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Interview with Sam Gilardi

Sam Gilardi

Lisa M. Groesz

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Researcher's name: Lisa M. Groesz
Event: Interview with Sam Gilardi
Place: Lannings Foods, 1033 Newark Road, Mount Vernon, 1:00pm
Co-workers present: None

LG: This is Lisa Groesz and I am interviewing Sam Gilardi at Lannings Food Processing Company.... Actually, do you mind if I shut your door?

SG: That's fine.

LG: And the date is October 25, 2000. How long have you been working with Lannings?

SG: Umm, 11 years.

LG: And your father, he owns the company?

SG: No, actually I own the company.

LG: Oh, Okay.

SG: My brother and I do.

LG: Oh, I'm sorry. And so what's the history of Lannings? Like, did?

SG: Bernard Lannings started the company, uh, in 1969 and my brother and I bought the Lannings out in 1989. So.

LG: Okay.

SG: So, I don't know, we, when we took over the company, there were three employees. Now we employ forty. We moved two months ago into this facility, so.

LG: Did that help with expansion then, increasing employees? Or did you already have forty before you came.

SG: No, when we moved down here, we had 25 people.

LG: Okay.

SG: We expanded our retail area so we had to hire more help.

LG: Okay.

SG: So, that is where the extra employees came from.

LG: And the expansion with employees, is that because there is a bigger market now.

SG: Well, there is now because of our location. We have a better location. We offer a lot more services. We sell a lot more beef and pork products than we ever did before.

LG: Okay.

SG: So.

LG: And who comes to you with animals? Like, is it local farmers? Or is it as far as Columbus?

SG: No, its, all of our beef comes out of Knox County and surrounding areas.

LG: Okay.

SG: I have a guy in Ashland who takes care of all the killing for us. He purchases it locally, meaning in the surrounding counties. And he kills it and it's under the Ohio Proud label, I don't know if you are familiar with that or not, but we joined the Ohio Proud to basically let the consumers know that we purchase Ohio raised beef.

LG: Okay.

SG: and that's, we did that when we moved down here, so that's the only thing we process for retail business.

LG: So do you just process beef then? You don't do pigs or?

SG: We do hogs as well.

LG: Okay.

SG: That's, the hogs we buy from right here in Mount Vernon.

LG: Okay.

SG: We get them killed up in Fredericktown and then we process them here.

LG: Okay. And you get them killed in other places just because you don't have the capability to do that?

SG: Right. We don't want to mess with it.

LG: Right.

SG: We are not capable of killing animals here and we are not licensed so.

LG: Okay.

SG: We get that done. So.

LG: So, what is the volume that you process per week, approximately?

SG: Well, on those particular items, we process probably maybe, probably, 3000 pounds of pork and probably 5000 pounds of beef, so, for retail. We also have a wholesale business that we produce for so.

LG: So where all do you send to? You have the meat store, like, here. And so who are your consumers here?

SG: Our consumers are local businesses, schools, hotels, umm, we send a lot of stuff out to Kenyon, out in that direction.

LG: And are most of the consumers, like, in-state?

SG: Oh yeah, everything is in state. We are not licensed to ship out of state. Everything stays in Ohio. So. And we go about a 75 mile radius around Mt. Vernon. So that's our delivery area.

LG: Okay. And do you feel there's enough food processing companies to satisfy the demand for meat to be processed? I know, like, there's DJs?

SG: I think so. I certainly don't want any more competition.

LG: Yeah. How do farmers decide where to go?

SG: Well, like the guy I work with, he's got his people that he knows that raise good quality beef and he sticks with it, with those people. He tells me what farmers are coming from.

LG: Okay.

SG: They come in with little tags on it that have the farmer's name that raised the beef. He doesn't jump around that much. The hogs we buy at the auction down here at Producers, so they're everybody's hogs. We buy what we feel is the best and that is what we get processed.

LG: So if a farmer decides he wants to process the meat, like, how does he go about it.

SG: Well, he would come in and talk to me and I would line up the butchering or the killing. I would call DJs because he does my killing locally here for me. The farmer

would then bring the beef up there to get it killed and we would go pick it up in our refrigerated trucks and bring it back here and process it. That's how it works.

LG: Okay.

SG: It's about a three week deal.

LG: Okay.

SG: And we do a lot of that.

LG: Is there sometimes, like, a waiting period. Or can someone just come...?

SG: Oh, yeah. Right now, it's January is the earliest.

LG: Oh, wow.

SG: So.

LG: Um, And so what are the governmental regulations? Because you have been mentioning stuff. Like you have to stay in the state. Like for where you buy your beef and for where you send your beef?

SG: Yeah, we're state inspected. They come in three hours every morning. They are here right now.

LG: Oh, really.

SG: Yeah. And they basically keep a file on us, they make sure our temperatures are right, they make sure that the plant is kept sanitary. They make sure that we follow all of our programs that we work under for food safety. Well, I don't know, they watch us. That is the biggest governmental regulations that we have. Make sure all the labeling is proper. So.

LG: Wow. So three hours every morning.

SG: They are here.

LG: 15 hours a week.

SG: Yeah.

LG: That's intense.

SG: Yeah.

LG: Do you ever feel, like, watched too much?

SG: All the time. All the time. It's part of it.

LG: Is that something that's picked up speed? With, like, e-coli problems and stuff.

SG: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LG: Or has it always been bad?

SG: No, it has never been this intense.

LG: Okay.

SG: It has never been this intense. But we just ... I don't know... you can't, they just make sure we operate under their guidelines and they don't take any bull and we, uh.

LG: No pun intended

SG: Right. We do pretty well. We get along with them.

LG: Yeah.

SG: You gotta have a good working relationship with them. That's, that's the whole thing.

LG: And can they shut you down completely if they find something that's wrong?

SG: Yeah. At any given time, I mean, they have these tags and they will just tag up a piece of equipment if it doesn't look...

LG: Okay.

SG: If it's not clean enough, if our pre-ops aren't done right, then they'll. That's where if you have a good working relationship with them, they'll say stop the line and do this and take care of it and we will let you keep operating. If you don't have a good working relationship with them, they will just tag it up and they will come back tomorrow and then, then you are out of luck for the rest of the day. Could be costly.

LG: I can imagine.

SG: So.

LG: Umm, so you can pretty much choose any farmer as long as he is in-state? Or do farmers have to follow regulations too? Like if you were to choose, like, Farmer Joe's Beef.

SG: No, for incoming you mean? Since we participate in this Ohio Proud thing, all the beef has to be raised in Ohio so that's one of the stipulations that we put on, on what we buy. Because being in farm country up here, people like that.

LG: Yeah.

SG: And they ask, where does the beef come from. Well, we buy it in Knox County and surrounding areas.

LG: Right.

SG: Then the guy that I'm working with up in Ashland, he's, he's in the same program so everything I get is, is from Ohio: Knox County and surrounding areas.

LG: So this Ohio Pride (sic) thing, was it started by the government then or?

SG: No, it's a private group. Ohio was, is, is behind it and they're pushing it and they are just pushing. What it is is the farmers, the farmers are the people that are really behind it. The farmers and the, the, you know, the Ohio, the people who have the farms in Ohio. They are the people that started it and they come after people like us to get us to participate so they can get their product to the market. Without us buying the product out of Kansas City and Nebraska and from out of state. That's what they don't want.

LG: Right.

SG: So.

LG: Right. And that is actually what we are looking into right now, in looking at the local, you know, food networks and like, and if possible getting restaurants, even if it's just a special day, you know, but purchasing something locally and advertising it as local so then consumers are excited too. Because they are buying a product that was grown locally.

SG: What do you mean by locally?

LG: Ummm.

SG: In Mount Vernon?

LG: We are looking at, like, general Knox County area.

SG: Yeah.

LG: But,

SG: Getting recognition is always a big thing. That is what I tell the people at Ohio Proud when we have our meetings. I tell them you got to, they got to spend some money on advertising so people know that it's a good thing. I mean, a lot of my customers don't know what it means but when you tell them that the, the beef, the carcasses that we bring in are raised in this general area they like that.

LG. Umhm.

SG: So, that is the big thing. Giving the program recognition is what you are going to have to do. Is this a project for school? Or what?

LG. Yeah.

SG: Is it?

LG: Umm. It's a year long class. Last year, they did Along the Kokosing. I don't know if you have seen that. It's a brochure and it has, you can get it with a CD or a tape. And it just talks about different areas along the Kokosing. Just kind of, ummm, making people aware of, like, rural life in Knox County primarily. But, umm, so have you seen a difference in sales with the Ohio Proud?

SG: Well, it is hard to tell. It is hard to say because when we moved down here, our sales went way up anyway just because we've got a nice new building, our location is good, we expanded our hours.

LG: Right.

SG: I am sure that it has played a part in it but I don't know what kind of percentage. I mean, for me to say, oh yeah if we didn't have that, our sales would be this. But, I am sure that. It's all in the marketing plan when we built this place. That was part of it. I would say, yes, it's helped. The quality is good. It is a lot better than when we were out at the other facility?

LG: And that is because of your better facility?

SG: No, it's just because the product is from Knox County, it's dry aged, it's basically, it's aged properly, it's not vacuum packaged in a bag, that's a wet aging process. And we went to a dry aging process where the carcasses are hanging. I don't know, did you get a chance to look around the store when you walked in or not?

LG: No, I haven't.

SG: Well, the carcasses are hanging behind that glass window. If you look behind the meat counter, you will see them back there. And it's a dry aged beef. And, it's, it looks a lot nicer in the case. It has a real nice, bright red appearance and it doesn't get dark on the

edges, it doesn't bleed off and the quality is a lot better, so. We sell a lot more beef here than we ever did at the old place. So.

LG: That's great.

SG: I would say that that probably has something to do with it. So.

LG: Umm, is there anything else you would like to tell me?

SG: Is there anything else you would want to know?

LG: I don't have any more specific questions.

SG: Well, not really, I just told you. I mean, that's what your project is on, I mean, the homegrown thing, right?

LG: Umhm.

SG: That is about it really.

LG: Okay. If I have any further questions, would you mind if I came back?

SG: No.

LG: I would call you beforehand again.

SG: I'll help you.

LG: Great. Awesome.

SG: All right.