

LARRY AVERY
French Market Foods—Lake Charles, LA

Date: September 10, 2007
Location: French Market Foods—Lake Charles, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Length: 39 minutes
Project: Southern Boudin/Gumbo Trail

[Begin Larry Avery-Boudin/Gumbo Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Monday, September 10, 2007. I'm in Lake Charles, Louisiana, at French Market Foods and I'm sitting here with Mr. Larry Avery. Could I get you to pronounce your first name yourself and tell me your birth date?

00:00:22

Larry Avery: Larry Avery, and my birthday is January 10, 1952.

00:00:26

SR: And what is your position here at French Market Foods?

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LA: President and CEO.

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SR: And how—what is your history with the company? How long have you been here?

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LA: Well I'm—I am the owner also, so we started the company in, back in 1999. We—by putting small food companies together, and now we've created a much larger food company. That was the basis for French Market Foods.

00:00:57

SR: And your—most of your product is sold under Tony Chachere's?

00:01:05

LA: That's correct. We did a licensing arrangement with Tony Chachere in 2003 where everything that we manufacture gets branded the Tony Chachere name. It's worked very well for both companies.

00:01:20

SR: So—so I was pronouncing it wrong. It's [*Sa-cher-e*], not Chachere, huh?

00:01:26

LA: Correct.

00:01:26

SR: Okay. And so Tony—just so I understand, Tony Chachere's is one of the small food companies that you purchased and merged with other ones?

00:01:33

LA: No. Tony Chachere's was began by Mr. Tony Chachere back 40 years ago with—and he's very famous for his seasoning, his Tony Chachere's seasoning in the little green cans, so—. And he's built quite a reputation. He was the first chef inducted into the Louisiana Hall of Fame for Chefs. He's got, like I said, quite a reputation for food, and we've used that name to actually grow our products and our company.

00:02:11

SR: And was he involved in—in this company ever?

00:02:17

LA: No, they have their own company. Tony Chachere Company is actually located in Opelousas, Louisiana; like I said, been around almost 40 years. It's still run by Don Chachere, the grandson of Tony Chachere, and they are the premier manufacturers and sellers of the Tony Chachere seasoning, and they—they've been doing it for 40 years and do a really good job at it.

00:02:42

SR: Okay, and so the seasoning then—it's separate from your line of products?

00:02:49

LA: That's correct. Although we use their seasoning in all of our products, it is a totally different company than what we are.

00:02:56

SR: Okay, and how is—so Tony Chachere isn't alive anymore, right?

00:03:04

LA: No, he did die back in the '90s at 90-something years old. He was—he had a good life, but this was not his first success story. He actually started as an insurance man and had a lot of success there, but did a lot of cooking, and took his clients and cooked for them and things like that—and very, very successful in the insurance business. And in his next career he began the food, the seasoning business, and went on to have great success with that.

00:03:35

SR: Did you know him?

00:03:38

LA: No, I had never met the man.

00:03:40

SR: Okay, and so what is—what was your background before you started this company in '99?

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LA: I actually had an environmental engineering company. **[Laughs]** And we—although we were located here, we had offices in 12 different cities around the country. [I] sold the company in the late '90s, retired, and then began a second career of this—food business.

00:04:11

SR: This is your retirement job?

00:04:13

LA: Yes, kind of a retirement job. Now we have 200 employees and [*Laughs*]—so yeah, not much of a retirement.

00:04:23

SR: No. And why did you choose this—this sort of business—food business? You didn't—when, you know, you didn't have much experience in that realm?

00:04:35

LA: Well I find that 90-percent of business is transferable. You only—you know, I know all about customers. I know about costs and things like that. What I didn't know is part of the food business, so actually began learning that and got together with a partner of mine, Mark Abraham. He had a small company, a boudin company in Sulphur that he acquired a couple years earlier. And I had a production background, and so we got together as partners and I told him the way I grew my environmental company was to acquire small companies and putting them together and then sold it and looked to do something like that with this company. But kind of fell in love with it, and now we're just growing it and having a good time doing it.

00:05:32

SR: And does he still have his boudin shop?

00:05:35

LA: No, no. It was closed down and he works here, although he's running for State Senate now, so he's got a full-time political career. So he's—he's very happy doing that, and I'm very happy doing this, so it works out good.

00:05:49

SR: Great. And so he wasn't—so in the beginning when you were starting this company, that's when y'all made friends with the Tony Chachere name?

00:05:59

LA: No.

00:05:59

SR: Or did he already have that?

00:06:00

LA: No, he—he didn't have that. We were on—we acquired a company called Signature Foods, which was began by Chef Paul Prudhomme out of New Orleans. He made turducken, stuffed chickens, de-boned chickens ,and things like that—his company, Signature Foods, did that. We acquired it and put it over here in Lake Charles into our new plant. We just finished a state-of-the-art plant here on Ryan Street, and we were looking for products to put in there to really increase production. So we were doing very well with it, marketing under French Market Foods;

we were in grocery stores throughout the country. We were also doing Home Shopping Network, where you know, you do it on TV. The Tony Chachere folks were also doing Home Shopping Network. Unknown to us is they—the Home Shopping Network told them that there was only going to be one Louisiana Cajun company on Home Shopping Network, that they needed to contact French Market Foods because we had great products and they have a great name—that we need to marry those two and we would be very successful. They called me up; I went to Opelousas, and after about a three-hour meeting we decided to form an alliance where we would put their product name on our products and we would use their help in marketing, that we would use their food scientists and their graphic artists and that type of thing. So it's a good relationship. It's worked very well, since 2003.

00:07:42

SR: Hmm. So the Home Shopping Network was sort of a matchmaker for y'all?

00:07:48

LA: That's the way they did it, yeah. They put us together, uh-hm.

00:07:50

SR: Well I was—I've just been on a tour of your facility, which is very exciting because I didn't think I'd ever see where Tony C's did its thing, but for the record can you give me sort of an overview of what happens here at French Market Foods?

00:08:04

LA: Well we—we bring in the raw materials, whether it be the chicken, the turkeys, or the pork, and then it's—in the case of the chickens we of course de-bone it, season it, stuff it with our stuffing that's made out of the rice dressing that we manufacture right here, and—and we package it up and get ready to freeze it and prepare it to ship out. The boudin is brought in in big pork combos, 1,000-pound pork combos. We grind the product, we cook our rice, we mix it with the seasoning and the rice, and then we push it through our stuffing machine that fills the casing, the natural casing, sausage casing that we—that's how you make pork boudin. And then we put it in our smoker for a short time and package it and it's ready to ship also. So—.

00:09:14

SR: So your boudin is smoked?

00:09:16

LA: Yes, uh-huh it—it's only smoked just a little bit to get the—bring the moisture content down some, uh-hm.

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SR: Hmm.

00:09:28

LA: Not really to give it a smoked taste.

00:09:32

SR: Okay, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

00:09:34

LA: That's okay. The turkeys, we start with the whole turkey, de-bone it, and then we stuff it with chicken that's completely de-boned, and then we stuff the chicken with the duck, and we end up with the turducken, and we do roughly 700 turduckens a day—is a normal turducken [day]. We do somewhere around 3,000 de-boned stuffed chickens a day, and we do about 30,000 pounds of boudin a week. So we—and then of course we also have the Tony Chachere sausage, the—the smoked dinner sausage, which we manufacture here too.

00:10:20

SR: And also some entrées, right, such as gumbo and—?

00:10:23

LA: That's correct. We do [*Laughs*]—we make, yeah, we start with our own ingredients, which includes Tony Chachere seasoning, cook it down—. We make—we also cook the rice and then we put the two together, package it up and freeze it, get ready to ship it. It's in single-serve entrées, and also two-pound family-style, fully cooked just heat-and-eat entrées. And we do chicken sausage gumbo; we do crawfish etouffee; we do shrimp gumbo and several other entrées.

00:11:07

SR: Well let me ask you how—who developed the recipes? How did—how did you go about that in the very beginning?

00:11:14

LA: Okay, I should have said up front that I'm not the cook, okay, but we have cooks working for us. And what they do, they—they make and prepare the products for us and we taste it, and if we like it then chances are we believe other people will like it, and that's the way we do it. We develop it with cooks in our plant. We also get Tony Chachere 's food scientists and their people to try it, okay. If their Board of Directors like it and we like it, then chances are the public will like it, and that's how it really works.

00:11:50

SR: And so I bet you've had some—some deep discussions around a dinner table about what's a proper gumbo or—?

00:11:59

LA: Always—every time we have a food tour, you know because gumbo in different parts of the country is made with different—. We use a roux-based product here, and it's a little bit deeper taste, and then the tomato-based product, but it's—we believe it's the real Creole gumbo. And we enjoy it.

00:12:25

SR: And well, since I'm working on the Boudin Trail, I'll start there. Did the boudin recipe come from your partner, if he had a boudin shop?

00:12:35

LA: Yes, he had—yeah, the recipe that was started several years earlier than that. Now he—he acquired that shop also, okay, so the boudin recipe has been acquired from way back, so nor I or my partners did the—did the first origination of the recipe. **[Laughs]**

00:13:02

SR: Well that's the case in—with a lot of the people that I'm talking to, you know. The recipes go way back—the general recipes—and then tweaks happen along the way. Is there anything that you know that you have to do much differently than a small mom and pop boudin shop when you're—when you're packaging it for retail sale like you do?

00:13:25

LA: Well we are a USDA plant, so we have an inspector on site all the time here during the manufacturing of our product, so they—we make sure that we're inspected. We keep it clean. We keep everything sanitized and all the sorts of testing that goes along with being a USDA plant, so—. It's probably quite a bit more than the mom and pop stores have to do. So—.

[Laughs]

00:13:55

SR: Are you required to have a full-time USDA inspector?

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LA: Yes, we do, uh-hm.

00:14:00

SR: And how does that work? Do you employ that person or does the government employ that person?

00:14:06

LA: No, it's a government employee. We don't—we don't employ him. They're—we only provide him an office and a phone, but they work for the government and they don't become very friendly. They will not eat with us; they will not do any of that. *[Laughs]* So that's—they do their job and they do it well.

00:14:30

SR: Huh. And why are you required to have an inspector when smaller places aren't?

00:14:37

LA: Well because we sell across state lines, okay. There's two types of inspections: a state inspection where you—I can sell it inside of Louisiana—or you can go to the USDA inspection, which allows you to sell it anywhere in the country, and that's what—the way we do it, because we sell our boudin and other products throughout the whole US, so it's got to be USDA.

00:15:07

SR: And how does a product like boudin, which is so tied to this—not just this part of the country but this part of the state—does that sell well in other states?

00:15:19

LA: I think the boudin is a growing business, but it is not one of the mainstays for the Creole foods and Creole restaurants around the country, because people don't understand it. Once they taste it, I think they enjoy it and they come back and buy it, but what you'll find is at first the restaurants carry it, and then people in the area start asking for it at the grocery stores, and that's how we developed the field.

00:15:48

SR: Huh.

00:15:48

LA: The following.

00:15:51

SR: Well that's interesting. So the restaurants sort of become the trend-setters for home cooks, too.

00:15:56

LA: Right, that's the way we found that it works. You have good—Emeril has done it very well—good job of showcasing the Louisiana cooking across the country, and there's a lot of it. Paul Prudhomme and a lot of the famous chefs in this area have done a good job of promoting the Creole foods, and that's where that developed a following that pushes on into the retail segment of the market; so it's where we come in.

00:16:24

SR: Do you know offhand what part of the country besides Louisiana and Texas, say, is—where does boudin sell the best?

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LA: Well we—our markets—our strongest markets of course are the eight states that start from Texas and Oklahoma and just go eastward across Kentucky and Tennessee and Alabama and Mississippi on over to Florida. That's our strength, but we have a really good following in the California market; we have a real good following in the Chicago market, so it's really a good. I guess a lot of misplaced Louisianans have showed up over there.

00:17:12

SR: Can you tell me a little bit about what characterizes your boudin? Do you eat your boudin, I guess I should ask?

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LA: Yes. Not on an everyday basis, but yeah, we try it from time to time. It's really good.

00:17:27

SR: And what to you sort of makes it stand out compared to its competitors?

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LA: Well I don't know. I guess the way we make it. We put lots of pork in our boudin, and of course the Tony Chachere seasoning makes it stand out. So it's kind of a—the unique seasoning married with these products that we manufacture here is—produces a real good tasting product.

00:17:55

SR: A lot of people in the state are addicted to that seasoning, and that probably helps.

00:17:58

LA: Oh yes. Everybody knows Tony Chachere, uh-hm.

00:18:02

SR: What is—you mentioned earlier “pork combo.” What is that?

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LA: Well that's just the way that the raw pork is brought in. It's on—it's a 1,000-pound—cardboard box on a pallet, and it's just the name.

00:18:22

SR: Do you put liver in your—in your boudin here?

00:18:25

LA: Some—some of our recipes have the liver; some don't.

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SR: Huh, how are they distinguished? Is the packaging different?

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LA: Well we also private label for other people, and some of the recipes require the liver and some don't. So I think that Tony Chachere boudin [*Laughs*]
—I don't know if it has the liver or not, okay.

00:18:53

SR: That's okay. I'm just curious.

00:18:55

LA: Like I said, I'm not the cook.

00:18:57

SR: Yeah, no, that's fine.

00:19:02

LA: You can ask anybody else.

00:19:05

SR: Yeah, I'll ask—I'll ask Scott. That's fine.

00:19:06

LA: Okay.

00:19:09

SR: You know it sort of strikes me that it's not—it wasn't really your background. I mean you're a businessman, which is how you wound up in this position, but a byproduct of your position is that you are helping promote and preserve, you know, culinary traditions that run very deep in the state. Do you think about that ever, like do you get anymore satisfaction than—than you did in your previous life, or does that play a part at all in your daily existence here?

00:19:49

LA: Well I think I would like my name to be associated with quality products. I think that the Tony Chachere, the quality name, the quality products they've turned out for 30, 40 years and the name they have means quality, and that's what I want to be associated with, so that's—. And yes, it does—it means something to me to be a quality food producer and not just a(n) everyday product. I want it to be one of the best out there.

00:20:23

SR: Are you more popular with your friends now that you're involved in food? *[Laughs]*

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LA: Oh absolutely, absolutely. We are. We have great Christmas parties and holiday parties, so—because everybody likes the food.

00:20:35

SR: Yeah. And where are you from? What is—what is your background?

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LA: Born and raised in Sulphur, Louisiana, just west of Lake Charles here, and lived there most of my life; a short stint in Houston, a couple years in Houston, and then when I sold my environmental company I had to relocate to Chicago to continue running it for two years. And then my contract expired and I was down—back down here in Louisiana.

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SR: And so what—are you Cajun?

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LA: I don't think so. No, I don't think my—I think it's more of, we have a little Indian and a little Irish in us.

00:21:20

SR: Oh okay. And were your parents born and raised in the area too?

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LA: Actually more in the Shreveport area—Bossier City, Louisiana, area. My mother was from Oklahoma; she was about one-eighth Cherokee Indian, so—I'm sorry, she was a quarter Cherokee Indian. I'm an eighth, okay, that's right.

00:21:44

SR: So you did—you grew up eating this kind of food that you make here?

00:21:47

LA: Absolutely. Gumbos, and we've eaten them all of our life, so we've enjoyed them—not so much the turducken.

00:21:57

SR: Yeah that's new. [*Phone Rings*] And—and now that you mentioned gumbo—so you said that you make a shrimp gumbo here, and a chicken and sausage. Is that right?

00:22:08

LA: That's correct, uh-huh, and a shrimp Creole. And a lot of our products are made with shrimp because one of the other companies is a shrimp company. We make—we process about 8,000,000 pounds of shrimp. Here we sell a lot of it under the Tony Chachere shrimp in retail

grocery stores, and we also use the shrimp in our recipes. So it's all wild, called American shrimp, and it's the best out there. So—.

00:22:40

SR: So you use all, you know, local shrimp in your products?

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LA: That's correct. Only raw caught domestic shrimp are used in our products—all from my plant.

00:22:52

SR: That's great. And where is your plant?

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LA: It's in Dulac, Terrebonne Parish, just south of Houma on the water.

00:23:02

SR: How many employees do you have there?

00:23:05

LA: There we have about 85, so—I counted that when I said we had 200 people in our food company, okay.

00:23:15

SR: Oh okay. Does that include the people who catch the shrimp?

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LA: No, we—those are all independent contractors. And we have three docks, and we buy from the boats but we don't own the boats.

00:23:30

SR: All right. What about the crawfish that you use? I saw some crawfish dressing being made. Is that a Louisiana product?

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LA: Some of it is; some of it is imported product. We can't get enough of the Louisiana product to use all Louisiana, so some of it's imported.

00:23:49

SR: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about what happened here at the facility, and also the business, when Hurricane Rita happened?

00:23:57

LA: Wow, that was—here we had some damage to our plant, but the biggest problem we had, because we had all the holiday products ready to ship, was that we didn't have electricity for two weeks. So we had to come back the next day, and we had already arranged to have a big tractor-

trailer generator meet us here. We—but the problem was, that I didn't think about, was that there was no electricians to hook anything up. They were all evacuated. So I called Tony Chachere in Opelousas—remember, they were out of harm's way—and see if they could help me. They actually sent all their plant electricians over here and got us hooked up, and we ran on generator power for about 13, 14 days, and kept the freezers going. And after about a week we started the plant back up, once we got more of our people back.

00:25:05

SR: So I saw the—the freezers and the refrigerators. I can't believe that there's a generator big enough to keep that all running.

00:25:14

LA: Oh yeah, it's a big generator. I can't remember the size, but it—it arrived on a big tractor-trailer. It was huge.

00:25:20

SR: And where did that come from?

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LA: Actually it came from La Place, which is down close to New Orleans, and we had put it on a retainer before any of the storms—before Katrina, before Rita hit. Now understand our—although our shrimp plant is just south of New Orleans, it was actually on the west side of the storm, so it actually—we got no damage during Katrina at all. But Rita, which hit over in—over

here on this side of the state, we got six-foot of water throughout our plants and our homes and everything down there and caused quite a bit of damage. But again we—you know we got it cleaned up, replaced our motors, replaced everything that was harmed and went back to work.

00:26:16

SR: So you didn't lose any product here, but did you lose product in the—at the shrimp facility?

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LA: Oh yes, millions of dollars worth of product.

00:26:25

SR: Wow. How did you possibly clean that up?

00:26:28

LA: Well we have—well it was still in cases, of course, so I mean it was frozen in cases, so of course if it thawed out, a lot of it—we just put roll-off dumpsters there—many, many roll-off dumpsters—and just loaded it. And they took it away and put it in a landfill.

00:26:54

SR: Do you have a home down there near Dulac?

00:26:57

LA: No, my—I live in Sulphur, but we own three homes down there as part of the business. We have some crews that stay in the homes, and like I said, they got a lot of damage. But again, we got it all replaced and they're back to—they're living in it now, so—.

00:27:19

SR: What—what effect did the hurricane have on your staffing? Did a lot of—I mean are there people that didn't come back?

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LA: Most of the staff that we had prior to Hurricane Rita didn't come back, okay.

00:27:34

SR: Did or didn't?

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LA: Did not come back. We basically had to re-staff, and it's taken us—took us about a year to come up to full staff, and then it's not as bad now. The turnover is not as bad, but quite a turnover at that point when everybody was looking for people on the Gulf Coast. They were—they could get, you know, a good working hand could get a job anywhere and did so—went up and down the street, I guess, changing jobs every other week. So we experienced the same problem that most people on the Gulf Coast with staff, good staff. So—.

00:28:14

SR: And what about sales? How have they—how did the hurricane change your sales? Not just as far as, you know, profit goes, but also geographically? Did things shift around a little bit?

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LA: Well one of the biggest markets for our shrimp was in the New Orleans area, and of course that was knocked out for a good while, and now that's returned. A lot of it's returned, but not all of it and—but for the rest of the problem—the products that we sell, it hasn't been that dramatic of a shift or anything like that. I guess maybe a lot more attention has been brought to Louisiana, and maybe that's a good thing as far as our products because our sales have just continued to grow every year, so—.

00:29:09

SR: And how do your, you know, retail—like supermarket sales—compare to your web sales? Do they grow equally—or I guess I'm kind of wondering if there are more people in the diaspora, you know, who might be ordering online since the hurricane or—or maybe not? I don't know.

00:29:29

LA: Well yeah, the web sales have really been strong since the hurricane. I guess maybe that's because of the attention drawn to this area, so I would say our web sales have grown faster than any part of our sales. That's been a good—good bonus for us.

00:29:50

SR: I met the production supervisor in the plant. I'm not sure what his name was.

00:29:58

LA: Marcus?

00:30:00

SR: No, he's a Spanish-speaking—?

00:30:01

LA: Oh Melchar, I'm sorry. Yeah, Melchar, right.

00:30:04

SR: Melchar—do you know how to spell that?

00:30:08

LA: Sure: M-e-l-c-h-a-r.

00:30:10

SR: Oh okay. And he—it's amazing to me that he can keep all that going back there. I mean I saw them—one of the people on the tour I was with timed him, and—and he de-boned chicken in a minute. How long has he been with you?

00:30:29

LA: Melchar has been a part of our company for six years. And we have his son working for us and two brothers working for us, his wife working for us, so he's—he's part of our family too. So he's, although he's from Mexico he's been here for many, many years. He's done a really, really fine job of running the poultry production for our company.

00:30:56

SR: Uh-hm. And yeah, that's what the, you know the tour guides were telling us too. Do you get—I guess the tour guide referred to the people that were working with him in the—in the poultry room as migrant workers. Do you have a high turnover of workers?

00:31:13

LA: No, we operate under the H-2B program, the government sponsored program where you bring in—well we use Mexican labor for 10-months, and then after 10-months they have to go back to Mexico.

00:31:30

SR: Oh okay.

00:31:30

LA: So because of our business—so still a great deal of our business is holiday—we are classified as a seasonal type company, and we're able to bring in the H-2B program workers from Mexico, and the same at our shrimp plant. And we've probably doubled our migrant workers since the storm because the others didn't come back. So—

00:32:04

SR: So I guess, yeah it—with that you know, if they just stay 10-months there's definitely need for somebody—for a bilingual person running the place back there.

00:32:13

LA: That's correct, yes.

00:32:14

SR: Yeah.

00:32:15

LA: So Melchar is with us year-round, but most of his workers in the poultry room go back during January and February.

00:32:25

SR: Well since you brought up the seasonality of a lot of your products, I know that you—I think that I learned today that you make turducken year-round. Is that true?

00:32:35

LA: We start turducken work production basically when our labor gets back from Mexico. So that's around the first of March that we start making turducken and—for the holidays.

00:32:51

SR: I guess, for the record, could you explain what a turducken is?

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LA: Sure. That's—it's kind of a specialty Louisiana food that takes a whole turkey and de-bone it; take the carcass out, leaving the drumsticks and the wing bones for the shape. We take the boneless turkey and we stuff it with a boneless duck, and then we stuff the duck with a boneless—I'm sorry—boneless chicken goes first, and then the boneless duck, so—. And then we put our dressings and seasonings around those products--meat products, so you have this 15-pounds of almost 100-percent edible product, and it's just a great flavor. It's ready-seasoned, ready-to-eat—I mean seasoned and ready to cook, and we just—and we sell tens of thousands of them for the holiday season, so—.

00:33:48

SR: Do you also sell them, say, in April, or not?

00:33:53

LA: We sell them—all the sales spike during the holiday season, whether it be the Super Bowl, whether it be Easter, whether it be Thanksgiving, Christmas—all those are good holiday—those good holiday days are good turducken days. So any time you get a large group together, turducken makes a good fit.

00:34:15

SR: When was the first time you personally encountered a turducken?

00:34:18

LA: Probably the first time I looked at the company to acquire Signature Foods. We—they cooked one of their turduckens for us and we tried it, and it was excellent. That was in 19—late '90s. I don't quite remember; sometime around '99.

00:34:41

SR: Because it's relatively—it's a relatively modern Louisiana food, right?

00:34:47

LA: That's correct, yes. Chef Paul Prudhomme is accredited with beginning that many years ago, but actually bringing it out to the public, it's only happened probably in the last 10 or 12 years. John Madden with his Thanksgiving Day football game, he made it kind of famous also during—when he serves—cooks and serves a turducken on the Thanksgiving football games.

00:35:15

SR: He does that every year, right?

00:35:18

LA: Every year, yeah.

00:35:20

SR: But is—is turducken at all a tradition in your family?

00:35:25

LA: We have it probably every other year; we don't have it every year. We like to just have gumbo and things like that. I mean, because I get enough tourists through here where I get a chance to eat it on a regular basis anyway. [*Laughs*] So we're going to have a nice bite of it after the interview.

00:35:46

SR: Okay [*Laughs*]. Well now that you mentioned a home gumbo, who is the cook at your house—the gumbo cook?

00:35:54

LA: Well it's definitely not me. My wife is the cook, so I don't cook at all. She's an excellent cook, and she's also on our tasting panel here, so it must pass her taste test before it goes out to the retail.

00:36:09

SR: And she's a Louisiana native?

00:36:13

LA: Oh yes, uh-huh, born and raised in this area.

00:36:14

SR: So if she's going to make a gumbo at the holidays, what—what will it be?

00:36:19

LA: Well the way she did it a few years back, of course, is start with the roux and her own raw materials and build it from scratch. But now, it just so happens we own a food company and we just bring it [from] here—heat and eat.

00:36:36

SR: All right. I'm sorry, I didn't ask your wife's name.

00:36:37

LA: Fran Avery.

00:36:42

SR: F-r-a-n?

00:36:42

LA: Yes, Fran.

00:36:45

SR: I had some questions when we were walking around. Do you have any idea how much you know, let's say—I think you told me how many pounds of boudin you do. How much can your freezer hold? How much—how big is that?

00:37:01

LA: The freezer holds around 600 pallet spots, which is a little over 1,000,000-pounds of product.

00:37:08

SR: How—do you have any idea how many square-feet that is?

00:37:12

LA: No, I forgot. [*Laughs*] I didn't study for this.

00:37:19

SR: No, it's okay. It's just—it's much bigger than many houses.

00:37:23

LA: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. It's four stories high, so it's very—it holds a lot of product.

00:37:31

SR: Okay, let me see what else I've—I was jotting things down as we were walking along. How about, do you have any idea what your gumbo production is like, how many gallons you do a week or—?

00:37:46

LA: No, I—

00:37:50

SR: That's okay; that's fine. Those rice cookers are also huge. You don't—where do you get your rice? Is it from the area?

00:38:00

LA: Yes, we use mostly Louisiana rice, but we also get it from Arkansas and Mississippi, and we use it and we—. Yeah, we have five 70-gallon rice cookers, and so we go through a lot of rice.

00:38:19

SR: Yeah. I think that I could stand in one of them.

00:38:22

LA: Oh yeah, you could stand in any of them, yeah.

00:38:25

SR: Let me ask you: what do you enjoy most about your retirement profession?

00:38:32

LA: Well I like growing my business—enjoy that. I love the challenges of growing it, and I love being around the people. I'm surrounded by good people, and it makes my day go really good.

00:38:49

SR: Well thank you for giving me your time. It was very helpful.

00:38:53

LA: Great, great. Thanks for coming by today.

00:38:59

[End Larry Avery-Boudin Interview]