

**Leonard Brown**  
**Brown's Farm - Water Valley, MS**  
\*\*\*

Date: November 5, 2015  
Location: Home of Leonard Brown – Water Valley, MS  
Interviewer: Abby Huggins  
Audio Engineer: Abby Huggins  
Transcription: Abby Huggins  
Length: One Hour, Twelve minutes  
Project: Oxford City Farmer Market

[0:00:00]

**Abby Huggins:** This is Abby Huggins with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today is November 5, 2015. And I am here at the home and farm of Mr. Leonard Brown. Mr. Brown, can you introduce yourself for the record and tell me your name and occupation?

[00:00:23]

**Leonard Brown:** Ok, My name is Leonard Brown and I basically work with the family farm. And, of course, there are many different things that you do with the farm. We grow livestock. We grow herbs, mushrooms, and a few other fruit items like figs, persimmons, just on a very small scale. We're trying to enlarge.

[00:00:58]

**AH:** And just for the record, can you tell me your birthday?

[00:01:00]

**LB:** Well [*laughs*], I'm actually, I actually don't give that out too much, but it's in January. I'm a January child and I'm above 50 [*laughs*].

[00:01:21]

**AH:** What year were you born?

[00:01:22]

**LB:** The year of my Lord [*laughs*]. I don't really say that exactly. You know, I don't really. But, anyway. Maybe if it come necessary, we'll give that to you.

[00:01:37]

**AH:** Ok. Well, I'd love to hear all about your farm operation. But, can we start out by you talking about growing up?

[00:01:54]

**LB:** Well, I actually grew up here. I grew up here with two brothers and two sisters, grandparents close by. They lived not too far from here. And, we always worked on the farm. My dad always, he never worked public work, he always did his own, he was his own businessman. So, in his own way, he grew a lot of produce and livestock, similar to what I'm doing today. We did, he did grow quite a bit of row crop at the time. But, after finishing high school, went to college at Alcorn. Left there, went to Tuskegee. Left there and came back to Montgomery, Alabama and worked with the extension service for about nine years. And, then eventually came back to somewhat reenergize the family farm. And, of course, I've been back here for probably twenty years. And, so what we're doing now is just continuing where we were. We do have a wildlife program going. We have the timber management program where we manage the timber and it also manages the wildlife. So that's a big part. We have various people that come out and hunt game during the year, so that's a part of the farming program. The other part is working with the herbs, working with the mushrooms, and working with the livestock, working with the goats and cattle. So, that's basically, we do grow some fish and so, it's pretty much something going on year round out here, you know. Always plenty to do. Too much to do. *[laughs]* That's about it.

[00:04:22]

**AH:** Can you talk more about working on the farm growing up?

[00:04:26]

**LB:** Well, actually, we had hands on. We actually at the time we grew, early on we grew cotton, corn. Of course, my dad grew all types of vegetable produce because he had his

own farmer's market at that time in Grenada, Mississippi. So, he produced watermelons, peas, tomatoes, pepper, okra. Just about anything that can be eaten, he grew it. And of course, it was all pretty much a self-sustaining operation because had to buy very little from the store. Always plenty to eat. My mom did a lot of canning. So we had practically *[laughs]* everything that they had in the stores. So, it was fun, it was a lot of work. And, we enjoyed it. So I guess that's the reason I somewhat came back and got back into it.

[00:05:43]

**AH:** Can you talk some about the history of this land?

[00:05:49]

**LB:** Well, this land right here is 80 acres where we call the home place. And, my dad bought it, I think at the time, it was something like, somewhere in the neighborhood of \$400. Of course that was a lot of money back at that time. And, of course, he maintained it and, you know it produced, he always burned wood for heat. And always had milk for the, we grew milk cows and it was just a self-sustaining operation. It's not a lot to say about it I suppose. But the house that's existing on the property now was, he cut the trees from the property and built a house. It was built back in the 50's. And, it's a fairly decent old house. It was well constructed. Took him quite a while to build it. But, it was lumber that was cut from the land. And, like I said, the whole thing has been a self-sustaining operation down through the years. And, it's been everything basically that you need, you know. Of course, early on, he would somewhat trade vegetables, eggs, or what have you. And that's the things that they needed from the store. That's kind of what he did, like that. And really, wasn't a need for a huge amount of money. But, I mean, money was important. But, basically it was just about everything that you needed. It had water here.

It had water. In fact, its got running springs now, you know, with a huge amount of water. So, so it was just about everything. It didn't have electricity at first, that came later. But after that it somewhat modernized. It didn't have telephones at first, but that came later. And all the other goodies that you have today *[laughs]*. All those came later, but, as far as the quality of life, it was good. We were about six miles from the school. So, we traveled on the bus to Coffeenville. And that was the school. And, so that's pretty much it. There was some, I guess, some good days and some bad days. But it was, it's always been kind of like a dry area out here. It's from what I've been told, down through the years, the rainfall was always a little less than other places around here. So, but they managed to survive. Right now, got a good well and got ponds, and what have you, so. We do have good water supply. We still use water from our well and of course we have the garbage system now that picks the garbage up. So, we don't have to dispose of the garbage. So, its even better quality of life out here now. And it makes a lot of other people happy. We have people from Memphis, Batesville, Hernando, and other places around that come up. And they enjoy hunting and just enjoying the land. So, its sort of semi-farm recreation *[laughs]*. Yeah.

[00:10:08]

**AH:** You mentioned going to school in Coffeenville growing up. Can you tell me about that?

[00:10:14]

**LB:** Well, it was good, we thought. We think we had good teachers and we loved it. It was, you know, we had the basic things. And of course, later years they improved them. They did build a new school while I was there. And, early on, it was not as comfortable,

but we didn't know any better. We thought it was perfect. But, it was good. I was determined my last year of school not to miss a day. So, I did not miss a day. *[laughs]* The last day of school and they worked on the road. The bus couldn't get out here. So, my neighbor, so we hitchhiked to school. *[laughs]* And, we made it. So I was determined not to miss a day. You know, perfect attendance. And that was the only year that I had perfect attendance *[laughs]*. It was just a goal that I set. And I said, looked like I wasn't going to make it. But anyway. We went to school and there was some teachers working in Water Valley. So, in the afternoon, when school was over, they would drop us off about two miles from home. And we would walk on back here. So, it all worked out. *[laughs]* It worked out, but it was, that was what I can remember the last year of school. It was a bridge out, so the bus didn't feel comfortable coming in here. So, anyway. That was the last year, and all the other years were good. I made decent grades and, so, anyway. When I finished, I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. And I don't know exactly what I want to do now *[laughs]*. So, but anyways, it was good. It was, like I said, my first public job was in Montgomery, Alabama. And, so I got it and I enjoyed working with it for the time I worked with it. But, I've also had short courses at other universities. But the main two was Alcorn in Lorman, Mississippi and Tuskegee in Alabama. So, that's about the extent of my education. *[laughs]*

[00:13:10]

**AH:** What did you study at those places?

[00:13:12]

**LB:** Well, at Alcorn, I studied Agriculture Education. And, at Tuskegee, it was Agriculture Science Education. So, it was somewhat similar, with a little more science courses. So, it was good, I enjoyed both of them.

[00:13:36]

**AH:** Can you talk more about the experience of being there? Of leaving home?

[00:13:40]

**LB:** Well, it was somewhat an experience when I went. I had never stayed away from home very much when I went to Alcorn. It was a challenge the first few days, few weeks. But, after the first semester, I guess I got adjusted and when I would come back home, it didn't seem right anymore. So, I was always glad to get back there. And, so, you know, I guess I was maturing and what have you. And I learned to accept everything and focus on the grades. And I had, it was a family environment, you know. All the teachers and what have you, it was very family like. So it seemed like a second home. And, of course, at Tuskegee, it was similar, it was good relationship with the faculty. And, I enjoyed the classes that I took. And, it looked like it was just a short period of time. You know, it was very short. But I really enjoyed it and I guess I learned something, I'm not sure. *[laughs]* But anyway. It gave me a good base to somewhat endure the different things I needed to face, you know. Some challenges and what have you. You look back on your training and you are somewhat able to direct yourself, direct a path through whatever complications you have. So, I'm really proud of both experiences, from both schools. It was good. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. So, basically, like I said, I came back and just shifted from the, maybe the, instruction side to doing the instruction side. I got a chance to put a lot of things into practice when I came back here. And I actually started working on the farm.

So, you're not a scientist, but you have to deal with some scientific things. You're not an economist, but you have to deal with some economics. You're not a psychologist, but you have to use some principles to guide yourself. You're not an accountant, but you have to *[laughs]* learn to deal with some accounts. So, just about any walk of life, any profession. You're not an engineer, but you have to find yourself doing some things that engineers do. As just about any. You're not a horticulturist, but you have to find yourself grafting some trees sometime. And, you're not an agronomist, but sometimes you find yourself having to deal with the soil to get it corrected. So, just about any profession, the farm incorporates just about all of those. And, how you deal with them makes you either more successful or less. So, that's the. You're not a mechanic. But sometimes you have to do some mechanical things. You're not an electrician, but sometimes, you have to deal with electrical. So, it's pretty much, pretty much you get experience, hands on, in all of those different areas. I mean, you're not an instructor, but sometimes you have to give out instructional information. And, so, that's the challenge here, of being where I am today. You just incorporate just about everything that you can think about. And the good parts, you can experience it right here on the farm. So, that's the part I like. We've also had some other people that help us a little bit. So, we give them some training, knowing how to market. You're not a professional marketer, but you have to know how to market. And, so, just about any profession you can think of, it dips over into what goes on here on the farm. So, you're not a public relationist, but you have to deal with public relations *[laughs]*. So, it incorporates it all. So, I enjoy it. I enjoy it. And then, the next thing, it brings quite an array of other people with different experiences into where I am. And, when you bring those into where I am, I get benefits. They come get benefits from me.

And I get benefits from them. So, it's a win-win situation all the way. I don't have all the answers, but anyway, I'm willing to, and I listen to anybody. If they have a good solution, what have you, I take it. And, just, if I can use it, I use it. And if I cannot use it I don't. But whatever I have, I have no secret information. If anybody, any person needs to ask me any questions what I'm doing or how I do it, I explain it the best of my ability. And, that's about, that's about it.

[00:20:23]

**AH:** Out of all those different parts of farming, what's your favorite?

[00:20:28]

**LB:** Well, I guess the herbs would be my favorite, because, well I have to give my uncle credit, some years ago. He's the one that introduced me to the herbs. Of course, he's no longer with us. But, it's so many benefits you get. It's so many benefits you get from the herbs. First of all, it makes food taste good. And then, on the other side, it has medicinal purposes and there are things that you can take, make teas, what have you, to eat, that actually make you feel good. So [*laughs*] its, I'd say that would have to be my number one. It's quite a bit of work in it, but, you know when you enjoy something, it doesn't seem like its work, you know. But, that would be. And then, on the other hand, you never know it all. The more you learn about the herbs. The less you know you know. [*laughs*] So that's, it's so much to be known, so it's just frightening. The things that you can know. So, daily just about, we experience. If its no more than experiencing how to take care of a plant. Certain plants, I do music and seems like some plants do a little better with music. And, some need more water. Some need different soils. They're pretty much like human beings. They need different things. So, there's just so much to be known about each plant.

It’s just so much to be known until you wouldn’t believe the various things that you could know. So the more you know, the less you find out that you do know. [*laughs*] That’s what I’m finding out. So, you only have some of the answers. And, then its so many different ways you can use an herb. You can, for example, let’s say lemongrass, which makes a real good tea. But you can also use it in cooking chicken, fish, different soups and numerous other things. So, it’s, so that’s the good part about the herbs is no one way to use them. You can use, if you decide you want to take a mint, you might say, well, I want to make me a mint tea, or I want to make me some mint butter. I mean, its just so many different ways you can use it. And that’s the good part about it. So, you never get bored [*laughs*]. You never get bored using herbs. And then the next thing is they’re really good for you. They’re really good for you. So, one of the great philosophers said that, I believe he said, herbs was food and food is medicine. I think that’s the way he put it. But, I agree with him because, the more you use herbs, the better you going to feel. Aloe vera, for example, it’s an easy plant to grow. Real easy to grow, just about anybody can grow it. And, if you get burned or cut, you’ve got immediate remedy. It will soothe a burn right quick. It will also help heal a cut. And, you can also make a quick tea with it, and numerous other things you can do with it. So, that’s the good part about herbs. Not only aloe vera, but all kinds of herbs you can just pick your choice. You can go from A to Z with different things you can do. So, that’s my favorite. I do like dealing with the livestock. We’ve always had livestock. I like that. I like the dealing with the timber, seeing the trees develop. And when you manage the timber, you’re also managing wildlife. Because its giving them good food to eat, so. So, it’s just, it’s just hard to say. I like this and don’t like that [*laughs*]. No matter which one you pull out of the bag, its got

good qualities.

[00:25:54]

**AH:** Can you talk more specifically about the other herbs that you're growing?

[00:25:58]

**LB:** Well, right now, we're mainly, right now what we have on hand, we've got basil. We've got lemon basil. We've got thai basil. We've got the sweet basil. Which is pretty much something that most people use that use herbs. It's a real good herb to use which means you can put it in quite a few dishes. You can also make salads with them, you can make teas. We have the, like I mentioned earlier, the lemongrass, which makes a real good, that's my favorite tea, lemongrass, I like it. And, lets see, we've got several different kinds of mint. We've got the chocolate mint, which is good to make a tea, and you can also put it in vanilla ice cream it's good that way. We've got pineapple mint. We've got apple mint. We've got grape mint. We've got, let's see, lemon balm. Lemon balm is a good mint that you can also, if you have trouble sleeping, you can take a cup of it before you go to bed and it relaxes you. Let's see, did I miss one? We've got orange mint, minito mint. And, we've got bee bam, which is good for making teas. You also can make a nice bread with the flowers of the bee balm. I'm sure I'm missing [*laughs*] I'm sure I'm missing one or two, but. Let's see, we have bay leaves. Bay leaves makes a good tea. Bay leaf tea is good for people with diabetes. And, let's see what else we've got. We've got stevia, which is good for sweetening things natural way. You don't have to use granular sugar. And, let's see what else. We've got the rosemary. Rosemary's real good for your skin, good for digestion, good for putting in many different dishes. We've also got the curry. Curry's good for cooking chicken, well you can cook other kind of meats.

You know, its good. Curry and thyme. Thyme is also good. Let's see, I think right now, let's see, did I miss anything we've got on hand right now. We do have a little mullen on hand, which is good for medicinal purposes. Of course, we've got the mushrooms. Let's see, what else we've got, we're overlooking? We have banana leaf, which is good for baking. We use that. And we've got, I mentioned the rosemary, I mentioned. I think that may be, oh, I think that might be close. Well, we do have a little ginger root growing, ginger. Well, we take the root and make the tea. So, we do have the ginger growing. And, I'm sure I'm overlooking some right now. We do have some herbs that we don't, we've got angel grass growing, which is good for medical purposes. We've got gyro, which is good for medical purposes. Also good for making salads. We've got sorrel, which is good for salads. We've got purslane, which is good for salads. Many of them have other purposes also. I'm sure I'm missing something [laughs], but that's the basis of what we've got right now that I can think. Some things are just annuals so some of them have played out right now. But, we constantly looking for new herbs to add, new herbs that we can try, that's beneficial. We do have comfrey, which is good for several different things you can use it for. But one particular, it's a good pain type, it eliminates pain. And, we have a eucalyptus. Eucalyptus is good for making teas and you can also add it into other herbs and make an infusion of other things that you can do to. We do have the horehound, which is good for flus and colds and what have you, we've got it. We have the garlic chives and we do have onions. And we do have, right now the sage, well we do have pineapple sage. We have orange sage. We have the broadleaf sage. So, the more I think, the more I think I've overlooked. But, I know I'm overlooking some, but we do have, we

have a great deal of choice right now. We're trying to add other herbs that's beneficial each year.

[00:32:14]

**AH:** How did you gain all this knowledge of how to grow herbs well and their medicinal qualities?

[00:32:22]

**LB:** Well, trial and error was a big part of it. And then, reading books. I have several books and I read that. Got some information from Mississippi State. And, we had a, we had an herbalist to come by and give me some information. Wherever I can find people with information, or find companies that's got type of seed or plant that I think that I can use, I'm willing to try it. So it's not a one way street, but it's wherever you can. You know, you get hungry for information, you just search for it anywhere you can find it. Some you find on the internet. It's just, its just no one particular place. And many time you run across people that's got some valuable information on certain herbs, certain ones that's good for this or that or how to use it. So, I make a list of, make notes of whatever people tell me. And we try to research it and see if it will work out. There are many, many herbs that I don't know about that grow natural. Most time, you driving down the road, you can see trees with the little berries on it, that's called sumac, which is good for colds and you can mix that with lemons. And that's really good. So, it's quite a few things that we see and we don't really know. Burdock is one that's good for quite a few things. It's the tree that's got the little stickers on it, the little. It doesn't grow that big, but it's got a lot of medical purposes. Sassafrass is got a lot of medical purposes. Peppergrass, I'm trying to grow it again. It is some natural peppergrass, but it's, what I planted on the

peppergrass, it didn't come up. I don't know if it's seed or what. But anyway, the peppergrass is good for you. The poke, which you call, it's got the salad. We call it poke salad. It's really good for you. Hopefully next year, I'll take some to the market. So its just so many things around you that's beneficial. Until, you just in a world of good stuff right around you know. And all you got to do is, if you know to reach out and touch it, it's good to, it's got some benefits. So, and then, you know, you learn how to use it once you know the plant, you know how to use it. So, that's the fascinating part, you know. It's just getting what grows natural and learning how it use it. The fig tree, the fig leaves on the tree is good for different things. It's just so many valuable plants and valuable herbs until, it's just mind taking to think about what all's out here and what its good for. So that keeps me motivated. *[laughs]* Keeps me motivated. And I really enjoy it. I enjoy just searching for new things. Trying it, and see what's it's like, what it tastes like, what it smells like. And that's one thing about the herbs. Most time they've got a distinct smell or they've got a distinct flavor. And, so it's almost like they got their personal personalities. So that's the good part also. So, we going to continue to try to find more and see what they'll do.

[00:36:54]

**AH:** How do you educate your customers about this wealth of knowledge *[laughs]* of herbs?

[00:37:01]

**LB:** Well, it's been fun. Its really been fun because we have people from all walks of life. They come up and we explain what we have. And they'll be surprised to know that this plant can be used for that or for different things. So, we try to pass on and then we have,

most of the time we have a notebook, we have ways of, if they ask a particular question about an herb, we try to give them a quick answer. We try to find the answer. If we don't have it, we'll get it and get back to them. But, it's been interesting to see the different people that come up and they're fascinated. If it's no more they're fascinated by the smell. Some people just want to come over and smell the herbs, so. We get, that motivates us when other people are interested. So, we are motivated to try to learn a little bit more, tell them a little bit more, get them to try certain herbs and when they try it and come back and ask more, then you feel like you have won [*laughs*]. You feel good when they come back and ask for more lemongrass, ask for more peppermint, spearmint. Whatever herb they tried. And we have people now that will say, "Well, I tried this, I want to try something different this time." And, so, it's an ongoing thing and they, when the people get benefits, then we get benefits because it motivates us to try to learn a little bit more, try to look up answers for them, and try to provide what they want. Sometimes we don't have what the customers want. But, we do our best to try to get it. And, so it's just been super. And sometimes the customers will give us a hint about something and we'll check it out and we just add that to our volume of knowledge [*laughs*]. We just add it, so we just keep adding on. And then, like I say, we're constantly searching for ways that we can use the herbs and we pass that on to the customers. It's been a very good building process and we enjoy it. Yeah, I have my nephews, they look forward to showing up at the markets because they are fascinated with the information just like I am. They're fascinated. And they drive me, they push me, "You going to be at the market today?" "Yeah." [*laughs*] So it's something that once you get into it and you see the array, the large amount of people that really come over and get information, sometimes people just

want information. Sometimes people have herbs growing and they don't know how to use them, they don't know what to do with them so we'll tell them how they can use them.

And they're surprised. "I didn't know that, I just had it growing. I got all this growing and what do you do with it?" So, we tell them a good reason and that makes their day. So, that's the way we go.

[00:40:54]

**AH:** So you sell at the farmers' market. Can you talk about the culture of the farmers' market? What's it like there?

[00:41:04]

**LB:** Well the farmers' market is really, is somewhat like a big family. People come in and after they've been there two or three times, then they expect you to be there. That's a *[laughs]* that's another thing, they expect you to be there. Sometimes people will come up and they'll say. Occasionally we do miss. For some reason, we have missed a few markets occasionally. And they'll say, well, "I didn't see you last week." And I'll say, "No, I didn't see you, I wondered where you were." *[laughs]* And they said, "You weren't here" And, but anyway. They expect you to be there and of course we look forward to seeing some of them also. We look forward to repeats. And that's where we feel like we have grown when you get people coming back. We've got quite a few repeats, so that's the good part. And then, we constantly have new people coming in, some just discovered the market. So they come in and they take on that same type of attitude. "Will you be back?" They'll ask a question, "Will you be back next week?" "Yeah." So then, we look forward to seeing them, they looking forward to seeing us. So, its been, our business has been building. We have grown from the very first day that we started. So we're constantly

growing and the customer base is growing. We've had quite a few customers that have come out to the farm. So, its kind of like, its not exactly like a supermarket. You think, you go in, you don't have that relationship if you go into a supermarket. You may see somebody you know. But, even the vendors all, they feel like, they expect to see us there, other vendors. So, it's just more like a family type atmosphere. It's just enjoyable, you know, because you coming together with people with the same cause, main cause.

Everybody's basically on the same page, as they say. So, that's what makes it good. It makes it like you going to a family meeting, a family get together, you know. And, people will see you, I got a call this morning, from a group up in Holly Springs. They invited me to come up on the 19th and speak to their, I don't know what name of the club, but anyway. That happened just this morning. But they feel like, when people feel like you've got something to offer, and to me it's an honor to ask me to come. Because, it makes me feel like I got something to offer. So, you get spin off effects. You get, like I said, its all types of benefits right at the market. Because, like I said, its just new people coming in all the time and then, the people that's there, sometimes you don't even know their names, but they seem like you've been knowing them forever. So, it's that type of relation. So, my deal is that we don't really sell, people say sometime, they say, "You really a good salesman." I say, "No, I don't sell herbs," I say, "I sell relationships."

*[laughs]* So, when you develop that relationship, then people will come back to you and that's where we're at.

[00:45:25]

**AH:** How long have you sold at the Farmers' Market?

[00:45:29]

**LB:** Well this is the second, this is our second year. We started, really, from the get go, I really didn't intend to really do that much at the farmers' market to be honest. But, it was just such an experience, until you just couldn't help but to go back that time, and then you say, ok I'll go back one more time, so you get hooked and you just. So, it's not all about the money. It's not all about the money. We do make some money. But it's, like I say, its the other benefits you get, the benefits of doing something good for people. And, my thing is, if they use my product, it's going to make them a better person. I strongly believe that and they believe it. So, as long as you're helping somebody, then money, that's not, money can't buy that. So, I enjoy it and it's motivated me to do more and each time I go and come back I'm thinking about new ways that I can improve on what I'm doing. Improve on the marketing strategy, improve on the quality of the product. It's just good therapy for you all the way around [*laughs*]. And then you, like I say, when you get back to the farm you get quite a bit of physical exercise because when you bending over doing this or standing up doing that, you get some exercise benefit also. So that's good for your body.

[00:47:36]

**AH:** Do you sell your herbs in other ways besides the farmers' market?

[00:47:41]

**LB:** Basically, we've had, like I say, people come out here and buy. But that's predominately where we've sold the bulk of them. Actually, I started off, just, when I first started, I really started, before I started going to the farmers' market, I started just growing a few things here and when people come by, I give them some of this or some of

that. They take it home and try it, then they started asking, coming back, do you have some of this or some of that. And, that's one thing that motivated me to, maybe more people need this. Because I really started off just growing it for my personal use. And, so, its expanded to where there's no way I can use all I grow [*laughs*]. So, I'm forced to go to the market. But that's the major place that I sell it, at the market. Like I said, small number of people come here and get things, and that's growing also. Some people, when the market is closed, some people come here and get. And I'm having more, had people come from Charleston, I've had people come from Grenada, I've had people come from Houston, Mississippi. And, even had one guy came from Texas. He had heard what I had. Of course, he had people living in Winona. So he came, each time he comes, he'll come over here and get things to take back to Texas with him. So we've had people out of Winona come up here. And, I'm sure Tennessee. Ok, I haven't kept up, I started making a list, but I haven't kept up with everybody, but I'm going to do a better job on that. But we've had people from quite a few places that hear about it. I had a guy yesterday, local guy. He doesn't live too far from here, but anyway, he had never been here. He said, he heard about it, so he came yesterday. And had some people come from Sardis, Sardis, Mississippi. I just haven't kept up, but I've had people come from quite a, as they hear about it, they will want to come. I've had quite a few calls, people want to know if they can come over. And the answer's always yes. So, it's getting more popular [*laughs*] as time goes on.

[00:50:34]

**AH:** You talked a lot about herbs, can you tell me more about the other things that you grow here?

[00:50:41]

**LB:** Other than herbs? Well the main thing, well I'm growing the goats. I'm trying to develop a good meat type goat. So, we're trying to do some cross breeding. And, we're trying to get a fast growing meat goat. So, we're working on that. And we're also growing Angus cattle. So, that's pretty much, just, they're not pure bred other than the bull. He's registered, but we do have a number of Angus cattle. So we are, they serve as income, they also serve as helps to keep the farm from growing, as they say, growing up. Growing the unwanted vegetation. They do a good job getting in places that you can't get in with a bush hog or tractor. So, that's part of, like I say, provides some income. It also provides helping to take care of the farm. And then the goats, they will eat the undergrowth, and then it grows more grass for the cattle. So, everything works hand and hand and it just seems like it goes together and it doesn't seem like a separate entity. It seems like its all kind of fused together. Its somewhat like when you burn, do burning on the timber, you kill out some of the undergrowth. It lets the trees grow faster, it also brings in new grass and food for the deer. And, it also makes more the turkeys like to scratch in the ashes.

*[phone rings, recorder paused]*.

[00:53:05]

**AH:** Ok, we just had a little interruption, but we're back. Mr. Brown, I'd like to hear what you have to say about the Oxford community and the Lafayette County community.

[00:53:20]

**LB:** Well, I really think it's been perfect in my sight as to the support that they have given the farmers' market. They come out in good weather, they come out in bad weather.

They come out early. So, they've been absolutely great as to the support. And if you've got what they can use or need, then they will get it. So, that's been, I have no complaint on the support that they have supported the market. So, it's been, I don't know exactly how long the market's been in operation. But I do know that more and more people from around the university in Oxford community, they are coming out. Some people only finding out about it. We had people Tuesday. Each market, each time we come, we have new people that didn't know the market was going on. And so they say, “Well, we'll be coming back.” So they will. And we have quite a few students that have found out about the market and they come out and support us. And, so I have, I give them an A for support. *[laughs]*

[00:54:49]

**AH:** How do you see yourself as a part of the community?

[00:54:53]

**LB:** Well, you know, Oxford is no stranger. I live in Water Valley. But, we have always done business there, so it seems like just right up the road. But, I feel more a part now that people look forward to me providing them things that they want. And, it makes me feel like, well, that's I've got to do this as part of my duty. So that's my goal, anytime a person wants something and I have the ability to produce it, then I make sure we do it, I make sure we get it. And that's what we strive for, is to make, have 100% happy customers. So, right now, we have no complaints from the customers. Sometimes we don't have as much product as they need, but we are striving to, as we learn what the market demands, we are trying to produce more and more of what they really want. So, that's our goal is to give 100% satisfaction. Sometimes we just don't have the product at

the time. Sometimes it's in the growing stage, but. And sometimes we don't have it at all. But we will, we do our best to try to get it. I have a, whenever people tell me, I have a list of some things I've never heard of, but it's my goal to try to get them. Try to research it and see if it's possible. And if it's possible to grow it. Now some things just don't grow well in this particular climate. But if we can grow it, we will do it. If we can get it, if we can get the seed, we do have the space to grow out here. We have the space. And if we get it, we'll definitely grow it.

[00:57:13]

**AH:** Can you talk more about your mushroom operation?

[00:57:18]

**LB:** Well the mushroom has been an unexpected [*laughs*], I really didn't start out to do a commercial operation with the mushroom. I really started out, just something for personal use and had no idea that it was a big demand for it. So, actually I'm having to expand and I'm in the process now of expanding. You cannot produce them overnight, but it takes a while to produce them. But, we are trying to close that gap. We're trying to close it and be able to, you know, because some people almost dare me to come back to the market if I don't bring some mushrooms [*laughs*]. So, I've got to, so we're in the process now of working on our facilities and what have you, so. We've got a lot of work out here to do in order to meet the demand. But the demand is there, it's just a matter of producing the product. But, the market, I say the market is there, more so on the mushrooms than any other product we've got. It's unreal as to the demand, which I did not know. But at the same time, we're having to do some catching up. So, we're going to try to close the gap as soon as possible. But we got people right now on a waiting list [*laughs*]. We got people,

we had to cut our supply smaller. We started out letting each customer have a pound, but we had to cut it in half because we didn't have enough. And we yet don't have enough. But, like I say, we're working on it. So, it's been good and for some reason people like the quality. They like the quality. I don't know what about the ones we're producing. But everybody just say, "Oh they were just so good." [*laughs*] So, I suppose they got good quality and one thing we do have natural water, mushrooms have to have quite a bit of water. We have natural water with no chlorine and what have you. So, that may be making a difference, I'm not sure. But anyway, the only thing we've got to do is try to produce more. We've got to, and we're working on that daily. If you don't believe it, just come look [*laughs*], we're working on it. But it takes at least twelve months to get the mushrooms starting to produce. And then after they produce, they have to have a waiting period. And of course they like temperature between 50 and 80 degrees. So we're trying to work on our environmental part, we're trying to, several areas we're working on at the same time. We're getting there, just give us a little more time. We'll be there.

[01:00:41]

**AH:** And I know you grow fruit too, what are some of the fruits that you grow?

[01:00:48]

**LB:** Well, right now, we're trying to grow a few muscadines and persimmons and we are trying to increase our figs. We have, well, like I say, we're very limited on what we have. But we do have, we're trying to increase the blueberries and maybe, we're thinking about adding a few other things. We've got some tropical things growing, like the banana tree. We're mostly using the leaves from the banana tree for people who like to bake and make their food taste good. We're not heavy into the fruit area, but like I say, we didn't start off

with that. We've had a great supply of pears and so we're trying to increase, we have to increase with the, we also have to look at the manpower we have to somewhat care for the various items we have, so. But, we're going to push it to the brim if we can, we'll study trying to climb up the hill on it. So, its getting better but it takes a little time, takes work, takes, right now, it took quite a bit of water because we were short of rainfall. That's one thing that held us back somewhat this year. But, we're doing a little bit of irrigating and we'll probably have to do more of that in the future. But, we're working on it.

[01:02:48]

**AH:** Who else works with you on the farm?

[01:02:53]

**LB:** Well, the main, we don't have any permanent employees. We do have, use some student labor when its not, when they're not busy in classwork, what have you. But, that's mainly the, when it comes to the herb part, that's mostly the help that we've used. Some of the other work that we do, it takes more skills to do. So, from time to time we have people that just maybe do, use them as you need them. No permanent employees, yeah.

[01:03:44]

**AH:** Beyond the farm, what are some important things in your life?

[01:03:53]

**LB:** Well, I guess [*laughs*], just trying to do things in the community, make people's lives better. Trying to work with the nephews, not only my nephews, but other school age children that would like to learn how to do something. Maybe learn how to drive a tractor or something. So, we do other things. Of course, that's part of the farm, but we like to do

a little local traveling and see what other people are doing. I do also work with the Central Boiler Heating System, it’s an outdoor wood heater which is somewhat coordinated with the, that's one thing that I use to heat my greenhouse, which it cuts the cost. So, I have the Mississippi area to deal with. And, so, it keeps me busy also. Going around and helping other people get set up with their situations. So it’s, so all of these require a great amount of time. But I do like the heater operation because it does provide, it helps sustain the farm and also, like I say, you meet different people with different ideas, and then once you get them set up, it makes them happy that they got an item on their property that saves them a lot of money. So you have no time to be bored, there's always something to do. This particularly Saturday, I will be at the Vardaman Sweet Potato Festival advertising the heater.

[01:06:26]

**AH:** Well, you've shared a lot of wonderful insights and stories. I'm wondering if there's any other insights or stories that you'd like to share?

[01:06:37]

**LB:** Well, right now, I can't think of anything particular. This, I think I touched on, I might could go in depth at some point on other things. But right now, this is pretty much touches on most of the things that I'm involved with. You know we deal, you know I'm involved with the church and different other organizations around the community. So, that takes part of your time also, so. It's just, and then, you know, we have [*laughs*] many people in the community, when you're not working on a job 8 to 5, they think you're free so they call on you [*laughs*]. They call on you with their problems. I had one lady call me this morning. So, you have to try to find a way, even if you don't have time. You have to

try and find a way to help solve their problems. Sometimes that issue is not important to me, but it's important to them. So, you try to find a way, rather than just saying well I just can't do this. You try to find a way to say no to them in a way that makes them happy.

*[laughs]* So, that takes a little doing also. But, but that's pretty much keeps you busy and so I don't have any other burning story right at the present time. But, this is somewhat sums up where I am right now.

[01:08:41]

**AH:** Maybe you could wrap up by sharing your hopes or your vision for your farm and for the community you live in?

[01:08:52]

**LB:** Well, I guess my vision is to have something like when my parents were here, they made sure that, hoping that it would be here that we could enjoy it. So, hopefully, we can leave it in a shape where other people can enjoy it. And right now, this is happening. Cause we have quite a few people that enjoy this spot that they purchased years ago. And they enjoy it and people in different ways. Many people come out here with their four wheelers and they enjoy riding sometimes they just like to go out and make pictures in the woods, photographs in the woods of different things. And some come back and show me what they found. It's quite a few people that we got three different sets of people that's involved in hunting clubs. They come out. So, it's quite a few people that enjoy. Some people come out and they like to fish. So, they enjoy that. And that's what makes me happy when I can see other people being happy with something that you have a hand in. So that, like I say, it's not all about the money. But, when you can make somebody happy and see that they enjoying something that you got a hand in, then that's, to me that's very

important. So, the family, when they come around, they, and everything don't interest everybody. Some people would be interested in watching the goats, looking at the goats. Some would be interested in watching the cows. Some would be interested in seeing what's out, you know the birds flying around. Some be interested in the cats, some be interested in the dogs, some be interested in the horses. So we have a variety of all these things that, and everybody don't have the same interest. So when they come out and they see something that they enjoy and like to, you know, be involved with that. Well that makes my day, you know, so. So, that's the focus at the house up in here. That's enjoyable, that's workable, that's good for you. And, to me, you can't ask for much more [*laughs*]. That's about the way I see it.

[01:11:49]

**AH:** Well thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate this interview.

[01:11:53]

**LB:** You're certainly welcome anytime that you feel like I can, again, be available to offer any explanations or what have you, just feel free, anytime. I appreciate you stopping by.

[01:12:10]

**AH:** Thank you, Mr. Brown.

[01:12:12]

**LB:** You're welcome.

[01:12:15]

