

**Vermont Folklife Center
Audio Log**

Project: Archie Green Project

Interviewer: Andy Kolovos

Interviewee: Carl Cushing

Interviewee Contact:

Location: Vermont Livestock Slaughter and Processing, Ferrisburgh, VT

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Time	Content	Keyword 1
START-00:00:25	Introductions.	Introduction
00:00:25-00:16:12	One of 10 siblings, raised everything they ate. Mom worked nights, Dad days, grew everything they ate including bread. Later changed to taking advantage of new products, home raising took backseat. Used to cut meat at home. Age 15 started working in meat plant in summers, learned to butcher until age 17, did that for 7 years. Got high school credit for it. Did that until 23, then did meat inspection for 32 years. Retired as Director for Food Safety and Consumer Protection for Vermont Agency of Agriculture and Food Markets in 2007, then came to current job. Grew up in Milton. Kids shared work with Mom and Dad who did canning. Kids worked in garden, barn, brought up to help. Both parents worked outside and inside. Shared many products made at home with family friends and visitors, always sharing. Is middle child of 10. Garden was just over an acre, had fruit trees, vegetables, grapevines. Anything to can, including minced meat, stews. Born 1953, most active in home help 5-6 years old. Had 450 chickens for eggs. Late 50s/early 60s started decreasing by 1970s, most kids had grown up	Childhood, homesteading, producer, processing, institution, Vermont Agency of Agriculture and Food Markets, family, slaughter, polio, rewarding, freezer, storage, work ethic

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	<p>and left home. Still rely on that upbringing, today many people going back to that lifestyle. Parents were both from farm families. Dad had farm in Waterford, VT shared with his Dad. Did logging, maple sugaring, dairy. Dad worked in milk testing, lost leg in service, ended up working for state during day and helped at home if he could. Mom was from farm family, lost both parents early, but remembered her father as itinerant slaughter. Let neighbors know about slaughter, would help neighbors slaughter in fall. Other grandfather did same thing. Didn't feel that connection when started this business, learned that later on. Only knew his own home experience at first. Had challenges as kid, got polio and was paralyzed at young age, worked very hard to get mobility back and interested in meat industry even though lots of hard work. Inspection seemed better option because didn't have to do hard physical work, and already knew industry well. Worked there for retirement benefits. Parents were very innovative with vegetable and fruit growing practices, tried to grow anything. Some of it out of necessity to support 10 kids. Appreciate it more now than as kid, a lot of work but gave all siblings a work ethic to plan day and accomplish something. Very rewarding to see those accomplishments. A little spoiled now with conveniences, but glad to have that experience. Everyone could benefit from experience like that and from hard work. Even with work, always had free time and family time. Didn't work Sundays as Irish Catholic family. Very tangible reward in hard work. "You could look back over your work, and there's a reward that you get and you can't explain that to somebody. When you look over what you've done, and the way that it looks and the way that you were taught to do it, and that it meant that something was going to come back to you tenfold, there was a reward that you just can't explain, yet, it's a sense, you have to feel it. I'm glad I had that." Grew and raised 90+% of family's own food. In harvest time especially always gave food away, particularly in fall. Was 11 when had first store-bought</p>	

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	bread. Then got another freezer or store bought bread. Had 4 large chest freezers, bread in one, frozen corn, making sure always had supply of food.	
00:16:12-00:21:08	Brother was cutting meat in retail store, then went into commercial processing facility when Carl working on farm a lot. Offered Carl a job even though only 15 and had to be 16 to handle a knife. Got opportunity to do other things before cutting meat, then asked to work on Friday during school year because other people couldn't come in. Homeroom shop teacher came into store, held secret they were both cutting school. Teacher helped him get credit for meat cutting. Hard work, but very interesting. Very high volume low profit job, need to move product. As got older, lifting was getting harder with leg brace so decided to stay in industry but move towards meat inspection. Worked well to utilize talents, represented 28-State Meat Inspection Program as President. Liked responsibility of keeping meat industry safe and healthy for consumers, but require lots of on your feet time. Now, cut meat, teach, and influence others to share knowledge. Worked as meat cutter for 8 years before becoming inspector at age 23. Were no inspectors in meat processing plants until 1968/9.	Processing, high school, volume, profit, inspection, institution, 28-State Meat Inspection Program, health, safety,
00:21:08-00:28:45	Change in health outcomes of meat industry because of inspection. Was need for inspection, some people saw industry as money rather than food and didn't always protect food well enough. Necessary, like laws for speeding, just want to stop those who are taking shortcuts. First bad experience, called by Montpelier who had woman concerned about meat. Showed him package of meat with red fat, so animal had died other than by slaughter. Husband came, was upset and told Carl to leave. Started investigation, found out farmer had animal that died, buried it in spring, hired person took animal back and thawed it and sold it as fresh. Those experiences few, but that person saw it as money. Farmer didn't know, farmer's helper did, and woman was very upset. Felt more comfortable about doing inspection after that to protect people. Also, people come in and	Inspection, health, safety, spoiled, regulation, policy

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	<p>complain about regulations and Carl tries to help them get animal slaughtered and processed they way the farmer wants it, even selling on farm and getting them a logo. Build relationships with local farmers, don't want to injure the industry, just want to help farmers get the business they want. Doesn't want regulation to be intimidating, wants it to be helpful and get people to buy direct from farmer. Regulated industry, saw need for it, didn't always understand rules, but now tries to make it make sense for farmers. Some producers start out with only one animal, gives Carl chance to give back to people whereas before just had to follow a rule book. Always supporting cause for regulation and the need to have it enforced. Try to explain rather than just point to the rules.</p>	
00:28:45-00:30:19	<p>Employed by state of Vermont, first state in Union to provide state employees as meat inspectors to do federal work. Certified in 1984 as federal inspector for meat, poultry, import/export. Everyone was trained for whatever was needed within Vermont.</p>	Employee, inspection, federal government
00:30:19-00:38:31	<p>Normal day at age 15 was cutting wholesale parts for further processing. Also had retail people looking for small cuts. Had varied responsibilities and cuts. On Saturday, 10 people worked to wait on customers coming in for small cuts. In evening, could cut custom meats if animal was slaughtered under inspection. Was very busy given size of Vermont. Slaughterhouse connected to was largest in New England at the time. Shipped a lot of product south and west of Vermont to be processed into other products. Last 6 months worked in mainly retail shop, then went into inspection. At Carl's current business, thinks of it as a service, works for the owner of the animal. Slaughters, processes, and sends some to distributor if needed. Natural fad came, then organic, now local growing most. Field calls of people looking for local meat products, direct them to farms selling direct. Non-GMO also important to people. Slaughterhouse just got organic certification this week, because more interest now than before. When came</p>	Retail outlet, processing, inspection, distributor, service, producer, local, organic, GMO, consumer, market, expanding business, institution, Hannaford Career Center

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	<p>here, quadrupled the business and had to start turning people away. Trying to build larger slaughterhouse to accommodate more people. Wants to train more people, currently work with Hannaford Career Center in Middlebury to train new people in meat cutting classes/lab. Wants to do more of that and make it more formal, open program to out of state folks too. Now certified to process organic animals to maintain organic credit of animal. Organic animals have to be kept separate, must be fed organic hay or grain if they stay overnight, and must stay together when killed. Must be processed first in morning as lot, then wash and go to next lot of animals. Everything else the same, cleaning materials included. Had to get organic seasoning company because were buying from commercial company before for value added products. Looking forward to maintaining organic certification, gives producers opportunity to maintain premium for organic animals.</p>	
00:38:31-00:46:34	<p>When started current operation, previous owner did mainly custom work for owner's own use. Last owner was 72, didn't want to continue because felt there were no more farms left in area, but Carl thought the opposite. Many slaughter facilities are seasonal and close mid-winter to summer. Carl wanted to have year-round operation, searched for farms doing year-round slaughter by promising spots during busy season. Took business from \$230,000 and by year 3 over \$1 million gross sales. Quickly realized that facility was old, soils not conducive to waste, not septic system, single-phase power, electricity was very expensive. Upgraded power system, contribute to land owner, share septic system fees. Also moving towards new building. Very steep learning curve in slaughter industry if you haven't done it before, but value their experiences and relationships with producers. Have 100% satisfaction guarantee, will work to make good business on both sides. Please to work with hard working farmers, salt of the earth folks, people don't rush into livestock. Identifying year-round market is very significant</p>	<p>Seasonal, expanding business, year-round market, education, diversification, consumer, demand</p>

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	<p>to business. In past has always been seasonal to take advantage of summer grazing and fall cool temperatures for storage. Now, consistent need and desire for quality products year-round. Helping young starting farmers to understand how to raise and slaughter animals year round. Key is matching clientele with producers, want to help industry flourish. Discouraged customers don't tend to look twice in same location for product, so want to provide consistency. University of Vermont and other institutions can help with this kind of education about livestock diversification and consumer demand. Doing well, but can do better by listening closely to consumers.</p>	
00:46:34-00:55:11	<p>Vermont went from 20 slaughterhouses to 6, then was big push for more slaughter capacity and are now new facilities. Carl was booked with waiting list, which was not great for farmer because needs slaughter on time. Currently have work but no waiting list, working on modern packaging. Need to fill coolers to stay in business. If can't get product processed on time for producers, both industries hurt. Don't want overabundance of slaughter, but need slaughter. Only time will tell how successful the industry can be, but unless the animal numbers come up, will be difficult for all slaughterhouses to survive. Currently have cattle population at 1951 level, while human population and exports have gone up. Opportunity to raise and slaughter cattle is available, need to increase cattle numbers to satisfy increased processing facilities. More of a buyer's market if you need slaughter, but not a bad thing, competition okay. More prevalent in last year than before. Processors want to be able to provide value added products and packaging, but starting slaughterhouse is not easy with increased numbers. Carl relying on quality service to entice customers for slaughter. New plants that fail will hurt industry because sends message that you can't survive in this industry, and farmers reliant on industry will be hesitant on increasing herd incase more processors shut down. People mean well, many people impacted, keep 12-17,000 acres open for cattle when industry is</p>	<p>Slaughter industry, timeliness, cattle population, processing, value added, quality service, conservation, working landscape</p>

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	successful. If slaughter opportunity wasn't here, wouldn't be conserving land the animals live on. Want new people to be successful because that means everyone is successful, just need to make sure the working landscape works.	
00:55:11-01:00:04	Carl provides a service to make sure you can get product to market. If you don't have a market, try to connect buyers and sellers. Sees producer as the customer, doesn't want to compete with the farmers. Isn't in business to grow and sell animals. One farmer advertises on internet, invites people to visit farm, already has animals sold before slaughter. Meets people with product on trailer, so Carl understands he needs to perform at this producer's needed level of quality. Needs to get animals slaughtered on time. If something goes wrong, all levels of system hurt from producer, distributor, consumer, retail outlets, etc. If need to stay after hours to get things done on time, will do it. Farmers come who went to other processors and were not given promised slaughter dates. There is a tremendous need to do what you say you'll do. Others are trying, but sometimes it doesn't work.	Service, market, producer, consumer, advertising, quality, timeliness
01:00:04-01:08:25	Buyers range from distributors who call to fill orders. Some farmers have their own market, but need to know Carl offers skilled work and USDA inspection. Buyer, seller, distributor, and slaughterhouse need to work together. Try to connect as many people to markets as possible, even taking people from NY. Trying to modernize facility as much as possible to increase efficiency. Small plant, bought it in 1977 after owner wanted out of industry, owner talked to Carl when Carl was meat inspector and 28 years later bought it. Location was perfect for slaughterhouse, on dead end road so won't bother people, sits between two biggest beef counties in the state. Many people trying to start slaughter, more animals coming into slaughter. Farmers want to grow, Carl wants to help them. Try to tell people to book animals in advance, if get too busy have to turn people away and want to	Distributor, consumer, market, institution, United States Department of Agriculture, inspection, location, expanding business, timeliness

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	help grow small businesses. It's a significant commitment to raise animals and not get them into slaughter. Need balance to spread slaughter season.	
01:08:25-01:14:10	Do retail cutting and value added products, ranging from small packages of cuts to sausage, sausage links, curing, smoking, cooking. All help farmers get better income. Carl's plan to offer more value added in larger new plant. "There's nothing in the meat industry that's inexpensive." Equipment very expensive, so have to charge more to farmer to cover cost of machinery, but farmer also makes more money selling value added product. One person from MA visited processing plant and farm just to know where their meat was coming from. Farmer gets credit for quality of meat, Carl gets credit for quality of cut and packaging and processing. Not many customers like that, but makes you feel good about hard work and expertise. Slaughter and processing is an agricultural component, can't separate it, live animals don't get to consumers without going through slaughter. Legislature views it as commercial and industrial activity separated from agriculture. "You can't get any closer to agriculture than what we do." Compost, blood, bones, fats, hides, all used from processing.	Retail outlet, value added, sausage, equipment, consumer, producer, agricultural system, government, animal byproducts
01:14:10-01:17:41	Current value added services include processing down to retail packing and three different kinds of sausage. Next step will be sausage links, experimenting with casings now Will make breakfast, hot, sweet, and Italian sausages. Also soft pressed sausage patty, and machine is very large so need bigger space for it. Need to be conscious of older workers, don't want to strain workers more than already doing. New facility will also feature curing and smoking. Cooked product can get contaminated in air, so will connect producers to other facilities to cook product. Sausage recipe Carl knows is his own from his mom, but at the plant uses recipes based on customer feedback of what they like. Some customers bring in own seasoning, others ask for specific changes in seasoning. Moving forward, would develop own recipes. Food television inspiring people for more	Value added, retail outlet, sausage, equipment, employees, labor, cooking, recipe, consumer

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01:17:41-01:21:55	<p>interesting combinations of flavors, and want to support that.</p> <p>When farmer brings in animals, Carl slaughters and sells the hide as part of slaughter. Head, feet, and intestines picked up by company free of charge. Some farmers ask for bones, but anything farmer doesn't want goes into barrels and same company picks up the waste to be rendered. Carl doesn't get anything for those products. Most producers take back marrowbones for people to eat, make stock. Many parts used to be thrown away are now getting eaten, like pig ears and pig feet. More unique products being sought after. Rendering of other products turns into fat, meat meal for animal food, bones as calcium for chickens, bone meal for fertilizer, yellow fat for chicken feed. Anything going into ruminant feed not happening anymore. Fertilizer and animals feeds plus hides for leather most prominent. Downturn in economy had fewer expensive cars selling, so hides became worthless and cost more to salt them than to sell them. Economy came back and hide prices went back up, helped business survive. Everything has a use, and hides are part of bottom line. Hide buyer sells to another hide buyer, eventually a tanner probably outside the country.</p>	<p>Animal byproducts, slaughter system, producer, consumer, economy, hide</p>
01:21:55-01:27:27	<p>Carl's employees have been in industry for 30 years, newest employee is young lady who is instructor for Hannaford Career Center, learned as student with them. Carl's wife works with him, was florist for 30 years, son working there since young age. Main cutter is older, a father and son pair of previous owner integral to business. Have had fairly low turnover in employment, not as bad as other businesses. Carl likes to give people freedom as long as they have desire to learn. Majority of employees have been long term. Older brother retired, brother in law works now. "If you aren't born in it, you still have an opportunity to be in it, but the influence has to be from people that have been in it. Otherwise they just don't understand the level of responsibility that there is to produce this for the industry." Carl wants to help train people and give necessary exposure to let</p>	<p>Employees, institution, Hannaford Career Center, opportunity, mentor, correctional facility, war veterans</p>

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	<p>people decide if they want to go into the business. Likes working with people from correctional facility, people make mistakes and some really like to work with hands. Carl likes to offer a chance for people to turn around if past is non-violent. Never know if someone will succeed unless you give them the chance, growing up with leg brace Carl recognizes the importance of giving people a chance. Can't put yourself on a pedestal, need to work with people. Also works with war veterans, if they think they can do the job that's good enough for Carl. The industry is difficult and it's a hard job but people may be interested if given the opportunity. Will keep older staff until they want to retire, then hand over to younger and newer people with enthusiasm.</p>	
01:27:27-END.	<p>Seeing your work completed and in pieces gives good sense of satisfaction and reward. Having that attitude going into it that end product is rewarding is key. Carl is very passionate about what he does, maybe because he can do it but also because there is a need for it and the reward is from satisfying a customer for something Carl didn't grow. Reward is providing a needed service in a timely and quality way to help producers grow their own businesses. Reward is working with everyone, from farmers to good people learning the business. "Heaven's not ready for me, Hell's afraid I'll take over, so I'm gonna be here for a while. So while I'm here, I'm gonna do the best I can to try to influence this in a way that works for those that come in contact with us. That's my motivation." Learned that from family. "Don't ever give with an expectation. If you do, you can be hurt. But if you give without an expectation, you'll never be hurt." We do our best, but always looking to improve, and putting your best face forward. Part of what attracts employees, but have to bring their own enthusiasm. Very lucky to have the staff and business they have.</p>	<p>Reward, service, timeliness, expanding business, giving without expectation, family, work ethic</p>