

Citrus Hall of Fame Oral History Interview
Florida Southern College

Interviewee:	Joe L. Davis, Sr.
Interviewer:	Richard Soash
Date:	December 3, 2010
Camera Tech:	Holly Bennett
Others present:	LuAnn Mims, College Archivist
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Transcription:	Jennifer Bruno, June 2011

Soash: *Hi my name is Richard Soash. Today is December 3, 2010. I am interviewing Mr. Joe Davis Sr., here at Joe Davis Inc. for the Florida Citrus Hall of Fame Oral History Series. Camera person is Holly Bennett, and also present is our college archivist, LuAnn Mims.*

Hi Mr. Davis. Thank you for being here with us today. Would you please state your entire name?

Davis: My name is Joe L. Davis, Senior.

Soash: *Okay thank you, would you tell us a little about your education?*

Davis: I was born and raised here in, Hardee County.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: Graduated from a country school out here in the country. Always tell the story that I graduated twelfth in a class of 13. But I did finish ahead of T. J. Bryan. And, of course, I am a product of the Wauchula High School here. Finished school in 1941. And uh, beyond that I only had limited formal education. Most of it was self ...

Soash: *Self-taught?*

Davis: ... taught. I spent a full seven years with the, the old F. W. Woolworth Company. It was, they're out of business now, but it was one of the old five-and-dime stores. And I started in the stockroom, and went through the process of assistant manager and manager. It was, managing the Woolworth store in Norton, Virginia when I came home in 1948.

Soash: *When did you get your realtors license?*

Davis: In, let me get it straight now. I bought, I was in the restaurant business for several years. I always say that I made my first million dollars in the restaurant business. That's stretching it a little bit. But that's the first success that I had in the real estate business. And we had three, three restaurants: the Midway in Wachula, the Palms in Avon Park, and the Fountain in Orlando.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: So, and, I guess we bought the first orange grove in '53. And got the real estate license, this was our fifty-fourth year, in '56.

Soash: *Okay. How did you go from being in the real estate business to also working with citrus?*

Davis: Well we bought the grove first.

Soash: *Mm-hmm, okay.*

Davis: In '53. And, uh, a 20 acre grove out here in the lemon grove area, and we just parlayed that. We bought and sold groves. Buy an old grove, and improve them. Keep the best ones, and sell the sorest ones. And we ran that from the 20 acres and the 26 hundred. That's what the family owns and operates now.

Soash: *I've read in the Citrus Hall of Fame biography we have on you are, you were definitely ... quite the innovator when it came to trying new techniques in citrus.*

Davis: We were always blessed with, with funds to do things, from the real estate business and from other investments. And we were, we, kind of pioneered the ... proper engineered to grow oranges in the flatwoods. See we grow oranges out here on Ten Mile Grade, and 19 miles from there we grow oranges in Highlands County, and its completely two different operations. So, we were involved in making it possible to grow oranges on land that wasn't orange land. See all the old, all the old grove land was ... very limited. And so we were involved in that.

Soash: *How did you make the transition from growing in typical orange grove land to a more unusual locale. Like what were some of the strategies and techniques you guys used?*

Davis: Well, it was necessity. Uh, you know, one of the ...

Soash: *Necessity is the mother of invention.*

Davis: Yeah, that's the old saying, yeah. And that's what happened. Uh, the buried nematodes got into groves on the ridge, and uh, and, it shoved the septius banus [?] to the flatwoods because we never did have buried nematodes in the flatwoods. And it shoved it this way. And then it shoved it towards the Indian River area. But all the old real good groves were established along the Ridge. But if you look at your map, that's a very limited amount of acreage. And as the demand for citrus grew, people came south into the east, and south to the west.

Soash: *Some of the specific innovations that are mentioned include like underground tile drainage, could you explain to all the non-citrus people out there, myself included, some more about what that means?*

Davis: Well, we, if you see a baseball or football field.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: They, they're I imagine that 100% of them is tile, where you get the water on and you get the water off. And, and that was our problem in Hardee County was getting the water off. And they first started doing the beds, but then you wound up with water down in the bottom, and you still had water. And that's when we got involved in the tile. And ... we, we have about, imagine about 800 or pretty close to a thousand acres of grove that have been tiled.

Soash: *That's a lot.*

Davis: And they're some of our most productive growers.

Soash: *How does that work?*

Davis: How does tile work?

Soash: *Yes, I guess.*

Davis: Okay, it's, you put, perforated pipe down in the ground, and, and you put the water that way in other words you engineer it where the water's going to go that way. And then you got to have a place

for it to go, so that you have to engineer that, too. So, it, every, every football and baseball field, I know, is tiled. And we just use the same technique to get the water off the groves here. See, if the orange, if it's setting in water, it won't root. Those roots don't, don't work with water. So what we were trying to do was lower the water level and get rid of the surface water.

Soash: *Was that an unusual practice when you first tried implementing it or how common was it, I guess?*

Davis: I imagine that we may have been either the first or second.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: I'm talking about in this area, now.

Soash: *Right.*

Davis: I don't know about on the Indian River. But to my knowledge they never did have any tile over there. We had a six hundred and fifty-acre grove over there one time, and every time I went over there, water was in there everywhere and standing in water and the trees would have a box and a half, and oranges. And we got a chance to sell it, and I told my people, I said, "Well, sell it and go home." I said, "We grow more June blooms in our area." So we in the four counties.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: Hardee, Highlands, southern Polk, and Desoto. We just in that little triangle there. And, there, they're no big blocks of fruit, I think the biggest block of fruit is maybe 200 acres. They, they're, they're ...

Soash: *They're spread out?*

Davis: In other words, they're spread out and then put together. During a freeze or hurricane it's an advantage sometimes.

Soash: *Makes sense.*

Davis: And, and it's a little bit of disadvantage in caretaking. But we have that down to a science.

Soash: *Another innovation that I was hoping you would elaborate on, in the biography it says that you double set and inter-set older low density groves, could you explain that a little more?*

Davis: Well, the old original groves was either set 30 by 30 or 30 by 40. That was just a normal set. And, we, we started double setting 'em, in other words putting more trees per acre. For instance, we had a grove at Fort Green, that was set 30 by 20, and it was set, it was set, east and west. Well we turned it around, and made it 20 by 15. We turned it around north and south, and oranges really do better north and south then they do east and west.

Soash: *Why do you think that is?*

Davis: I dunno, why? Well, they have proof out there that they get more sun that way.

Soash: *Ah, okay, that makes a lot of sense.*

Davis: They didn't know, they didn't know hearsay, it's the truth. You never, you never put a grove east to west unless you have to.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: And sometimes you'll have a piece of land that just lends itself to east to west. But most of the time, every one of ours, that we have, that we can is north and south. And that's what we did with the

30 by 20; we turned it around the other way and made it 20 by 15. And after all these years, the production on that grove will still almost blow your mind. We had, we never was people that wanted to plant a lot of acres. We want to plant, we wanted to grow a lot of oranges, on the acreage, on less acreage. And that's been our philosophy.

Soash: *How long would it take to move from the earlier set of, I believe you said, 30 by 15.*

Davis: Well 30 by 30 was it.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: And there was a little bit of 30 by 40.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: And of course you got to remember, you got to remember back then that they plowed the groves. And they, and they would, a lot of the, a lot of the small growers here would, would pin the cows in at night to fertilize.

Soash: *Makes sense, that's one kind of innovation.*

Davis: Right, right. But now I didn't invent that.

Soash: *Are we talking oranges or grapefruit? Sorry, it's probably a silly question, but what kind of citrus?*

Mims: *What type of oranges?*

Soash: *Oh, what type of oranges?*

Davis: Well, we've been, we've been through the whole gamut.

Soash: *Okay so ...*

Davis: We at one time had a lot of grapefruit. And, and, and we planted oranges for fresh fruit, all different kinds. We built a packing house on [US Highway] 27. And, and we tried it all. But we're now, now have four grapefruit trees; 22 acres of Murcotts, and the rest of it is juice oranges.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: And are Hannibal, Valencias, we grow more Valencias than we do anything else. Simple rule, that's where the money is.

Soash: *Makes good sense. Could we talk a little about watering technique, going from overhead sprinklers, to drip irrigation, to micro-jet?*

Davis: Okay, we had one grove at Sweetwater, it's a 40-acre grove. We bought that sometime in the '50's or early '60's, and it had the old pump and aluminum sprinkler pipe. And you would just water one or two middles at a time and you would physically drag that sprinkler pipe around.

Soash: *Mm, okay.*

Davis: And that particular grove, we, in the '60's, we put in overhead irrigation system. And the overhead irrigation was good except it ... it really didn't help you any with cold damage. I mean the freezes.

So we then converted that grove to drip, and, and we had the drip. And I guess we had that 3 or 4 times, 3 or 4 years, and then the micro-jet came along, which in the area that we grow, the triangle fruit here, the micro-jet is a godsend to us because it gives us a good irrigation system and it also gives us cold protection.

Soash: *How does the cold protection work?*

Davis: Well, you're going to have to ask one of your doctor friends. I really, all I know ... it works. And you get into the dew point, dew point, and when you run it, and when you don't run it. But if it's cold, our twenty-six hundred acres are ruined.

Soash: *Acres.*

Davis: Huh? And every grove we have has at least one sprinkler to the tree. And some of 'em, in a cold area, may have two sprinklers. You might have one where you normally put it, then you might put another one on the north side.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: That's, that's where our cold comes from, the northwest.

Soash: *I also read that you were a big advocate for mechanical harvesting ... would you go into detail about that?*

Davis: Well, it's the only, it's really the only fruit or vegetable that isn't harvested mechanically. And our numbers of growing oranges ... and, is almost as good as Brazil. Everywhere except harvesting, and then they beat us to death. So that was the reason that I was always hoping we could reach some way to mechanically harvest our oranges. And on top of that it's the most dirtiest, hardest work in the world. That's picking oranges. And in the whole citrus business everything is bright, and clean, and enjoyable, except the actual picking of that orange. It, it's the only distasteful part of it.

And so I'd always, we were, I was, I served on the Citrus Commission 18 and a half years and we funded, we funded some of that and tried to help ... and my son still sits on the mechanical harvesting, but ... I think, I think it, and if we have mechanical harvesting, Brazil would have it also. But it wouldn't do them as much good as it would us.

Soash: *Makes sense. Why is Brazil ahead of the United States citrus industry in terms of harvesting the fruit? Why are they more efficient?*

Davis: Labor.

Soash: *Yeah.*

Davis: Just one word. Labor. They, they pay something like ... two or three dollars a day or something like that, and then they don't have the insurance and all the regulations like we have.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: And see ... with mechanical harvesting you would get rid of people, and you'd have more skilled people.

Mims: *If it increases the harvest, why do people not want to use the mechanical harvesting? What is the opposition to it?*

Davis: Well, there's no real opposition to it, we just never have ... an orange is a peculiar thing. It, when an apple gets ripe it falls on the ground. And an orange never turns loose. And then over half of our fruit are Valencias, and when you're harvesting Valencias you've got green oranges on there too. So ... and you don't want to get your green oranges for next year. So it, it, it is the most difficult thing to harvest, they are, is oranges.

And we've went to, spent millions of dollars, and I don't know the details, but ... we spent millions of dollars trying to register ... what it amounts to is a loosener. If we had that orange that when you shook

the tree the ripe ones would fall off, it, it would be, it would be real something. But just to shake the tree, you've got to shake it so hard it causes some damage to the tree. And then you shake off part of the little green ones too.

We have a, we have a painting by Robert Butler, the black nature painter, I don't know whether you've ever heard of him or not, over in the farm office that, it shows one of our Valencia groves with a, with a full crop of fruit and a full bloom. So see the Valencia oranges double up, you have the two crops at one time. And that muddle supplies our harvesting problem.

Soash: *You mentioned the Citrus Commission, and you also served on Florida Citrus Mutual, correct?*

Davis: Right.

Soash: *Could you go into some of the work you feel was very important that you did on those boards?*

Davis: Well, I think that ... we were probably instrumental in improving government relations in the state, county, and the federal government. And, and, we certainly had a hand in marketing, improving the marketing. And to some extent the quality of our product. You wouldn't believe it, but used to, when you picked up a bottle of NFC in the grocery store it was only good for three or four days. So they kept improving the technique or producing it. Now, I pick up a bottle of orange juice and its shelf life's 30 days. A lot of things has happened in the citrus business.

Soash: *Did you ever, like go to Washington to speak to individuals up there, or was your ...*

Davis: A lot of times.

Soash: *Oh, okay. What kind of work did that entail?*

Davis: Well, when ... when ... President Reagan passed the CBI Program, the Caribbean Base Initiative Program, all that juice was, out of the Caribbean could come in here without paying the tariff.

Soash: *Okay.*

Davis: And of course there wasn't much of it and there wasn't much ... and there wasn't much, and, and, and ... citrus isn't like cucumbers. You can't get it overnight. It's a long drawn out dedicated process. So ... and, they really still, even with that advantage, they still don't produce a lot of citrus in the Caribbean.

But our fears was, and I don't know whether I was at Mutual or maybe at the Citrus Commission, but our fears was that Brazil was going to trans-ship through the CBI countries. And we, you know, you go to Washington and you get a lot of, talked to a lot of people, and we went ... Bobby McGuy, who at that time was head of Mutual, he and I went up, and maybe I was chairman of the Citrus Commission, I don't remember.

But anyway we went up there. We thought we would ... probably get a staff member or something, but we, Lawton Chiles got involved personally and wrote the bill himself, or had it wrote. And they still to this day know trans-shipping, that we ... anybody can ever find their choice now.

Soash: *Wow.*

Davis: So that was ... that was ... one of the ... we went there many times. I went to Washington a lot of times, but, Tallahassee too. But I think our relations now through Mutual and our other organization, I think it's as good in Washington and Tallahassee as it ever been.

Soash: *That's great. Did you ever meet with, like a foreign counterpart, in some ways, like I'm not, I'm trying to imagine like a negotiation setting, so to speak? I don't know if I'm completely off base with this.*

Davis: You mean on the tariff?

Soash: *Sure.*

Davis: I never did get involved in that. Now we did get involved in the anti-dumping suit when I was at the Department of Citrus.

Soash: *About when was that?*

Davis: Ooh man ...

Soash: *Sorry.*

Davis: I, it, you would ... as a result of that anti-dumping suit some of the processors collected some money last year. Where they had dumped a product here below the market price and they collected the money last year. And I tell you who could give you the exact details on that would be Mike Sparks at Florida Citrus Mutual. He was involved, see, he was the comptroller at the Department of Citrus before he came to Mutual. And that's an interesting part of it is that anti-dumping suit. And, and, Mike, he wasn't involved until this time but he knows how it worked because he's controlling the money.

Soash: *Okay. I've actually heard Mr. Sparks' name come up before in, with Dr. Larry, er ...*

Mims: *He's on a list.*

Davis: Yeah, you want to, if you, any of that detailed information, he would have the records. And ...

Mims: *He's at Mutual now.*

Davis: Yeah. He's the executive director of Mutual.

Soash: *One last question before we take a short break, but was there anyone that you looked up to in the citrus industry during the early part of your career? Any mentors, so to speak, that you can, that you would like to talk about?*

Davis: Most of the time I was givin' 'em all hell! [laughter] They wasn't doing their business like I did this one, and ... and we, we helped them some. I, no, not, I'm not, my father wasn't in the citrus business, so I'm a first generation grower.

Mims: *Who would you go to for advice?*

Davis: Ohh, I had an uncle that had some citrus. And I think that he maybe helped us pick out the first grove we bought.

Soash: *Sounds like there's a lot learning on the job then.*

Davis: Yeah, yeah, but as far as, you know we've been involved with so many people, but, but ... not really that. We had an old ... what attracted me to citrus, growing up here during the Depression on a truck farm out here, between here and Avon Park, the people who had the little orange grove always had a little money and they got a new car. So as I grew up I said, "I'm gonna get me some of those orange groves." So we did; able to put a few of them together.

[taping paused, then resumed]

Soash: *And we're back. So would you be able to give me a little bit about your memories of packing houses?*

Davis: Well I didn't know how bad they were. I was following ... looking at the gift fruit houses. And the gift fruit houses at that time, and that would have been in the ... let me back up and see how long ago it would have been ... it would have been in the '80s. The gift fruit business at that time, the only thing that you could buy was peanuts, and pecans, and fruit cakes and citrus. It wasn't like the internet is now.

See I got three new shirts in there. I bought them on the internet Monday, paid five dollars extra and they were here Thursday.

And the gift fruit business 25 years ago was a big business. And there were several large houses on the ... east coast, and several large houses on the west coast. I mean big. And they were all making the money, a lot of money. And at that time we were just, we had the tariff and, and we could compete with Brazil but we didn't know we was going to be able to compete with them on two charges. If we lost the tariff, or if we lost it today we couldn't compete with them. The tariff is our lifeblood.

And so we had these groves, and we were looking around. Always looking around for another niche to improve what you have, and we decided we would do the fresh fruit business. And we did a big thing and did building, and we put it on [US Highway] 27, on 27 north between Avon Park and Sebring, and we did it up right, except ... everything begin with become available through shipping. Everything. Beer, anything you want you can get off ... and, and then ... the oranges and fruit that was shipped, the big part of them come from the east coast to west coast.

If, if, we'd of done a little better research ... the east coast would've been number one, the west coast would've been number two, and 27 would've been a poor third. And we didn't, we didn't do, we all, all we knew was that if we could develop a packing house business we would have a market for some of our fruit without depending on the competition from Brazil, or if we lost the tariff it wouldn't affect that business. So we did it and we were what I would call medium-successful. Not real successful.

And I only had one child. I had one son and he was here running the real estate business and I was over there running that and with the time in our lives we decided, well it was time to get him in a graded ... in that end of it. And so I asked him, I said, "Joe, I believe, I believe I've got the hardest job. You want to swap jobs?" And he said, "Don't kid me," and I said, "No I mean it." So we completely swapped jobs.

And I came back here to my old desk, and he took that thing over. And he ran it; he only ran that packing house two years. And he said to me, "Dad, I think I'm going to close the packing house unless you've got some hard feelings about it." And I said, "Well do we have to take Chapter 11?" He said, "No, you know better than that." So he closed it up. And now that's where the greening and the canker offices is for this whole area. It's in the old packing house.

Soash: *You donated it to the Department of Agriculture, correct?*

Davis: I believe, I believe our rent check comes from the USDA, I don't know. Here again I don't know the details of that mix, of who pays for what and who gets what. But if you're in that area it would be interesting to go in there and look at it.

We did it first class. And, had the good orange ice cream, and orange and vanilla, and fresh-squeezed juice, but it ... 27 and I-4 are [shakes head from side to side] than the coast. And the people we get on 27 don't have dispensable money like the people we'd get on the coast. So of all my ventures that would be my probably a C, or D, or maybe a, maybe a F-plus. [laughter]

Soash: *I don't know if there's such a thing as an F-plus. [laughter]*

Davis: It wasn't, it wasn't, [laughter] ... huh?

Soash: *I don't know if there are F-plusses.*

Davis: I'll tell you what; it wasn't nearly as good as some waterfront property I bought. Not near as good.

Soash: *I read in your Hall of Fame biography about the 406, would you tell me a little about that?*

Davis: Oh well that, that's when, oh Ted Williams owned ... I can't remember, he owned 10 or 15 or 20 percent of that packing house. I forget what it was. So we developed the 406, because that's when he, he was the last one to hit over 400, and that was in 1941. And we sold quite a few of them in the Boston area. And as popular as he was it never did ever really catch on fire. And maybe we wasn't marketing it, maybe, yeah, I don't know.

Soash: *How many people work for the packing house, approximately?*

Davis: You mean ... before Christmas?

Soash: *Sure.*

Davis: We probably had, we probably had 50 of them there trying to get out the Christmas orders. See between Thanksgiving and Christmas you did a lot of, that's when the big part of your business was.

Soash: *Okay ... going back to the Florida Department of Citrus, I read that you did a lot to try to improve the marketing for Florida citrus. Could you tell me some about the ways that you tried to increase marketing?*

Davis: Well I've always been, maybe oversold on the product. And it's just the, it's the gold ring of all juices. And ... and it's probably one of the best kept secrets. And it's good, the only problem we have with it is that it has calories, but I think the calories more than offset the advantages you get from it.

But anyway, I got pretty deeply involved in the marketing of that. I attended hundreds of strategy studies and visited the stores. I was lucky I had the time and energy and it fascinated me.

Soash: *One thing I read was that you were wanting to create a hundred percent citrus ID label. Did that ever take off?*

Davis: We came within that close [holds fingers approximately an inch apart], but then the freezes ... there's no use marking something if you don't have the supplies.

Soash: *Makes sense.*

Davis: So the nearest thing to that today is ... Florida Natural has gone to marketing a hundred percent Florida. And maybe one juice over on the Indian River, I forget the name of it ... and it may be the Indian River brand, I forget what it is. But I always thought it had a niche. I was always taken with the Idaho potato, the Columbian ... coffee, and I really believed in it. But actually we never did have the supplies.

Soash: *Makes sense.*

Davis: Just like three years ago when orange juice went to \$2.40 a pound. And Tropicana got caught in it and had to buy a bunch of it. And the lady that runs PepsiCo said, "Well you don't catch me the second time." So they made some provisions to be able to import NFC from Brazil, so then of course Coca-Cola followed suit. So both of them has the capability now of economically bringing in NFC. They still will to have it here.

Soash: *What company did your oranges go to primarily?*

Davis: We always kept them ... we were at Florida Natural, FOM which is Minute Maid, and then we carried around. You know when you grow a million boxes you can't eat them, or you can't put them in the back of your car. And you've got to get rid of them. So we spread it around. But like I said, I told the lady, we're about 40 percent of our fruit is at Florida Natural.

Soash: *Another thing that I read was about advocating for higher quality standards for grapefruit juice. Could you go into detail about that?*

Davis: Well we did, when I was on the Commission, we did improve the, we improved the quality of the grapefruit juice. And I don't know how it came about, but we had a higher standard for the juice in Florida than the federal government did. And I forget who helped, but we kind of cut a deal with the federal government. If we would lower ours to theirs, the next year they would raise it back to where it should be. And I forget the details ... you know I'm 87 years old, and a lot of things went through this head.

Soash: *No, even just the framework of that is interesting.*

Davis: In other words we did, we did ... and it was a giant step. Because grapefruit juice, the old story was that the hogs wouldn't eat it, and you couldn't drink it unless it was 75 percent vodka. That was the old saying about grapefruit juice. And it was that bad. It was bad.

Soash: *Speaking of ... the national government, you got, at one time there was the creation of a political action committee. Were you involved with that at all? I read it off of the biography.*

Davis: Yeah, I was involved in it. And we also ... [laughter] Jerry Chicone was involved with it. Did he mention something about Earl Ditis protesting the participation plan?

Mims: *I'm not sure. [To Soash]: Were you in on that*

Soash: *That may have been a Charlie [Fanning] interview.*

Davis: Anyway, one time this thing got so tight that you couldn't sell your fruit at all. All you could do was put it on the participation plan. And they did all, they spent all the money they wanted to and then at the end of the year if there's anything left they split it up between you.

Well that didn't, Mr. Chicone or I, neither one liked that. And he was kind of like I was. He never was totally dependent on citrus. His daddy was a bleeder man so they always had money. That's a number ... business. And they were kind of like ... and we always had our real estate business. And we were smart enough to roll the two of them together and make the citrus a big part of our real estate business.

Soash: *One thing that I talked to, with a number of the other inductees about and it's always interesting to hear their opinions on is the box tax. What are your feelings on that?*

Davis: Well, when we put the first penny on, penny on there I was not excited about it because I just felt like, that, that the taxes we paid, that ... the state of Florida and IFA should do that work, and we shouldn't have to re-tax ourselves.

But I did get involved to help promote the first penny. And then we were involved and voted for it, helped promote this last one that raised it to three cent. IFA and the University system is, they just, the politicians don't give us the money we need. We're not the population, and the people get the money out of the general revenue. Farmers don't.

Soash: *How do crate labels play into your memory of the citrus industry?*

Davis: Not really. Blank almost. I never have been excited about the first one, even though I tried it one time. We always have leaned towards growing processed fruit. Like I say we have four grapefruit trees and 22 acres of tangelos, I mean of Murcotts and a lot of Valencias. We never, I never did really ... Jerry Chicone did, and a lot of people did, but I never did. No, about all the oranges in this county, and most all of these went into juice.

Soash: *Okay. What was some of the biggest changes you witnessed over your time in the industry?*

Davis: Oh ... well, you know, when I got into the business in, we bought the little old grove in '53, you sold by the box. They had a, they had a, those old big boxes out there and they'd fill them up, and that's how you'd get paid, on the box.

And then a few years later it went to you got paid on weight. Ninety pounds. And then now we get paid on weight and pound size, so. That's one thing that has changed in its own way, and it changed for the better. We only have orange right here, that will have five pounds. And at two dollars a pound that'll bring 10 dollars. And you'd have one right over here that's six point nine that brings us lots more money. We try to grow the one with our right hand.

Soash: *Makes sense.*

Davis: Same orange, same ninety pounds. So that's a transition we've had. From box, to weight, to pound size. And Tropicana did take a run at us a couple years ago wanting to buy by the gallon. And they never did develop that. In other words for NFC they really don't need a seven and a half pound orange.

Soash: *Was there any overall philosophy you always tried to operate under in your years of running a business, either real estate or in the citrus industry?*

Davis: Well simple. We always knew what we were doing. [laughter]

Soash: *That helps.*

Davis: Yeah, we didn't, we weren't guessing whether we had money or not, we weren't guessing how much we were spending on this 10 acres of orange grove, we knew. And it goes back to the old Woolworth days. They had a little daily report that every day you filled it out and you mailed it in to Atlanta. And we still do that. We know, no matter what we're doing, we know exactly what we're doing.

Soash: *Okay, and lastly, do you have any thoughts on your time in the industry before we close?*

Davis: I think it's the greatest business in the world. And when you're lucky enough to tie the two of them together like we did, it's been a pleasure and a great run. And a great life.

Soash: *Your passion for the citrus industry certainly shines through.*

Davis: It is, it is. I love it. And like I say I was raised on a vegetable farm and didn't have any citrus.

Soash: *Do you have a fondest memory?*

Davis: Maybe it was ... [laughter] I don't know, I, I, I have been like Jerry Chicone, I've been controversial in business, and I got elected to the Mutual Board by almost by default. And I'm, I'm walking down the hall and the, the building, I heard one girl tell the other, "That's him! That's him!"

And Chicone and two or three of us, we were always trying to improve the business. And then of course I think that when Bob Graham appointed me to Citrus Commission, I think that I was 54 years old, my son was out of law school and home in the family business and, you know, I needed to give him a little room, and it just never could have worked out for a family better than me getting to serve on the Citrus Commission.

And of course the day they put me on Citrus Hall of Fame. I had an old buddy there, and a lot of friends there; that was a great day. Great day.

Soash: *You said Ted Williams was with you at that induction ceremony?*

Davis: Oh yeah, yeah. We got a lot of pictures around here from my wife but I don't know where they are, but yeah, yeah. I had, I had, we were scheduled to go to his induction to the hall of, to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Can't remember why I didn't get to go but I always regretted it, but ...

Soash: *How long ago was that? When he was inducted?*

Davis: Okay, he played until he was 46, and aren't there a five year waiting period?

Soash: *Yes, it's five year.*

Davis: So naturally he went in on the first ballot. That was almost unanimous.

Soash: *Okay, well thank you for ... this has been great.*

Davis: Okay, thank you.

[taping paused, then resumed]

Davis: That's what drove the citrus off the Ridge.

Mims: *Okay. Into the flatwoods?*

Davis: Into the flatwoods, that's exactly right.

Mims: *The nematodes?*

Davis: Right. And we were involved in improving the horticulture practice where you could grow them more. Our thousand acres down there's totally tiled and it's some of the most productive growth we have.

Mims: *Do you know why the nematodes preferred the Ridge and not the flats?*

Davis: I think it was the water.

Mims: *The standing water?*

Davis: I know it wasn't the, I think it was the difference in the moisture. See, the ridge is so sandy. I think ... I don't know exactly what it was. But anybody at the, Dr. Mackey in the lab, but your professor in Lakeland would know.

Mims: *I think Hugh English talked about it a little bit.*

Davis: Yeah, yeah.

Mims: *Okay, well that's good.*

Davis: That was the first really ...

[taping stops]

[END]