising young kids and—

01:32:11

**Kurt:** When we got married she started—she was trying to go to school. She went to school and then—

01:32:16

**Karen:** Yeah, we were in the rat race of, you know, getting our—well he already had his. He's older, four years ahead of me, but you know getting the degrees, having babies, starting to raise kids. You're just going through the motions, and then once the kids were a little older, and you know kind of like step back and like, *Wait, is this—what are we doing all this for, you know?* Doing all this labor and work and not getting compensated for it. And then we started just—he was interested in raising grass-fed cattle, so we looked on the health aspects of that, and that's what just took us off. We're like, *Well we can make a difference here. We can do something. We're in Louisiana; we're not on the West Coast. But we can do something organic, or health food, here.*

01:33:00

**Kurt:** You see I was programmed all through school, where you know it was—I wanted to make high yields and the program where the big farming, you know—'cause that was it. You had to be big to make it. And then work on the yields and not worry about a lot of this other stuff

because don't worry about these diseases, don't worry about this. Technology is going to take care of us, you know? Yeah, if technology takes care of you but at an expense, you've got to pay for that technology. And it—and I really wanted it—if technology has got ahead of our nutrition, I—you know everything has been geared for speed and turnover money and volume. They've really forgot about flavor, nutrition, and some of these things that are really important—that are really important to me now.

01:33:55

**SR:** And the farmer, too, it seems like they forgot about along the way.

01:33:59

**Kurt:** Yes, he's—. It's all going to work out. So—.

01:34:08

**SR:** Yeah, well, thank you so much for giving me your time and telling me your story.

01:34:15

**Karen:** You're welcome.

01:34:16

**[End Unkel-Boudin Interview]**