

Wild Caught  
Nancy Edens Oral History  
Date of Interview: 2003  
Location: Sneads Ferry, North Carolina  
Length of Interview: 55:41  
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Nancy, thanks for doing this again. [laughter] Well, maybe you could take us back a little bit just to get started. When would you say that the imports really started to come into the country in terms of early 2001?

Nancy Edens: 2000.

MB: Tell us a little bit about what started happening here.

NE: It was probably 2000 when they first started – when we first really started seeing an effect on us, on our prices, our shrimp prices. They just kept increasing every year. Then in 2002 was when the Southern Shrimp Alliance was formed. We filed a petition in 2003. It was won in 2005. The tariffs started in February of 2005. So, it's been a long process. It's –

MB: Okay. In other words, fishermen are independent group of people.

NE: Yes.

MB: Tell me a little bit about why the Southern Shrimp Alliance started. What was the basis for it? Why did it happen?

NE: Well, the Southern Shrimp Alliance is a group of eight states. They came together to try to fight the imports, to try to – a lot of chemicals are used in the imported shrimp that are banned in the United States. That's one thing that they tried to promote more testing of the imported shrimp that comes in here. The thing that really started it was the market. Because there's so many imports, 89, 90 percent of your shrimp are imported. The other 10 percent are domestic shrimp. They were selling more imports than they were domestic, which that drove our price down. That's really what started it was the price, what started the Southern Shrimp Alliance. It was to try to help the commercial fishermen just stay in business.

MB: Well, so Southern Shrimp Alliance started. What has the Southern Shrimp Alliance been doing to try to help the fishermen?

NE: Well, one thing was with the importer with the tariffs. That's in place now. They're also working – promoting, trying to get the USDA to do more testing. Of course, that means more funding. We have lobbyists that work for us in Washington. Then we are in Washington several times a year. Our executive director is there. Well, the last couple of months, he's been there almost every week. When things are happening, a lot of people don't know what's happening behind the scenes. With the National Marine Fisheries Association, a lot of new rules that they could put down on us, the Southern Shrimp Alliance is helping to make sure that they're not so harsh on the fishermen. Because we all the time get new rules and regulations. We try to make the fishermen aware of what's going on. So, you can write your congressman, senators, tell them what you feel about it. So, you can write the National Fisheries Service and tell them how you feel about the rules because they always have a public and a length of time that the public can respond before it's actually made a rule. They go to the meetings to try to help the fishermen in some of the rules and things.

MB: Was in front of the Federal Trade Commission that the Southern Shrimp Alliance – talk a little bit about how all that – what was all that about. I mean, in terms of –

NE: The tariffs?

MB: Right.

NE: Okay. Well, they filed a petition to tax the imported shrimp. That is a tariff that's placed on each company of the countries – of six countries that we filed against, which was India, China, Thailand, Brazil, Vietnam, and Ecuador. Then each company within that country has a tariff that we fought to have that placed. It was placed on him. That money goes into – it goes to the ITC, which is International Trade Commerce is who oversees that, which is really the government, which is all government.

MB: So, one of your contentions was that they were dumping shrimp? Talk about that a little bit.

NE: Yes. Oh, yes. Okay. The dumping is putting shrimp in here below what it cost them to produce it. That's what we felt like they were doing. They were dumping shrimp over here, put them way below the market price to try to keep their sales up, and then, in turn, (our sales?). So, the government found that they were dumping shrimp in here in the United States, which was hurting our sales. Then their labor over is so cheap. Of course, they can produce them cheaper than we can catch them, but they were selling them way below their cost. So, the tariff, more or less, evens the price up. They were supposed to even the price up. It's what it's supposed to do.

MB: So, when did the tariff go into effect?

NE: The tariffs went in effect February of 2005.

MB: What has the result of the tariffs been?

NE: We haven't seen a whole lot of price difference yet. We're working on marketing programs to promote the domestic shrimp. There's a marketing aspect of the Southern Shrimp Alliance, which is called WASI, which is Wild American Shrimp. They have programs in each of the eight states. You may have heard some of the commercials promoting the wild-caught shrimp. That's been an ongoing process also to try to get the public aware. A lot of the public do not know what they're eating when they eat in a restaurant. They don't know what they're buying unless they happen to look in, say, product of on the bag if they buy it in a supermarket. If you buy it to a retail fish house like we have in Sneads Ferry, most of them – there may be one or two that sells imports. But hardly anyone down here sells imported shrimp. In the supermarkets in town, if you buy a bag of shrimp, if you look on the back of it or sometimes on the front, it will say product of Thailand, China, wherever farm raised. That's the shrimp that sometimes has the chemicals that are banned in the United States in them. That's what we're trying to promote is the wild-caught shrimp, which should be available now also in most of your stores. They are supposed to be labeled. If they're not in a bag, if you just found them out of a case, per pound, they are supposed to be labeled so you can distinguish and have a choice of domestic caught or

wild-caught shrimp or imported shrimp.

MB: Okay. Talk about, in other words, of the imported shrimp. In other words, they're not going out off of the coast of China or Thailand or India –

NE: Oh, no.

MB: – like we do here.

NE: No. The imported shrimp are farm-raised in ponds. They just dig a hole and have a pond there. They raised the shrimp in them really. Go ahead.

MB: Well, talk about the chemical aspects. I mean, the antibiotics and all that chlorophenol or whatever that –

NE: Chloramphenicol.

MB: Talk a little bit about the chemical aspect of some of these.

NE: Well, the chemicals they use is in their feed and the chemicals that they use to make them grow faster, so they can obviously sell them faster. That's the whole process is to sell them faster to make them grow faster. They used a lot of chemicals. One is the chloramphenicol, which is banned in the United States. If they were tested more, they would probably find it in more of the imported shrimp. But they don't do enough testing. The USDA does not do enough testing. When you ask them about it, when we're in Washington and you talk to them about it, it's funding. It always gets back to funding and money. They don't have the resources, the manpower to do a lot of testing that needs to be done. If they find a shipment of it, it's supposed to be destroyed or sent back. One thing that we have found after the tariff started is one country will send it to another country that is not tariffed, not taxed, then they in turn will send it here. That's been done since the tariff has started. So, there's a lot of things going on in order for them to try to get their shrimp here without a tariff.

MB: So, the tariff obviously has maybe hurt them some, but it's not stopped them from shipping these shrimp over here.

NE: No, it's not stopped them. It's slowed it down. It has slowed it down. But it's not completely stopped it. It's not going to stop it because we cannot catch enough to supply the demand for shrimp. But we just want our fair chance and a fair market price.

MB: Well, now, what about the antibiotic deal? I mean, they're using antibiotics because otherwise, as I understand it, they lose quite a few shrimp anyway. They're all jammed in these ponds –

NE: Yes. There's so many in there. The disease rate is high. One reason they use some of the chemicals is for the diseases that the shrimp have that are raised in the ponds. A lot of the countries are helping to try to not use those chemicals to try to have a say for shrimp for people

to eat.

MB: Okay. So, the tariffs help slow it down a little bit, but now looks like a flood of shrimp coming in. I've also heard that some of them freeze them up for – they're not exactly fresh shrimp. How long does it take, I wonder, for a shrimp to get over here from over there?

NE: I don't know.

MB: Yes. I mean, they freeze them up.

NE: Yes. Oh, yes.

MB: They're frozen.

NE: They're frozen. They ship them on those container ships. It's how they come in here. They come in on the container ships frozen. But I don't know how long it would take them.

MB: So, how can we educate the American public to understanding there are differences in the shrimp here?

NE: Well, the marketing program – that's one thing it's trying to do is to put the commercials out there. We have a lot of ads in magazines promoting the domestic-caught shrimp. Then one of the things the ad says is, "You're not eating the shrimp that you thought you were." One guy stand there, and he says, "I would have told you sooner, but I was out catching them," or trying to catch some of the domestic shrimp. There's a lot of ads out there. The Southern Shrimp Alliance works to get money, lobbies to get money for the WASI firm because they can't lobby their self. So, that's one thing that the Southern Shrimp Alliance does too.

MB: So, is the battle continuing? Are they appealing the tariffs, or are the –

NE: Some countries, what they do, they can ask for an administrative review. What that does the tariff money that's coming in from their country or company from February of 2005, it will be held until that administrative review is finished. When they do the administrative review, the ITC goes back, looks at all their records and everything. Their tax rate can change. It can go higher. It could go lower. It could stay the same. But the administrative review is quite expensive for them. Some of them filed for it. Some of them have already dropped it. They have a time length that they can do that in.

MB: But the fact of the matter is they continue pouring all these shrimp in the [inaudible].

NE: Yes. The shrimps are still coming in here.

MB: So, what's going to happen to the American shrimper? What's going to happen to the shrimper at Sneads Ferry do you think? I mean, talk about that.

NE: A lot of people here are already selling their boats, going to do something else. It's quite a

few of them. A lot of the guys have gone and got jobs on those dredge boats, the crew boats, things like that. Some of them are going to hang in there. The tough ones will hang in there and tough it out. Some of them don't want to do anything else. They're going to do it as long as they possibly can. Some of the boats have gone scalloping. Some of them will go on and do other things to try to keep their boats in order to keep being a commercial fisherman, even though they're not catching shrimp.

MB: Okay. Your family is operating a – and your husband is a fisherman and your whole –

NE: Right.

MB: – his family history is. I mean, right now, your husband is scalloping off of Virginia, right?

NE: Right.

MB: So, would normally he have been shrimping or –

NE: Yes. Right now, usually, he would be shrimping here in the spring, which there's still – I don't know if there's any – there might be a boat or two left in South Carolina. But most of them are back here. They go down there in the spring. They'll come back. They should be working here now, off the beach, and then go in Pamlico Sound. Usually, in July, they'll go in Pamlico Sound for about a month. They'll shrimp up there for about a month. Then they'll come back. Then in the fall, they'll go back to South Carolina, usually in the late fall. But last year, every boat stayed in Virginia scalloping until the end of October because the shrimp season here was so bad last year. It was just a bad season. On top of that, the price of shrimp being cheap and the price of fuel being high, it just wasn't worth it to come home to go shrimping.

MB: One thing occurs to me, how can – the European countries don't let in no shrimp.

NE: No.

MB: So, why is it they don't let them in, but they're more worried about their citizens health or whatever than our government? It looks like it, but –

NE: Yes. The European countries won't let them in. They're more stricter with their rules. They evidently do more testing than we do. A lot of it just gets by over here. They just don't test them enough.

MB: Yes. I mean, in the United States, we have standards, "Okay. You can have so many parts per million or whatever chemical." But obviously they can't test or don't test all the shipments, so –

NE: No. They don't test all of them. They test very few. I don't know exactly what the number is. But it's very few that gets tested. They come in here. You don't know what you're eating when you eat them.

MB: So, this chloroamphinol, what's –

NE: Chloramphenicol.

MB: What is that chemical used for? Do you know? I mean, what –

NE: I think that's the one that's for the disease. I'm not sure if it's for the disease. I think it is. But it's been linked to – I don't know if it was cancer or leukemia. It was some type of disease that it would cause in humans. But yet, they're using it in their shrimp. Then those shrimps sometimes are coming in here.

MB: I mean, antibiotics is not good if you take in too many of it. Then they don't work when you need them. I mean –

NE: Right. Yes.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about that? I mean, they use – they've got to when you jam all of the shrimp together.

NE: Yes.

MB: It's kind of cozy in there.

NE: [laughter] Yes. They have so many in the ponds. They have to keep them healthy. According to their standards of healthy, according to their standards, so they can ship them. But then if they fill them full of the antibodies and then when you eat them, of course, it's going in your system, which is not good for you either. It's amazing what you don't know. A lot of people don't know. It's hard to educate people. [laughter]

MB: Yes. A part of them don't want to know.

NE: That's right. They don't want to know.

MB: They really don't want to know.

NE: No.

MB: Because if they knew, then they wouldn't feel like they could do it.

NE: Yes.

MB: They just want to go down to the restaurant and get some shrimp. They don't really care how – of course, that always occurred to me going out people like (Mac?) and John Norris and everybody what the blood and sweat and toil of fishing and back problems. Then people don't realize what's gone into that seafood.

NE: Yes. I think the things that are on the Discovery Channel now about the Alaskan crab and then there's one about the lobster also, I think that's helping a whole lot because it's in every fishery. Anything to do with the boat is hard work. I think people are seeing a lot of that. Because when you go and order those crab legs, you don't realize how much work has gone into that. It's the same way with shrimp. You don't realize how much work has gone into it to catch those.

MB: Yes. My problem with those documentaries, they never look at what we're talking about.

NE: Yes, yes.

MB: They don't talk about imports or regulations or customs.

NE: They're just dealing with the catch.

MB: The excitement of being in Alaska. That's great. But can this way of life keep going?

NE: Yes.

MB: Because it's under attack everywhere. I mean, talk about that. I mean, let's talk about Sneads Ferry – this proud fishing town, which for the film I've just done, it's a 300-year legacy here. It's under real attack. I mean, we were at that meeting last time.

NE: Yes.

MB: I mean, there's all these issues that are – I mean –

NE: Yes. Sneads Ferry has always been a fishing town. But with everything that's happening within the shrimping industry, and then we have so much growth here, it won't be efficient town forever, I don't think. I think the fishing aspect is what drew a lot of people here. But then those same people are changing Sneads Ferry. Of course, change is good. Change is going to happen, whether you want it or not. But it's going to change a lot of our livelihoods, the way we make our living. It's going to change so much. There's hardly any waterfront left now. A lot of these fish houses are sold. These boats are not going to be sold just because the fish houses are sold. Where are they going to go? There's not going to be a place for them unless something happens. They do have a public place that the boats can go. But I don't know where they would find the property, not that big of an area.

MB: Well, you know, I grew up in San Francisco Bay [inaudible]. Have you been there? But –

NE: No.

MB: Well, Fisherman's Wharf is a world-famous tourist site. I mean, they got these beautiful boats there. You can eat there on the water, eat crab out there. It's quite tasty. Oh, Dungeness crab, I mean –



NE: Oh, yes, they are good.

MB: Yes. In French bread, it's pretty nice. It's a public wharf. I mean, Seattle Pike, all over the place. I mean, the idea of having a wharf or a place where people can – stalls where people can sell fish is a great tourist draw.

NE: It's everywhere, in Louisiana, in Mississippi, in a lot of states all up and down the coast and in the Gulf Coast. There are public docks like that where they can come – I don't know for sure if they have to rent the spots. They probably do. But yes, they can sell their seafood from their boats right there, which in turn hurts a seafood business like a fish house. But if there's not any fish houses or there's not enough room for all those boats, what are they supposed to do? That's the only other thing that they can do is try to sell it off of their own boats. A lot of people do that in those areas. We've seen it. In traveling, we've seen a lot of public docks that you rent your spot, then you can more or less do what you want to.

MB: Well, that's why we have these farmer's markets that are very popular.

NE: Yes, same thing.

MB: Outside of Grantsboro, there's this huge one.

NE: Yes.

MB: [inaudible] county, I'm sure with state money. They've got all these farmers coming in. The produce is a lot better. In that way, you get them so cheaper too.

NE: Yes.

MB: You actually get food that actually had more taste to it, like tomatoes or something.

NE: Yes.

MB: So, same thing –

NE: They're homegrown. That makes a lot of difference.

MB: Yes.

NE: That would be basically what the shrimp or any seafood coming off of a boat in that type of place would be. It's not homegrown, but it's wild caught, which is basically the same thing when dealing with the seafood. But we don't have anything like that here. But Sneads Ferry needs something like that, I think. The people, I think, would come and buy.

MB: I think it'd be great tourists draw too. It's just like they keep promoting everything up in the mountains in North Carolina, up around Asheville up there about mountain –

NE: The pottery, yes.

MB: The pottery, woodworkers, that people can make these wonderful instruments or wood salad bowls, all that. Why is this heritage not as valuable as that or –

NE: It is, and it could be done the same way. It could be, yes.

MB: The problem is it had to happen pretty soon.

NE: Yes. It needs to be done quick.

MB: So, what's your kind of prediction?

NE: I think that something is going to happen to – and maybe it will be a change for the good. I think the price of shrimp will come back up eventually. One of the ladies at our last meeting on the Southern Shrimp Alliance in Tampa – we're in Tampa in June. She said, "We've been down before." I think it was in the [19]80s. The shrimp prices were low, and the fuel have gotten high. She said, "We've been down before, but we weren't out." She said, "Then we're not out this time either." It will come back. It will take time, but it will come back. I hope with all these programs that are going on that that's going to help. Maybe we may see a change this year. I'm hoping maybe this fall we'll see a change in our price of shrimp, that they'll be higher. I don't know. It may be next year before we see a change because everything has a trickle-down effect. It's going to take a while. But the shrimping industry will come back. But the thing about it is, is it going to be soon enough to save everyone, for everyone to stick it out and still be here? I don't know. Then as far as Sneads Ferry, I think if they do become incorporated, I think that they will help the commercial fishermen. I think it will be a help for them in maybe creating some type of market and public dock for them, things like that. Because a lot of them now don't have a place. Some of them don't have a place to put their boats. A lot of them are renting spots here and there. It's getting harder all the time.

MB: Are you one of the two statewide reps?

NE: Yes.

MB: Talk a little bit about how you personally got into this.

NE: Well, there were two representatives from North Carolina on the Southern Shrimp Alliance. One was Jerry Schill, who was the executive director of the North Carolina Fisheries Association. He was so busy with the North Carolina Fisheries Association, he was going to – he only stayed on the Southern Shrimp Alliance, I think, a little over a year. He wanted to get off. So, they had a meeting in February in New Bern. They had asked me if I would consider it. I said, "No, I just don't have time." Well, at that meeting, they asked me again. Nobody else didn't want to do it. Everybody is just so busy. The fishermen don't have time to go to the meetings. If you have to stop working and go, and you're gone for about three to four days, most of the time, it's a two-day meeting. So, if you drive or fly, you're going to be gone at least three

to four days. A lot of them can't afford to take that much time off from their work. So, I said I'd think about it. So, then I decided I would do it. I mean, I felt like we needed somebody from this area. Well, we had to have somebody from North Carolina. So, I decided I would do it. Well, then I got on there on the board and started going to the meetings. The first one I went to was in April, after I was elected in February of, let's see, 2004. The other person that was on there, he didn't go to any more meetings with me. Then his boat actually burned. He got on a tugboat. He had been on a tugboat before. So, he really was no longer a commercial fisherman. So, then we have another representative that's from the same area. He was from the Morehead area. So, there are two that represent North Carolina. There's two from every state from each of the eight states that are on there. You have to be involved in the commercial fishing industry to be on that board. One thing we talked about at our last meeting was owning a boat, having a boat license, or something to be on the board. That's one of the things because they want to keep it for the boats. That's what it started out about was the Southern Shrimp Alliance was for the boat owners and to keep the boats in business. That's what we want to keep it as. That's the main objective is to help the boat owners.

MB: So, it's been successful, I'd say.

NE: Yes, it has. Every battle that we have fought, we have won. There is really a strong voice in Washington right now. We have lobbyists and lawyers in Washington. We meet in February in Washington every year. Then usually a couple other times during the year, we have meetings somewhere else. But they're a real strong voice. It didn't take them long to become that strong voice. A lot of that was who we had working for us, their lobbyists and their lawyers. That was a lot of what helped us. But the fishermen are a hard group to get together to unite on anything, but they did on this. We have lost some members. Of course, that's because of what's happening with the markets and plus what's happened with the hurricanes in the Gulf areas. There were so many boats that were destroyed there. But we're trying to get our membership back up, to keep our members, to get new members. You've got to have the members there. You've got to have numbers.

MB: How many members are there? Do you know roughly?

NE: Right now, there's little over – oh, there's almost seven hundred. That's low right now. But we are trying to get the membership back up to what it was, which was a little over two thousand.

MB: Chef Emeril, isn't he been kind of supportive of –

NE: Yes. We have advertisements on the Food Network. He also started his own line of domestic shrimp that they were packaging in Louisiana. I haven't personally seen it, but they said it's available in some supermarkets. I don't know if it's just in that area. It's eventually supposed to be everywhere. But it's going to be Emeril's name on the package, and it's going to be domestic shrimp. So, they have ads in Southern Living. I'm just trying to think what the other – a lot of chef magazines. One magazine that's always in an airplane – I can't think of what it was. I don't remember the name. But they have articles in a lot of the magazines. Food Network has been a big help. They've done a lot.

MB: So, the ultimate part of the answer could be creating kind of like a gourmet niche market for the high-end shrimp.

NE: Yes.

MB: If you want the best shrimp, you want the wild-caught shrimp –

NE: Right.

MB: – not the frozen, imported stuff.

NE: Yes. Yes. That's one of the things that the WASI, the Wild American Shrimp group, were doing was trying to create the niche market for the wild shrimp. Every state has its own logo, and it has something to do with wild-caught shrimp.

MB: Well, yes, I think one thing that's disturbing is that the government of this country should do a better job – I mean, in terms of the shrimp coming in that have these chemicals, that's not a good thing.

NE: No.

MB: Plus, who knows what the water quality content – anything about the water. Like the footage I had in my film –

NE: Yes.

MB: – that water looked terrible. Just saw an article, the use of the antibiotics, they're often the same antibiotics they give humans. So, these guys, what do they know about antibiotics? They're not doctors or (shrimpers?).

NE: Right.

MB: They're dumping this stuff in there. It's really outrageous that they get away with this stuff.

NE: Yes, it is. It is outrageous that they get away with it. The only thing is just – we just have to lobby for more money for the USDA also for more tests because it always comes back to money. It's always they don't have the manpower. They don't have the money. They test so many shipments, but they just don't test enough. There's just not enough testing done on him. So –

MB: Well, it's a way of life. I mean, just kind of a wrap-up to say, in other words, people like your husband or Mac or some of these great fishermen, if they can't keep going, then we're going to lose this incredible talent pool of people that –

NE: Yes. What are those people going to do? They've always done that and have never done

anything else, never had another job. There's so many of them. I don't know if Mac has ever had another job.

MB: I don't think so.

NE: I don't think he has either [laughter]. Now, my husband, he's worked in construction, some demolition, drove a tractor trailer, different things. We have a clam boat, which – and you always go to something else. You can always go to a smaller boat, which Mac is probably got a skiff. I know he's got a skiff too. It's small, but he'd get oyster in the winter in that. Everybody finds something else to do in the offseason in the water. But the shrimping is the main income. It's not a year-round, but it's the main income. You have to make that income last throughout the year, and you supplement it with a little bit of something else like crabbing or oystering, clamming, something else during the offseason. But it's getting harder to do.

MB: Yes. It just seems like between the confluence of all these different things, the imports and the fuel and the endless regulations, but mainly is these – we've been talking about this growth here, it seems like the town is going to – is there going to be literally room for this fishing life to be part of it?

NE: Yes. I don't know. It's hard to say. You don't know what's going to happen as far as the town goes, which we hope that there is because it's always been here. There's going to be some that's going to do it no matter what. There'll be some that, if there was no more commercial fishing here, they would probably leave and go to where they could still be a commercial fisherman. Because they do work in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. They do go and catch shrimp in other places. When the season ends here and it's better somewhere else, you will move. But they usually don't move their families. But if they couldn't do it here, I think a lot of them would move their families. That's sad that you would have to leave in order to retain your job and to keep your same livelihood and to be able to do what you want to do.

MB: But it's a way of life.

NE: Yes.

MB: It's not just a job for them.

NE: No, it's not just a job [laughter]. It's the only thing they've ever done. It is their way of life. That's the only thing they want to do. Yes.

MB: Well, is there anything else? I think we've covered the main things in terms of the [unintelligible], the origins of the Southern – so it was 2003. Was it a struggle to start with anything? I mean –

NE: Well, I was not in on the very beginning of it. I had some information sent to me, but I didn't know a whole lot about it to begin with. I knew what was going on through emails with some people. They were sending me, letting me know what was going on. But I was not in on the very beginning with the Southern Shrimp Alliance.

MB: Well, it was just the rising tide of the imports, right?

NE: Yes. That's really what started it. It was the imports.

MB: Well, when did they start really getting bad? I mean, we've always been importing the shrimp, but –

NE: Yes.

MB: Or seafood in general.

NE: Oh, yes. A lot of the seafood is imported, fish too. It's not just shrimp. But it's just that the fact that the shrimp were becoming – they were becoming more imported shrimp. It really started affecting us around 2000. It was when it really started affecting us. That's when we thought they were dumping. There was just so many coming in here at such a cheap price. Around here, we'll sell shrimp to local people. But then when we have an overabundance of shrimp, like in the fall if we have a hurricane, we usually have a lot of shrimp. Why? I don't know. But a hurricane creates a lot of shrimp for us, then we have to turn around and sell them to a processor. A lot of those processors were buying imports. Then they weren't paying a very big price for our shrimp. Then that's when it all started was around 2000, or actually what they were selling more here. Shrimp became more popular to eat. It used to be too expensive. But then the import started coming in, that made it cheaper. The imported shrimp were cheaper. They're not really cheaper in the supermarket or the – well, there's some cheaper in the supermarket, but the restaurants are using them – so many restaurants. They'll have them on a special. They'll use the imported shrimp, and then they will have it on a cheaper price special in order for them to sell more. There's just so many of them in here. That's what really started Southern Shrimp Alliance was the cheap – and that was around 2000.

MB: So, as far as you know, they're not really dumping them anymore. Or are they?

NE: Well, no, they're not really dumping them. Because the tariff is – it slowed it down. It slowed the imports down. They are being taxed on it, so that makes their shrimp higher.

MB: But it's not stopped them from –

NE: No, it's not stopped the imports. It won't stop the imports. They won't stop them. We weren't trying to stop them. We're just trying to slow it down to have – to be more fair with us. Yes. You hear fair trade. Everybody wants fair trade, but we don't want them dumped in here at such a cheap price that we can't compete.

MB: Of course, it's hard to compete with – I don't know whether they pay somebody in Thailand to work on a shrimp farm or (either thing?). But I think they're like slave labor.

NE: Yes.

MB: What we're really talking about is this big G word, globalization. We can talk about the story, whether we're talking about cars or furniture.

NE: Oh, yes.

MB: Half the furniture is imported now for the last 15 years or so.

NE: Then the steel and the lumber both had trade cases also. The shrimp case actually has turned out to be bigger than the steel or the lumber case. It's what the lawyers in Washington told us.

MB: Bigger in terms of?

NE: Of money wise, and I guess they meant tariff wise. I don't know. They just said a bigger case. Some of the lawyers there said it was so interesting to them. So, if you ever have another case, we want to be in on it. They just wanted to work with us. We're just such a good group to work with.

MB: Yes, because the steel one got more publicity in the news. There really hasn't been that much publicity about all this stuff.

NE: No, there hasn't. There's been some, but there's not been a lot of publicity about it.

MB: Oh, I mean, news in the media.

NE: Yes.

MB: Because I remember the whole steel thing was pretty controversial about –

NE: Yes. But they said that the shrimp is really bigger than the steel case. You can tell what happened to the price of steel. I mean, it came back up. It took a while. I don't really know how long they were fighting it, but it took a while. The shrimp will too. They'll come back. Yes, the price will come back up. We just don't know when or how much.

MB: Well, I think we've covered – is there anything else that we should add here?

NE: I don't think so.

MB: We've covered the chemicals, how it started. So, from here on, your battle is just to keep it going then.

NE: Yes, just to keep the association going to make sure that more testing is done, to make sure that the taxes are still kept in place, to help, like I said, with the rules and regulations that come down from the National Marine Fisheries. Because the National Marine Fisheries governs everybody that's fishing. Now, each state has its own agency, but the National Marine Fisheries is everybody, all the eight states, any state – to try to keep up with that. There's just so many

things going on within that that people don't realize. The small commercial fishermen are not aware of it unless they're kept up within – unless they do keep up with the news. Then the Southern Shrimp Alliance, in turn, will relay to them what's going on. They want to keep the group together and to keep fighting because you don't know what's going to happen next. You just don't know.

MB: Well, the importers are about to give up, it looks like.

NE: No. They're not going to stop importing. No. You just have to stay on your toes to watch them because there's so many things that they could do. One thing that they were doing, they were putting a coat of some type of thin flour on top of the shrimp and calling it dusted shrimp. Now, dusted shrimp were not taxed. They were doing that. Then when they got the shrimp over here, they could wash it off real easy – or some type of rice flour. They could wash it off. They would have what they would have – what would have been tariffed had they shipped it that way. That's another thing that we are in the process of fighting. So, there's always something. They're looking for ways to get it over here without being tariffed. They tried to get it through other countries, then they've tried this rice flour thing. Dusted shrimp is what it's called. So –

MB: I don't get why the U.S. Department of Agriculture doesn't have enough money to test shrimp. I mean, it's a huge department.

NE: I know. But that's what they say.

MB: It sounds like an excuse.

NE: It is just an excuse. At a meeting in New Bern one day, I asked Dr. Hogarth, who's the head of the National Marine Fisheries, and he used to be the head of the North Carolina Fisheries here in North Carolina. I asked him. That was his excuse. I said, "How come you can't do more testing?" He said, "Well, it takes more people, and it takes more funds." I said, "Well, don't you think that it's important to do it?" "Well, yeah, it was important, but –" and it always goes back to the money. But to me, the number one thing is when you go out to eat or to go out to buy something, you want to be sure it's safe for you to eat. You just take for granted that this is being tested or that it's okay to eat it when you go buy something at the store. You think, "Well, it's okay to eat this because it says USDA-approved." It may be approved, that particular compartment of that shipment might not have been approved, the whole compartment might have been. But if they don't test every – enough, then you're just not – you may get one that's not good. I might get one that's good. It has been tested. That's fine. They just don't test enough of the shipments.

MB: What can you say about the antibiotics? I mean, they think that's okay – that's legal to put in antibiotics in the –

NE: Some of it is legal, yes. That's one thing we're working with some of the companies and countries, is to make sure that they don't use them.

MB: Aren't there American companies that are involved with doing this stuff over there?



NE: Probably. I don't know any of the names or anything, but –

MB: I've heard of Anheuser-Busch. [inaudible].

NE: I've heard different names, but I don't know for sure.

MB: So, you don't need to talk about how you became a member. But the Southern Shrimp Alliance, obviously, the southern states, which we don't need to list all those. Well, talk about how you're one of the two reps from North Carolina to the Southern Shrimp Alliance. In other words –

NE: Yes. There's two representatives from each state. I'm one of the North Carolina ones. The other North Carolina representative is PD Mason. He's from around Morehead area. We attend the meetings. Anybody in the state has a problem, needs more information, they contact us. We go to the meetings and then turn around and come back and try to let everybody know what's going on, what they need to be aware of. There's also newsletters that the Southern Shrimp Alliance puts out periodically. That keeps everybody up to date on what's going on.

MB: Do you think the American public is aware of the chemical aspect in terms of chloramphenicol? In other words, are people aware of –

NE: No. People are not aware of the chemicals that are in the imported shrimp. If you try to tell them about it, a lot of people don't want to know. They don't want to listen. A lot of people are more health-conscious now. Those are the types of people that you will get through to that will listen and that will choose the domestic shrimp over the imported shrimp. Everyone here in Sneads Ferry – I know you've seen the bumper stickers, "Friends don't let friends eat imported shrimp." I know you've seen the bumper stickers that we have out, which they're all over there in all the states. I've had people contact me wanting those. But people here, when we go to the restaurants, we don't order shrimp. We used to eat shrimp at home [laughter]. But we do not order shrimp. Most of the people here in Sneads Ferry don't. The people that know – that catch them and that know what are in the imported shrimp. We try to tell everybody. A funny story was my cousin was eating in the restaurant one day and her little girl. She was probably about 10 at the time. She was sitting there, and the people behind her were ordering shrimp. She said, "Mom, they're ordering shrimp." Because she knew not to order shrimp at that particular restaurant. But the people behind her – because she thought, "Well, they should know also." But of course, they didn't know. Now, some of the restaurants here do serve domestic shrimp, local shrimp, not all of them. One reason they don't is because they say they don't have anybody to head and peel and devein them for them. Some of the restaurants that have been in business for a long time, they used to do that. They used to, during the summer, come to the fish houses, all the different fish houses, and get some. They had elderly women that sit there and peeled them for them. They froze them and kept them to have all through the winter to serve at the restaurants. But they don't do that now because we don't sell them – the fish houses don't sell them ready to eat. Most of them are still – have the heads on him. Sometimes you can get them – you can buy them headed. But they'll buy them off the food trucks, and they're ready to cook. That makes it easier for them in the restaurants. But a lot of times, they're not local shrimp.

When anybody comes to Sneads Ferry and sits down in the restaurant and sees all these commercial fishing boats here, they think everything in that restaurant is local and it's not. Hardly any of it is local. They would be surprised if they knew.

MB: They'd rather think they're good. That's a nice illusion.

NE: Yes. Right.

MB: Oh, look, pretty fish and boats –

NE: Yes.

MB: – and I'm eating it fresh off of the boat.

NE: [laughter]

MB: But [inaudible].

NE: But it's not. It's not fresh at all.

MB: That includes the fish too.

NE: Yes.

MB: Because, as I understand, about 60 percent of all seafood is imported, not just shrimp.

NE: No. It's not just shrimp. It's all of them.

MB: It's everything.

NE: Yes. With your clams now, there are a lot of hatcheries – well, what they call hatcheries. There are a lot of clam farms in – or there's a lot in Florida. There's some in Virginia. They're all over. They can raise the clams and catch them for you at exactly the right size you want. So, that hurts the clam market. Because when you go out there and you catch clams, you're catching a variety of sizes. If you were ordering some, you only wanted that one size, you're going to buy from the guy who's got the one size rather than the mixed ones. So, all the seafood comes up against something, like the shrimp coming up against the imported one. The crab meat was the same way, come up against the imported crab meat. Now, the clams are coming up against the farm-raised clams, which are not imported. They're still in the wild, but they're farm raised. But it's with all the seafood.

MB: Right. Well, as (Ray Sweeney?) said, "You can't – what kind of country is it where you can't get your food?"

NE: Right.

MB: I mean, you can't import everything you can. It just won't do. I want to import everything, whether cars or booze or whatever.

NE: Yes.

MB: It doesn't make for a strong country that can't do it.

NE: No. We're putting ourselves out of business. That's what we're doing by importing so much. There's just too many things that are being imported. Because you hear about them losing jobs in the furniture industry, for instance. You hear about these plants closing and losing jobs. But you don't hear too much about the shrimp and the man that's going to lose his job because of the imported shrimp. Then if there's no more boats, then these other places that sell fishing gear are going to go out of business. It will have some effect, not a whole lot, on the fuel that's sold here. It's a trickle-down effect as far as who it's going to hurt. It's not just the commercial fishermen. It's a lot of people in the town.

MB: We've seen it in all kinds of towns, whether it's in –

NE: All over.

MB: – [inaudible] town of the Midwest or the factories, all the huge steel mills and car plants closing down over at Mexico or overseas. I mean, we're just seeing it. For every worker that gets laid off or loses their job, that it's their family, the businesses they would go to –

NE: Yes.

MB: – like you said, it ripples out. It's not just that person that gets screwed up.

NE: Yes.

MB: A lot of people do. So –

NE: It has a big effect.

MB: Well, I think we got it.

NE: Okay.

MB: So, Nancy, you grew up here in town.

NE: Yes.

MB: So, how does it feel to kind of look out in this beautiful scene here?

NE: Well, you really can't describe it. Everyone comes here since it's got a pretty view, and it is. You can see the boats coming in and out every day, going shrimping. I wouldn't change the

view for anything.

MB: Your family has been in this business for all these years.

NE: Yes. Well, it'd be four generations. Well, really, five, if you count my grandchildren now.

MB: Say that again. You've got how many generations?

NE: Well, actually, my father's grandfather did fish some. He mostly farmed, but my grandfather was a commercial fisherman. He didn't like farming. So, now I have grandchildren, so that would make it five generations. Yes, five. Well, you could really say six generations, I guess. I have four grandchildren that all love the water, love to go fishing, shrimping. They know a lot about it.

MB: Do you think they'll be able to do it?

NE: I don't know. I don't know whether I would want them to. The way it's going, you really need more stable income. But if that's what they want to do, yes, I want them to be able to do it.

[end of transcript]