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Interview with Sam Gilardi

Sam Gilardi

Leah Sokolofski

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Accession number: ELFS-LKS-A022201.A
Researcher's name: Leah Sokolofski
Event: Interview with Sam Gilardi
Place: Lannings Foods
1033 Newark Rd. Mount Vernon, OH
Co-workers present: none

LS: Leah Sokolofski
SG: Sam Gilardi

LS: This is Leah Sokolofski talking with Sam Gilardi at Lannings in Mount Vernon, Ohio. It is February 22nd, 2001 and the accession number for this tape is ELFS-LKS-A022201.A. So I guess, we're doing this article for the Mount Vernon News and my topic is the dollars and cents of food. So I'm looking at a lot of different aspects of it. And I talked to Lisa and she told me about some of the stuff that she had learned from you. And so I guess I just have some more questions both about the processing part and then the store part of Lannings, and I guess just sort of how they work together. So my first question is just how has the processing industry changed over the years?

SG: Well, in the industry as a whole what it has gone to is a lot of the big cattlemen people out West. What they've done is they've become more efficient by streamlining their operations and a lot of beef gets sent in from the West. And its, their production lines are a lot more efficient because they run 15,000 head of cattle through a day. They just have people on the line that they pre-fab the beef that comes down the line, they just do one thing all day long. So in other words, if the cattle comes down the line, they might break it down and they might have one person that just gets the short loins ready which is where you get the t-bones from. And that's all he's doing all day long, just getting the short loins ready and they're packing them. And then, the people over in this part of the country they're able to buy that cheaper than what some of the cattle people around here are able to sell it for. But what we've done here, for our retail business is we've partnered with a guy up in Ashland that buys local beef, from Knox County and surrounding areas, and we're helping to promote, to get that back to where it, the way it used to be and helping to promote the locally raised beef. Which in turn helps the farmer, that helps the, it just helps the local economy more if we're buying more local. So that's what we've done here, since we opened our new store. It's a little more expensive because the efficiency isn't there, but the quality is really good. Our customers like it and a lot, there's some peace of mind to be said when they can buy the beef and they know it's locally raised. And this is a farm community to begin with so, that's what we've done. Those are things, changes within the past 10 years, a lot of the grocers and a lot of the big chain stores, I would say just about all of them. They all went to the pre-fab beef that comes out of the Western part of the United States, Kansas City.

LS: What's the connection between the store and the processing company? Is it just the meat or I guess how do you see that connection, because it's a relatively new one?

SG: Our store and our processing?

LS: Uh-huh.

SG: Well, it's all the same company. What we do is we have a processing room out front that basically cuts for retail only. If you walked up to the counter and you said you wanted a 2-inch t-bone, they'll cut you a 2-inch t-bone or they'll cut you whatever you want. Then I have a processing room in the back that is set up for volume that basically services restaurants in the area. We cut meat back there, we do a lot of portion cutting, a lot of hamburger patties for people, for different restaurants, specs. They might want an 8-oz. Patty, 80% lean. We can do that back there. We have the equipment back there. It's refrigerated. It's state inspected. That's the only difference. It's all the same company, work out of the same building. But the retail is a little more, the atmosphere out there is different. That's what we wanted, we even want people to come out and see we're cutting the carcass beef that's hanging in the, I don't know if you noticed it, but we have a showcase out there with the carcasses hanging behind the glass in the cooler. All that beef is OhioProud. What OhioProud means is that it's raised and slaughtered in Knox County and surrounding areas. It's all choice grade.

LS: What is the impact of OhioProud, of that program, on your business? Because I've heard a little bit about it and I think it's kind of a really neat program. But, I was wondering when you got started with it and how it's affected things.

SG: Oh, it's really a positive thing for the county and you know, Knox County and my customer base and the surrounding area. Because the people know that with some of the media that we've experienced over the past couple of years with some of the illnesses and some unexplained happenings, I guess in the meat industry, that are still kind of up in the air. I think it's comforting for local consumers to know that they can go to a local meat market and buy beef that is locally raised, and it's been well accepted. My customers like it. They like to know when they walk in, they see the carcass there hanging on the rail, there's nothing funny about it. The meat cutters, they pull the carcass off the rail, they break it down, they cut the beef, it goes in the case and then you buy it. There's nothing, there's no hidden tricks here. Everything's out front.

LS: What sorts of people shop in the retail area? What are they looking to buy, is it mostly do they come in for meat? And then, does it replace going to Big Bear or Kroger for them?

SG: Well, when we designed this store, we designed it for the consumer that doesn't want to go the big store every week. You can shop at Lannings and get everything you need on a weekly basis. And then you should only have to go to the big stores just to get your staple items. We don't carry any canned goods, we don't carry any, uh you won't find toothpaste and stuff like that in our store. What we have done is we try to sell everything fresh, we do a lot of frozen business here. Of course you've got to sell patties frozen and some of that, some of those convenience items. But for the most part, everything here is fresh. We have a chef on hand, or on staff full-time that she makes recipes, she makes soups. We make our own breads here, we have a bakery and we make our own breads.

We do a lot of meatballs and lasagnes and special recipes like that. Really, you can come to Lannings and buy everything you need for your whole meal. And you should be able to purchase everything you need from vegetables all the way through the meat, through the bread, and we do carry some condiments, like ketchups and the salsa, you know just the basic stuff. But for the most part, if you're gonna plan a meal, we've got everything you need. And that's what we set out to do and to get the regular shoppers in our store everyday, day in and day out, instead of just coming here to buy their meat once a month.

LS: Then where do people come from? Do they come just from Mount Vernon or the greater Knox County area? Or do you have any idea where the shoppers are from?

SG: Yeah we get a lot of business, mostly the greater Knox County area. We have business, a lot of business comes up from the South, from Utica. We've done surveys and found that we have a lot of business, or the bulk of our business is just from the Knox County area.

LS: What are the economic benefits or disadvantages in dealing with local products?

SG: Well, the economic advantages for you as a consumer is it helps keep the money local. It helps the farmer. It helps the farmer's hands or you know his helping hands. It helps the general economy, the general local economy. As far as the consumer goes, the value is there, there's always going to be people that are more efficient as I was saying earlier than what we can do around here. We don't have any major packing plants around here. There's not, I don't know.

LS: Do you think people, like the farmer prefers to give you his cattle as opposed to sending it somewhere else to be processed?

SG: Oh yeah, they want to keep it local. That's the OhioProud, I mean that's what it's, that's the OhioProud, that's what OhioProud is all about. They want to keep the business local. They want to raise the cattle in Ohio, we've got to keep these local cattlemen alive. We have to keep them, otherwise we're not going to have any local cattlemen. If there's no customers that'll buy the beef that they or the cattle that they raise, then we've got a real problem. Because all these farms that you drive up and down the road and see, they'll go by the wayside. So what we want to do, we want to support them in every way we can.

LS: How do you view the flow of money in Knox County? Where is it going? You mentioned that farming is a big focus in the county, but I guess if you could look at a big picture, how would you see the money flowing?

SG: Well, a lot of it goes, as it is right now, I see a lot of it goes out of state. Because if you buy beef from Kroger or Big Bear, they're gonna get boxed beef and it's gonna come from Kansas City. So, that money goes out of state. If you come here and you buy, if you buy a round of steak from Lannings, that money likely will stay in the state of Ohio. It'll stay in Knox County and surrounding areas. And that's what the whole OhioProud

program is all about. The same with the poultry that we buy, that we sell out front, it comes from Gerber. They're over in Kidron, Ohio. It's not in Knox County, but still.

LS: And then, how do you see your business playing into that food chain? I don't know, are there greater connections other than just the consumer and the cattlemen? Or is that sort of the link you provide?

SG: Well, right now that's the link that we provide. We're providing a place for you to go buy your meats that the circle can all be complete right here in Ohio. The grain was raised in Ohio. The cattle was fed with Ohio raised grain. The animal was slaughtered in Ohio. It was brought to Lannings. We processed it. We sold it to you and all the money stays in Ohio. Now, the bigger that, hopefully we can expand on that. My wholesale base is not, it's altogether different. That is, it's a whole different thing. We can't, because of the efficiencies of it, we can't cut Ohio raised beef and sell it to some of the, to some of our wholesale customers that we have. Because it's just not, it doesn't make good economical sense. The marketing, you know as I said earlier. With some of the efficiencies that the bigger beef producers have out West, they're able to sell me, I can buy tenderloins, as many tenderloins as I want. Because they have somewhere to go with. It's hard to explain, I don't even really want to get into it with you. But if somebody orders, 150 beef cattle filet mignon steaks, I mean that takes about probably 20 tenderloins. Well, that's 10 cattle that have to die.So we have to use boxed beef in our wholesale cutting operation back there. So that's why, that's what it's like.

LS: Do you have any goals for Lannings in the future, like any other steps that you'd like to take?

SG: Well, I don't know. We try to stay involved in the community in any way we can. That's always good. Because that's where we get our customer base. I don't really have any set goals. I mean I know where we want to be volume-wise, but we want to get involved and be more involved in the community. As far as what we were talking about earlier with the economics and the well-being of the farmers and the local beef thing that we push. We're always working on that.

LS: Well, is there anything else you would like to share with me? I don't think I have any questions. But is there anything else you think I should look at with regards to my topic?

SG: I don't know. That's a tough question I guess.

LS: I know, it's the question I have for myself too.

SG: I don't know; we pretty well covered a lot of it.

LS: Yeah, okay. Well, great. Thank you so much for your time and for doing this.