

The following interview is with Mr. Courtney Lasselle at his home in Tigard on May 11, 1978. Mr. Lasselle has been associated with the food processing industry for most of his working life.

The canneries were an integral part in the agricultural life of the farmers in rural Washington County. The interview presents a brief historical look at the inception of canning, from Louis Pasteur to freeze-dried packing. Listening to the tape might be somewhat humorless and factual, but it does provide for an informative look at the various canneries in the county, the crops raised by the growers, the workers themselves, and the future of the industry. Every town in the area had at least one cannery which supplied jobs and food for its citizens. With the mechanization of the industry however, crops such as the Blue Lake pole bean and the Oregon strawberry are no longer being grown. Not only does this mean less employment in the canneries, but less jobs for the seasonal harvesters who are by in large young people, students, housewives, and women. In the interview then, Mr. Lasselle talks of an era that is past.

Mr. Lasselle also donated a number of fine photographs to the museum of the Sherwood and Forest Grove canneries, both interior and exterior views.

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COURTNEY LESSELLE
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INTERVIEW WITH: Courtney Lasselle at his home in Tigard

DATED : May 11, 1978

CONDUCTED BY :

The following interview is with Mr. Courtney Lasselle at his home in Tigard on May 11, 1978. In this interview, he talks about the history of the canning industry in Washington County.

All right, good evening. How are you, Lloyd?

Very good.

That's good. Sure glad to see you up here this evening.

All right.

Well, first off, I'd just like to ask a few personal questions - your age.

Well, (ha ha) I'm no kid any more, that's for sure. I'm 65; I'll be 66 next July.

Uh uh; have you grown up here in this area all your life?

Well, in Oregon for the most of the time; I was born down in Albany, Oregon and then moved up into the Garden Home area, right over here very close, and my folks lived there for awhile and then my father took a job with the California cannery and moved to -- we moved to the San Francisco Bay area -- we lived down the San Francisco Bay area for, oh, three or four years, and then the way things happened, he moved back up here and in the meantime my mother died so I moved back up with a brother that lived down at Eugene - I lived down at Eugene for a couple years - and then finally moved back up to Portland. I've been in the Portland area ever since - that includes back to about the time I was starting right as a freshman at high school. And then I went through high school and went to the University of Oregon - graduated from the University of Oregon after a kind of an intermission in there during

the depression when money was kind of hard to get - but I finally graduated from the University of Oregon.

In just your initial comment, you alluded to your father going down to the Bay area to work in the cannery business; is that how the family got its start in ...

No, my father was in the fruit business, starting about in the, oh, the early 1900's; he had a dried fruit packing business down at Albany. And of course, dried fruit, principally prunes at that time, that business kind of, as you know, it gave way to canned foods. The dried fruit business gave way to canned fruits and canned vegetables. And about, oh around 1920's, the '20's and '25's, and so that time with the dried fruit moving out he went out of business down there in Albany and opportunity came along to work for California cannery down in San Francisco Bay area and he started out working for them in the raw fruit department, buying fruit for them.

Was that the predecessor to the cannery business, was the dried fruit ...

Well, I think you take a look at preserved fruits generally, I think you go back into history - clear back to beginning of time they had dried meats and dried things like that long before they ever had any canned vegetables. Things were dried and salted - brined - before they were canned. I think that's just an evolution of preserving fruit.

Was there quite a few dried fruit operations up in this area also?

Oh, back at that time there were a number of them. In fact, Hutchen (sp?) House at one time was in the dried fruit business. There was an H.S. Gowl (sp?) Company down at Newberg was in dried fruit, and one of the bigger companies - west coast company - was Rosenberg Brothers. And my father also when he came back up from California - moved back up this way - worked for Rosenbergs for awhile in the dried fruit business.

Where was this operation at?

That was in Portland - originally they had a plant in Portland here, and

then later on they moved that plant down to Dallas, Oregon.

All right. When your father moved back up to the Oregon area, did he become involved with the cannery operations up here then?

Yes, to a degree. He worked for awhile kind of as a buyer for the old Grage (sp?) Canning Company, which had plants - small plants scattered around here in the country. They had a plant down here in Sherwood; that's where the Sherwood plant came from. They had a plant in Woodburn; they had one down down at Lebanon, and they had one, I think, over at Tilamook - over on the coast where they canned blackberries. And that cannery went out of business and my father kind of picked up the Sherwood plant and ran it for a couple years. And then that Sherwood plant was eventually bought by R. D. Bodle (sp?) Company and National Fruit Canning Company and then the company my father organized the Portland Canning Company bought the plant from them. And then at the same time about - in about 1936 - we also took over the old C. D. Minton (sp?) - what was left of it - Cannery at Forest Grove and rehabilitated it and put it back in business as the Portland Canning Company. So those two were both parts of the Portland Canning Company.

Now, that was in the early 30's; in fact he started in 1929 and I think Portland Canning Company was incorporated in 1930. But at that time you had Oregon Canning Company at Newberg and of course you had Ray Milling (sp?) at Hillsboro. We had the little plant there in Forest Grove and one at Sherwood. There were a number of cold pack around; in other words, plants that packed frozen berries -- that was just getting started then and it was all in institutional sized containers for selling and remanufacturing as preserves, mostly - there wasn't too much retail business - in other words, packing in small packages to be sold to the consumer of frozen foods at that time. And there were a number of those plants around here in the area too. There was J. B. Chandler here at the bottom of the hill - that came a little later in

the late '30's and early '40's. Then there was R. M. McLaughlin (sp?) Company over at Beaverton; there was a little plant it started during World War II out at Banks; there was one over at Scholls that I think was the start of Hutchen House really in the frozen food business. So there were a number and right here in this area besides of course over in the Gresham area you had Lewis (so?) Packing Company and Scenic Fruit Company - trying to think of ... Gresham Berry Growers of course at that time over there.

I get the impression that most of the canning operations began during the '20's or had their inception here in this area. What began the canning industry? Who ... in other words, who invented the canning operation or the method of canning...

Well, of course you go back to Louie Pasteur for that; he's the one who first figured out the pasteurization which canning is. That goes back to what was it - the Napoleonic wars I think - that he won a prize for figuring out a way to preserve fruits and foods for Napoleon's army, if my history is correct. I may need some correction there, but I believe that's right. But, course then you come to the late 1800's on the east coast, you had companies like - oh, trying to think back - Underwood I think was one of the real old canners. Then, of course, at that time, they made the word can comes from canister which was - tin canister which was hand made - and they used to hand make these cans and they left a little hole in the top and they were all cut out by hand and soldered up by hand. The little hole in the top they put the fruit or vegetable into, then they soldered the top all except for one little hole to let the steam get out until they got them hot -- got the cans heated up - - and then they would close them up tightly to create a vacuum in there and then continue cooking them. And of course you sterilized everything that was in there and it was in a partial vacuum and sterilized and that's what kept the food from spoiling.

So this canning business was just brought across to the west coast, then?

That's right. It started on the east coast; in fact, the big advance in canning was really in California in fruits and vegetables. California still is Mr. Big when it comes to canning. Down there the plants are gigantic and down there they ... I've forgotten the statistics right now but I suppose they can 30 or 40 million cases of things like cling peaches and fruit cocktail -- things like that -- very big pack. Up here in the northwest, originally we canned quite a few pears and then at one time before freezing became popular they used to can quite a few berries up here too. Remember we used to can red raspberries and boysenberries -- canned lots of evergreen blackberries in No. 10 cans -- that was a pretty big item. It still is for certain ... at least it was up until a few years ago; I've kind of gotten away from that now, but the Army used to buy pretty big quantities of canned blackberries for making blackberry pies. But the trend though of course is freezing - very few canned berries any more. I think there's only one or two canneries in Oregon now that can any berries. But pears were big items up here -- still are -- and plums at one time were a real big pack up here but they've kind of .. aren't a favorite any more as a fruit like they used to be and the pack has dropped off quite a bit. Of course the berries then they started and they've gone into frozen more. All your berries back there are frozen now. But the bigger items now in canning now are your vegetables, particularly beans. At one time Blue Lake beans were I think the biggest vegetable pack in the west coast here - in Oregon - the western part of Oregon. Again, I don't have the exact statistics, but possibly I think beans were even bigger than peas - they used to can lots of peas over in eastern Oregon but I think beans were the biggest vegetable pack, and corn's a big pack in vegetables.

When was the first canning operation here in Washington County area to your recollection?

Well, I actually couldn't say which would be possibly the first, but I think the Ray Milling (sp?) Cannery over at Hillsboro, which later on became the General Food Birdseye plant over there - I think that would most likely be one of the earlier plants in this area.

I'd like to know a little bit more about that operation over there; that was really one of the dominant industries in the City of Hillsboro and Washington County. Was - now Ray Milling was two people, am I right?

That's right. There was Mr. Ray and B. Milling, and eventually I think it ended up that Bert Milling owned it outright and it was B. Milling Company at the end. And then B. Milling Company was sold out to Birdseye Snyder (sp?) Division of General Foods. Well, Birdseye Snyder Division and General Foods I think bought Birdseye Snyder. It became Birdseye Snyder Division of General Foods and then later they just dropped that and it became Birdseye Division, and now I think they've even - well they still use the Birdseye brand but I think they speak of it as General Foods now even completely. And also at the same time, there was a Ray Brown Company over at Woodburn, which also was taken over by Birdseye Division.

How did Mr. Ray and Mr. Milling become involved in the canning business - did they have expertise in that area or what was their situation?

Well, actually right off hand I don't know; I wouldn't know how they really did become involved in it.

Did you know either of these two men?

Bert Milling - I've met Bert Milling. I didn't know him near as well as some of the other people that followed ... his number one assistant over there - Art Riling (sp?) I knew Art Riling real well. Well, he ended up as the manager eventually for Birdseye in this area - I knew him much

better than I did Mr. Milling; however, I had met Mr. Milling.

What was your general impressions of Mr. Milling the few times that you have met him?

Well, a very energetic man, with ideas, and of course to be in any part of the agricultural business, I think you have to be someone that's willing to take big risk, because there's risk in farming all the way through and risk in markets and also in your supply of crops in the canning business. But he was very successful so I think that he necessarily had to be quite smart and had to follow markets and everything else that goes into the canning business quite astutely.

Do you think he had a training in that area or just ...

No, I think he's just a good business. I don't know, but I think that at one time he was connected with railroad business in some way - that's my recollection but on the other hand Art Riling, he just grew up in the canning business; in fact, his son still works for North Pacific Cannery, which is a sales agent for the Stayton (sp?) Canning Company and some of the cooperatives.

Was that what made the company so successful was the manager?

I think good management -- good management, and of course having other good employees I think comes along with good management, the ability to pick good people.

I've heard of Mr. Milling's physical appearance. He was quite a ...

He was a big man. He was big and quite a little bit on the - don't know how to put this but, you know, kind of a husky man and a little bit on the ... I was going to say fat side but I don't know it was that ... but he was big.

All right; what were some of the other initial canners; I think we touched on a few of them.

Well, if you go on south, you go to Salem of course was one of the big canning areas. When you get down there you had the Paulis (sp?) Brothers and the Paulis Cannery, that was one of the big ones. Then there was Star Fruit Products - that was one of the older canneries in Oregon. Reed & Murdoch Company down there, which was started by Northwest Canning Company, I think the old Northwest was a newer Northwest Canning Company but there's a Northwest Canning Company down in Salem that originally started down there and then it became eventually Reed & Murdoch and the same cannery is there. Now it's Truitt (sp?) Brothers, but it went through several different owners. And W. G. Allen was one of the old time canners in the area. In fact, Allen Fruit Company still has a plant at Newberg and now they're in Class A cherries for ice cream, I think is the only fruit item they handle. They have branched off into the Allen Machinery Company, which makes canning machinery now. It was just recently here that Kenny Allen, who is the son of W. G., died here, oh about a year ago, and now I don't think there are any Allens left in the business.

I was just going to ah .. you mentioned that canning was really big in the Salem area. Was it on an even par up here in the Washington County area - was it that big of an industry?

I think down in Salem - Woodburn, Salem area - was a much bigger area than Washington County area; however, Washington County area later on here we had Hutchen House (sp?) which was a good sized cannery at Forest Grove. Then you had Flavorland came along later which started out as Sunset Packing Company, that actually started right after World War II; I think Kribner's (sp?) Cannery up at Bank was a frozen operation - it still is frozen - but that was one of the fruit packers. Then, of course there's two Portland Canning Company plants here in Washington County, and then I mentioned Allen Fruit Company, which at one time handled more than cherries and they were down in the Newberg area. The Springbird (sp?) Packing Company down there in the

Newberg area too, so there were a number of canneries around in this area.

How did you, yourself, get into the canning business then?

Well, my father, as I said earlier, he took over this Graves (sp?) operation and the plant there at Sherwood - it was during the depression - 1930, '31 and '32, and so I was going to school in Allen then so I just worked there in the plant. And then when I graduated from college, well, I'd been working in the plant - I knew something about the canning business; they needed someone there so I just kept with my father in that business. And I was there from starting in 1930 when it was formed working summers and whenever I could while going to school and I was there up until it was sold in 1966 to an eastern interest, and then I stayed on with them for five years, and then they resold it and I stayed there another - oh, not too long after they sold it the second time - maybe a couple, three months, and then they brought in some new management. So that left me out of a job and then I went to work for Northwest Packing Company in Portland, and I worked at Northwest Packing Company for about a year, and then things changed around there and we came to a parting of the ways and so then I was out of work for about a month - month and a half - and I went to work for Claremont West (sp?) over at Cornelius, and I've been there for the last six years.

Uh, uh, you mentioned that you got your start during the early '30's, and that must have been in the middle of the depression.

Right at the start of the depression.

Was the depression really hard times on the canning business?

Oh, boy, I'll say it was. I can remember \$6 ^{for plumbs} a ton/ for instance; 20¢ hour for labor to start with, and everybody was happy to work at those wages and work as long as they could to get that money. It was really tough times. But on the other hand, why a dollar went so much farther than it does now. You could buy things for the dollar like - well, I can remember you could buy a Ford car for about five hundred dollars, and I know my dad bought an Oldsmobile

for \$914, and gee we thought that was quite an outlay - that much money for an automobile and that was quite an automobile in those days. Well, now I think about the cheapest car you can get is about \$5,000, then you start putting on the extras so you see money was one _____ part, it was harder to come by but it went a lot farther. But, ah, we had to struggle - lots of years we didn't make any money there - it took a number of years to get that thing off the ground and going.

People must have really flocked to the canneries in search of employment then during this time.

Well, that's right; in fact, in our operations I never did see it except ^{too} during the war, when it was really/difficult to get help - sometimes late in the fall after school had started and all the kids went back to college and things like that and then it got difficult to get help. But back in the '30's it took so much more help than it did later on. Used to have every, like every box, all the fruit came in in lug boxes - maybe you're familiar - little lug boxes - all had to be hand handled and they were all hand trucked. They were stacked onto a truck to bring them in out in the orchard and they were trucked in and they were stacked off and stacked up and then handled with a hand truck around six or eight, ten boxes at a time. And all the empty cans were handled one at a time, you know until you got them into a line, so it took a tremendous amount of help. And as things progressed with the coming of World War II you didn't have the help available so you started in figuring out ways to save that help. And that's about the time you had the innovation of the lift truck - gasoline and propane powered and electric powered lift trucks became popular during and after World War II and that eliminated a lot of help - no more hand trucking - and then can handling went all into automatic can handling and palletized (?) cans were automatically fed into can runs and high speed fillers, high speed closing machines, continuous pressure cookers, all that kind of equipment came along, so as the

wage rates went up, the price of canned goods stayed pretty much down. In fact, five years after the war we were selling canned goods a lot cheaper than we were during the war because of innovations in mechanical handling. So, that, I think, brought about a complete change in the canning industry. We've named all these plants - now you have, in Oregon you don't have one-tenth the plants but still you're handling just as much or more product -- you're handling more product because the plants are bigger; they're higher speed; they're more efficient and so there still is the market here. Although the market for some things is very definitely changing and one comes to mind industry, real quick is the Blue Lake bean / for instance. Originally the bean industry grew up in Oregon around the pole Blue Lake bean, which is a premium, high quality bean but it was all handled by hand; it was practically planted by hand and it was strung up by hand originally - later on they got stringing machines that would make the trellises for the beans to grow on; they were all hand picked and originally put in bags, of course, and then later on into tote bins so they could be handled with lift trucks. But with the advent of the mechanical bush bean harvester the Blue Lake bean, although of all its good qualities it just faded out because the cost of producing it became so high as compared to mechanically harvested and handled bush beans that people just wouldn't pay the premium for it, so as a result instead of having a number of small growers growing pole Blue Lake beans you have some very large growers growing hundreds of acres of bush beans which are, like I say, they're planted now by machines that plant very high density plantings - maybe 15 - 20 rows at a time - you have machines that go out there to harvest them - mechanical bean harvester, very similar to a combine, has a big reel out in front, takes a 10 or 12 feet swath right through the fields, just takes all the beans off mechanically, they go into a truck in bulk, they're hauled great distances at high speed and run through big plants, so all that

eliminated the small cannery. Another thing is strawberries. Now the strawberries have been changed for a different reason. Again, our quality is the best in the world but strawberries have been changed because of growing and cultural practices and varieties in California that produced tremendous tonnages per acre. They're expensive to grown down there but they produce great tonnages - and approaching 50 tons now and they're looking at a possibility of 100 tons to the acre. And those berries also have been bred and lend themselves to fresh shipping and they can ship them in fact all over the world, I'll say, because the Arabs ship some of them clear to Europe now, and to the Orient. And so they get such high prices for those that the processed berries down there, which are the berries when, certain times when they can't ship them, or due to weather conditions, etc., they go into processing. That's kind of a side product with them. And so they process those berries very cheap. Up here in Oregon our tonnage we get from berries up here is around--10 tons is a real good crop, and originally when we first went into business with the old Marshall berry, we'd get maybe 1 1/2 tons, I think 1 1/2 tons lots of years you'd never average more than 1 1/2 tons, and two, three and five tons was a fantastic average. But at the same time those berries all had to go into processing and compete with some of that California ... I missed Mexico; Mexicans were also shipping berries in here in later years very cheap and we have to compete with them so you have seen the berry acreage drop from I think around 19,000 acres in Oregon with a production of around maybe 120,000,000 pounds down to around 5,000 acres with a production of 40,000,000 pounds. So our production isn't near half and of course with the increased tonnage per acre - our acreage is only about a third but it's producing about half of what we used to at least, so there's a big change come around here/in the Washington County area because Washington County I think has more strawberry acreage than any county in

Oregon. So you can see that's affected our agricultural economy a little - the bush beans and the strawberries - here in this area; at least, it's changed it quite a bit. Strawberries, of course, they're gone, but you have moved into more of the cane berries - that is, the blackberries, the black raspberries and marion berries and things like that which Oregon still at the present time has pert near a monopoly on those berries.

We've covered quite the whole chronological time frame of canning business. I'd like to go back to the very beginning when the canning business first began and .. we're talking about the increase of mechanization and mechanization of canning and you mentioned at first that it was really labor intensive. How many people were working in the mills, or I mean the canneries at the very beginning?

Well, I can remember out at Sherwood there where we were running, say in beans, we were running around on a three shift basis and at peak capacity in that plant we would run around 15,000 cases a day and that would be I'd say 200 tons at the most a day and we would have on the payroll around 300 people - between 300 and 400 people to start with. At the end out there, we were running about the same tonnage or more and I think we got it down to where we were using about 200 people. And I think now that would be considerably below that since the last several years, as I mentioned earlier, I haven't been really in the canning business. The company I work for now makes concentrated fruit juices so, and so we're strictly ... (end of first side of tape).

... down there on beans we were running around 30,000 cases a day; I think we got up to where we were still using in that plant about 250 - 300 people. These people we're talking about, were they mostly women, young people, old people or what was the makeup?

Well, we had quite a few housewives and people like that working, a little older people that were working in the plant, and they worked every summer.

there's people - women - that wanted to earn money during the summer and their children were out of school and what not, so they could work. And usually when school started you saw quite a few of the women you know, they started dropping out pretty bad because they had children got back in school. And besides that, we had a big number, a great number of college students - both girls and boys - working in the plant. There's quite a big of seasonal help like that. And of course, I was talking about picking these Blue Lake beans, quite a few school children that's where a lot of those came from - those buses, and I suppose you remember those too, the buses they came by every morning at six o'clock and they went out and picked beans for Joe Doakes, or somebody else, and they picked beans out there for maybe six weeks or so. Before that, you were picking strawberries, some of the other fruits. And that's another thing, in some of these berry seasons the mechanical harvesting coming in practically - I would say 50% of your cane berries are now mechanically harvested and I don't think the time is too far off where 90% of it's going to be mechanically harvested. Again, that's going to eliminate small farmers and go for bigger farmers because mechanical harvesters cost \$40-\$50,000 apiece, well you can't have a two-acre field and grow berries on it. On the other hand you can't very well compete if you use hand work, you pert near have to get big so you can have the big machinery to do the job more efficient. In fact this year, we'll be experimenting out where I work we'll have mechanically harvested strawberries. Two years ago, we started on this program with one grower and machinery manufacturer in the east - there's a couple being trying to develop - in the stages of development here in Oregon, and this year we will be running quite a few mechanically harvested strawberries. And lots of things have to come about before that will really be a reality where a big important volume will be mechanically harvested and that will be developing new varieties is one

thing, and then improvements in the machinery. I think the basic machinery is pretty much as it's going to be but it's going to be improved.

I think we've alluded to it - or you have alluded to it several times, but what were some of the original things canned. I think you've mentioned a lot of them; did we leave out any, or ...

Yeah, I think it's just your fruits and vegetables generally - all your fruits and vegetables. Of course, you have a lot more speciality items canned now, like, I'm thinking of, oh, chili con carne and there's lots more things like that canned. Spaghetti and meat balls and different spaghetti dishes - can't think of - lots of juices now and also blended juices where water's added and different things. Well, pretty near anything is canned - there's a lot more of those speciality items I've mentioned. Originally, you had meats and fish and vegetables and fruits and that was about it.

This is sort of a chicken-and-egg question; in that sense I mean which came first - the canning industry here in Washington County or the farmers growing the crops? Or did they just grow together?

I think they had to grow together.

Were there a market - ready made market for the canneries before they arrived here?

Well, most of the canned goods originally you know were shipped east - lots of our fruits, most of our fruits were shipped east. And even the vegetables. I remember out at Sherwood, I would say 90% of our pack there went to the east coast. In the east and midwest see they didn't have the fruits like we have here, so we canned them up and shipped them back there. On plumbs, I mentioned plumbs which have gotten out of favor kind of with the public now, but out at Sherwood - and that's one of the original products that Portland Canning Company ran was canned plumbs, or canned prunes as they

called them in those days. The old prune that they dried and as you know grew all over the hills here; we used to have tremendous markets for those in the midwest and used to pack them in No. 10 cans - gallon cans and without syrup or without sugar, just in water. Canned thousands and thousands of cases of them. They went into places, oh like Wichita, Oklahoma City and St. Louis - all back through the midwest. Then on the east coast we used to ship a little better grade in syrup packs in the 2½ cans and at that time it all went by ship. Haul them into Portland and they loaded them on steamers -- steam ships -- and took them down through the Canal and to the east coast.

That was before the advent of trucking, then, we're talking?

Well, we were trucking them all into Portland then; we'd truck them into Portland to the dock but at that time shipping by water was so much cheaper than by rail that you could ship them - they all had to go by boat because there was such a difference in the rate. And then, due to various changes and labor conditions, costs on the docks, trucking costs from the plants into the docks, and things like that, the two rates got closer and closer and then innovations in the rail rates where they'd let you stop cars at several places to unload and things like that, well pretty soon it got up to where the steam ship companies were just forced out of business and everything went rail or truck. Now, on frozen, lots of the items go to the east coast by truck - midwest by truck - refrigerated truck, because you can ship smaller quantities, you can ship faster and a little more flexible.

therefore
The canneries, then, and/also the farmers were really depending upon these eastern markets, then?

That's right; I think we still are to a great deal - great degree - and that's one thing that's happened with the coming of the bush beans. Oregon

and the northwest had kind of a monopoly on the pole Blue Lake beans. We were shipping them clear to the east coast; we were selling lots of them in Philadelphia and New York, Boston, but when we came to the bush beans and the mechanically harvested bean, they could grow them back there as good as we can grow them here. So now actually, beans are being shipped from maybe Wisconsin and up in that area, are being shipped into California and taking some of the market that used to be exclusively northwest, so it's affected our market for beans out here, the change from the pole bean to the bush bean, and those bush beans they grow up in Wisconsin, we'll say; New York State, Michigan, they're so much closer to the big metropolitan areas back there -- Chicago, New York, Philadelphia -- that their freight rates are so much less they can compete better and that's taken some of the market that was originally for products out of this area here.

That's interesting. During your time in the canneries, you must have met a lot of the farmers, growers, coming into canning. In general, what was the relationship between the farmers and the canneries?

Well, I don't know. In my own experience, we've always had pretty good relations with our growers in any company I've worked for. Of course, you have a situation there, of course when you're in one business you try to put out the best product the cheapest you can and so you're trying to buy that product at the most advantageous price you can, and of course the grower, he's on the other side, he's trying to get the most money he can for his product, that's just natural in any business. But, in spite of what's said, I think canners never tried to - at least most of them - have never tried to beat a grower down because, after all, you've got to have growers, and you've got to have good growers. One good grower is worth a dozen of them that's just struggling along and you have to finance and if he hasn't got adequate financing to have good machinery and have the

good equipment that he needs all the way through, so with a good prosperous grower you're going to get better product and you're going to prosper. I think when the grower's making money the cannery is usually making money, and vice versa.

My understanding that the prices really fluctuate from season to season, then; why is that?

That's right; usually they go in cycles. Good example, I think, is in our berry market here in the last few years. What happens is you have a short crop, we'll say, and so the price will be up - it'll go up. Well, it takes two to three years, maybe four years to really get into production. You take something like blackberries, you go out and plant first you have to get the plant, you have to grow the plant - that takes one year. So then you plant the plant - that takes another year. And then in the first year's crop you get there it's a very sparse crop, it's baby crop you call it. You've lived in the area and you've more than likely heard that term. You get that first crop, and then it's the second year - second and third year before you really start getting a crop so you're four years considering growing your plant - you're four years to expand that crop. So if we had a real short year, we'll say, and the price goes up real high and everybody says "Boy, blackberries are the things to grow; look how much money Joe made off of an acre of them over there." So they plant; well, the next year they don't get any increased production to speak of; it may even go down, so the price is again good, so more people say "Boy, look at the price of those blackberries" and they go out and plant. So about the third year you start getting these berries start coming in. The fourth year you catch up with the demand and the fifth year you're ahead of the demand and once you get too much ahead of that demand, boy, then the price just goes right down to the bottom because, after all, unless something new is developed

to use them, you only eat three meals a day and once you get beyond that and the amount of blackberries you eat in three meals a day -- in other words the demand isn't too elastic; it won't increase as the price goes down. It's kind of an inelastic demand, so your price goes down. Well, if the price goes down, so then people aren't making money, so they over correct, they start digging them out. People can't live, the farmer he has to get into something else, so they start digging the blackberries out. Pretty soon they go too far the other way. And then, of course, you always have another little thing like weather conditions thrown in here to help things along. You may have shortages because of weather conditions or have ideal conditions and have big crops and have over supply. But usually I think that's what happens. The supply lags behind the plantings and pretty soon you got too much so then your price goes down and when the price goes down the acreage comes out. Pretty soon you over correct there, so the demand is greater than the supply and the price goes up and then your plantings come back in. If you'll look at them, the price goes like that up and down, barring something other that might enter into it such as during the war when help was real scarce so you couldn't grow more if you wanted to. Boy, it sounds like you almost need an economic forecaster in the business to understand the market.

That's right; you do have to watch things like that pretty close and right now I think we're in a situation where in certain berries - looking down the road here two or three years - berries are going to be very cheap again. Right now they're very high on two or three of the berries, like evergreen blackberries are high priced; boysenberries are terrifically high priced; red raspberries are high priced. Now you can talk to some growers and

they'll say, "Oh, no, they're not high priced - they're not high priced." Well, I think they are; not because I'm a packer but just knowing what the tonnage is you get knowing a little bit about what you can grow and what the ... the people that have got the plantings now are making money. Now if they're starting out with new plantings and looking at selling them four years down the - or three years ahead - they may not be too high priced then because it's very, very expensive to put in a new planting of berries now. Plants cost you, say, 25 - 30¢ apiece, it takes a thousand, I'd say, to the acre - that's \$250 for plants; and if you have to put those up on trellises you have to put in posts and stake, you have to put in wire, you have to grow them for two years to get them up there to get your first crop, so most likely cost you, oh, I suppose \$1,000, \$1,200 an acre before you get your first crop off, so... And then, course sprayings are expensive, your help's high priced now, wages are high, so it's pretty high but when you take and get good yields and you're getting something like 50 - 60¢ a pound - getting five tons to the acre - on some of these good growers you're getting five or better tons/to the acre, I think they're doing all right now.

You charted the economic curve, so to speak, roughly charted it; was there a time in the past 20, 30, 40, 50 years where that curve really skyrocketed or pummelled one direction or the other that was really a bad time?

Oh, well I can remember a number of years ago when plums, for instance, sold for \$20 - \$25 a ton, and we had a real short crop and they went to \$120, so you say, "Boy, they really made it that year" but the trouble is they didn't make it because very few of them had a crop or the ones that had any crop at all had so darned few they didn't make it anyway because they only had a half a crop, or a quarter of a crop, so the value they got per acre wasn't any greater than if they'd had their normal crop and \$20 a ton, so it doesn't

work out that because the price is high you make a lot of money sometimes. Now, taking raspberries for instance last year where the price was up in the neighborhood of 60¢ pound and the crop was good the growers made money. They had a good crop; they had a good price. But I don't know, you've heard people say, "Well, you only hit it about three out of five years," well, sometimes I wonder if you hit it three out of five. Maybe that's a little strong, but you do ... there's some growers I know that have grown berries year after year after year after year, so they haven't lost money every year - that's the same as the canning business. I've cried about it myself when I was in it but after all we never stayed in it for thirty years out there and lost money every year. You just wouldn't - you couldn't, and that's the same as in some of these farming enterprises. Sure, sometimes it's been kind of rough but the good growers I think generally have made money.

What is the Northwest Cannery Association - what's its purpose?

Well, it isn't the Northwest Cannery Association any more. Originally, there was a Northwest Cannery Association, there was a Northwest Frozen Food Association, and they kind of ran along parallel. Well, you had so many problems of the two industries that were the same. In other words, you had growing problems, growing strawberries for canning or plums or beans for canning and the same things for freezing. And usually these associations, the purpose of them is to work collectively on some problems. Like, say, you're having problems with varieties or problems with diseases in certain products. Well, you go down and you sponsor some research at Oregon State and different things like that to try to correct some of these problems, so you try to work together for freight rates and getting advantageous freight rates, so you work together on research, better metals or better methods of canning, we'll say, in making cans, or better methods of freezing, you finance research and things collectively into those areas. That's the purpose of it,

but you had these two associations that were paralleling so many things, that finally they combined into Northwest Cannery and Freezers. Then, as time went on, you had other associations here that were very closely allied, like the Cherry Briners Association; then you had the Pickle Packers and things like that. So here about two or three years ago they changed the name of it to Northwest Food Processors Association, so now it takes in all kinds, especially items, pickles, brine cherries, dried fruits, any processed food, so that's the name of it now; it isn't Northwest Cannery any more, it's the Northwest Food Processors Association.

When it first got its start, did the canneries in this Washington County belong to that?

Pert near every cannery in Oregon belonged to it, and there were a few that didn't, but for the most part everyone belonged.

Where did it get its start?

Well, it was just an association. It got its start through a group of canners getting together and they found out they all had some of the same problems so they said let's get together here and form an association, hire us a secretary or an executive vice president or call him what you want, to direct some effort and we'll put up some money to solve some of these mutual problems we have. Then, out of that, you had other kinds of associations come together. You had things like the Blue Lake Bean Growers Association, you had the Purple Plumb Association, and those associations were put together to do possibly cooperative advertising, things like that, on one particular problem, or to do ... right now, the company I'm working for now, we just joined in on a research project to do some research on blackberries and marion berries - cane berries for the most part - in going to the ^{some of} problems they're having with/leaf spot, things like that, to get ... we're donating money which will be given to Oregon State College to put people to work trying to solve some of these disease problems of cane berries, and that's why

those associations are formed. Some people think they're formed to get together and try and control things and nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, that's against the law to do it, and people that belong to these associations are very careful that nothing like that gets into them because you get into a real serious trouble there with the government because of regulations and that's one thing you don't want to do.

I think we've traced the inception and the rise in the canning industry here in Oregon, particularly in Washington County. I think we've alluded to the gradual, and sometimes not gradual, demise in the canning industry here. Could you elaborate a little bit further on that?

Well, it's like I think I said here, briefly, I think we're most likely canning or processing - I'd better say processing because frozen has become more of a factor than it was a number of years (ago) but I think we're processing tonnagewise, most likely fruits and vegetables, as we ever were - most likely more, but you have fewer plants and bigger plants and you're trucking product greater distances; your farms are bigger because they have to be to afford and have all the necessary machinery now to handle these things mechanically and in bulk, so I think we're about most likely bigger than we were, but we do have less companies. And like I think I also said here that the canneries had to get bigger because of the cost of all this high speed machinery, bigger machinery you have to have.

You see that as the growing trend and the future of the processing industry here in ...

I think you're seeing that in the trend of everything in this country. Not only in having companies that are big in one item but companies that spread out and get into a lot of different directions and get into conglomerates as they are called now. The reason, I think, is for financing, things like that, that bring it around about as much as anything.

Do you think think this growing trend toward conglomeration affects the quality of the product at all, compared to in the past?

No, I don't think so. I think the quality has been improved right along. I think all my life the quality's been improved. I think there's some things that have been added that increased the cost and still have not benefitted the consumer too much, and I think some of this nutritional labeling - and now they're talking about, what do they call it, dating on your cans, and dating cans and things, well I think on canned goods and some of those things all you're doing is just adding to the cost, because no packer is knowingly going to put out product that's getting so old that would in any way affect the eatability or have any bad effect on the people that did use it because you're not going to build any business that way and that follows right through to the grocery store down here that's selling it. And as far as all this nutritional labeling, I don't know how many people sit there and study whether they're getting enough Vitamin A and Vitamin B and this, that and the other thing and the protein and so forth that are on those cans now. Did you ever sit down and analyze all that when you're eating your beans to see how many beans you had to eat to get the ... what percentage of your -- what do they call it -- daily -- forgot what they call it -- daily amount that you need of a vitamin or a protein? I think that's just -- you eat for more than nutrition, too. You eat for enjoyment and you don't go down and buy things that are not enjoyable to eat just because ... well, what I mean to say that they have to be good or you wouldn't buy them.

All right, that's about ... I think we've pretty much covered the industry as a whole; I think we've got a pretty good feel.

One final thing; I think that processed foods, I think, by and large, have been one of the best values that people have had in my life time. In other

words, I think that for good food I've spent less of my earnings -- well each year I think statistics prove it, I've spent less and less of my earnings for food each year, and I don't know I've been in the food business all my life and although some things I could pick apart, but I think for the most part the food we get is very good, very wholesome and reasonably priced.

O.K., if you don't have anything else to add, I think we've covered the discussion on that.

O.K., I don't know what value it will be to you in your work here, but I hope it's been helpful.

Well, I think it is; it gives a good historical background on the canning industry.