

Bob Sines – Cedar Hollow 1

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

The delicious aroma wafts through the kitchen. It is a succulent ham, prepared for the family dinner. As family members come running, they can know that this ham was developed by an innovative food company whose owner lives in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Bob Sines is co-owner of Cedar Hollow Foods, a premier ham production company. Bob and his wife Nancy live just west of Hiawatha, Kansas. They both grew up on family farms in Iowa. Nancy was a banker and accountant. After serving in the military, Bob went to work in the meatpacking industry. He started working in a slaughter plant and then worked his way up into management.

He and some friends started a meat plant in Ohio in the 1970's. In 1982 Bob joined a meat company in Falls City, Nebraska known as Mickelberry where he ultimately became Vice President of Sales and Bob and Nancy moved to nearby Hiawatha. In 1989, the Sines purchased a motel restaurant in Hiawatha. But the ham business came calling yet again! Bob's former partners had started a new ham business called Cedar Hollow Foods and Bob became an owner-partner in the start-up ham company.

Today, Cedar Hollow Foods is a leading producer of deli hams. These hams are made using all natural ingredients and old-fashioned methods. The company begins with select muscle from the hog's rear leg, not parts and pieces of pork portions.

"We cure it right on the bone," Bob said. "That makes it taste like a bone-in ham." The bones are later removed and excess fat is trimmed. Every ham is hand-stuffed, not vacuum-stuffed, into netting and sent to the smokehouse to be slow-cooked for a full 14 hours. The hams are sold fully cooked, smoked, and boneless.

The company also sells hams under other brand names such as Ol' Farmers brand. Various types of hams available from the company include old style Bavarian, hickory pit, brown sugar cured, mesquite smoked, honey, maple syrup, spiral sliced, pineapple, and even chipotle.

Innovation is a priority for Bob and his company. "We were the first to offer the pre-sliced quarter hams," Bob said. "We were also the first to put 'no MSG, no gluten' on the package." The methods used by Cedar Hollow Foods in ham preparation require no artificial ingredients, chemical binders or fillers, and no MSG or gluten. The company uses artery curing, which is said to be the most thorough.

"We've always been very conscious of the consumer," Bob said. He enjoys the personal touch. Bob will reply directly to email inquiries which the company receives. "People say to me, are you in customer service? I'll tell 'em, no, I'm one of the owners," Bob said. "People seem to like that response."

Bob Sines reflects on the early days with this company. "On that first day, we boxed and shipped four hams," Bob said. Today the company sells hams to 36 states from coast to coast. Wow.

"We sell to the guy with a 200 square foot store as well as to the guy with a 200,000 square foot store," Bob said. "We sell to the five largest food chains in the United States, and we also sell to the mom-and-pop stores." Clients include Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee.

The company buys fresh hams from Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri and does the processing at a state-of-the-art plant in Lincoln, Nebraska. The company headquarters remains

in Falls City. Bob Sines gives leadership to the national sales for the company from his home near Hiawatha, a rural community of 3,410 people. Now, that's rural.

"We love Hiawatha," Bob said. For more information about these hams, go to www.cedarhollowfoods.com.

The delicious aroma of ham wafts through the kitchen as the family enjoys a ham dinner. We commend Bob Sines and all those involved with Cedar Hollow Foods for making a difference with innovation and customer concern. Now, please pass the ham.

And there's more. One day Nancy asked Bob if they could purchase a particular type of animal. Breeding and selling those animals would become another nationally renowned enterprise. We'll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.