

## **Farming and Food Summary from Oral History Interviews of African Americans in Gainesville, Florida.**

This information was collected from the Joel Buchanan African American Oral History Archive, which is part of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida. The information summarized here include all the interviews conducted with African Americans who resided in Gainesville or Alachua County at the time of the interview, and who shared relevant information on food, farming, gardening, and other food systems information. These interviews were conducted between 1982 and 2016. It is important to highlight that many of these interviews were purposely conducted with social and civil activists and the focus of the interviews were mostly on these issues.

Text searches were conducted of this database and the resulting records were reviewed to verify that they were in the geographical location of interest and whether or not had relevant information for this project. Thirty nine (39) records were selected and relevant quotes were copied into an excel spreadsheet (attached). Next, this information was reviewed and compared by topic, resulting in the following summary.

### **About their farms and gardens**

The majority of the people selected indicated that they grew up on a farm or garden. At least 5 people indicated that their parents were sharecroppers and at least 8 people indicated that their family owned their farm land. Three people indicated that their fathers worked at the mine, while the rest of the family or hired sharecroppers worked at the farm. The farm size ranged from 2.5 to 80 acres. A few people referred to their grandparents or uncles' farms, not their parents'. A few people indicated that at least some of the farm products were sold to the market, while the rest of crops and livestock were produced for self-consumption. A few stated that either tobacco, cotton or cattle were the main cash farm products.

Among the farm products obtained from the farm, the interviewees mentioned the following products in order of frequency: corn, cattle, cotton, peas, tobacco, peanuts, beans, hogs, chickens, milk, cucumbers, watermelons, okra, tomatoes, eggs, potatoes, eggplants, turpentine, canning fruits, goats, lettuce, strawberries, sweet potatoes, squash, bell peppers, sugar cane, collards, turnips, pumpkins and orange potatoes, ducks. Many people reported having a smoke house which was used to prepare the meat from livestock. Additionally, a few people mentioned canning fruits and vegetables frequently such as peaches, tomatoes and pickles, and producing jelly.

### **Life as sharecroppers**

Only a few interviewees indicated that they worked as sharecroppers. Others helped their parents in the field but did not work as sharecroppers in their adult lives. The following quote from Louise Buchanan describes her adult life as sharecropper:

*“Well, I did see some heavy days. It was hard at the beginning. My husband worked at a mine and he worked there until the next [child] got old enough to run*

*the farm.... We had corn, cotton, peanuts, raised potatoes and cane.... I worked out at the white folk's farm. All our work was on the farm with the white folks.... I hoed peanuts. I didn't chop cotton because I didn't plant cotton. They had peanuts and corn. They gave me plenty of work to do..."*

The following dialogue from the interview with Rebecca Hall and Nathaniel Hall describe how the sharecropping arrangement they work under was unfair:

*Nathaniel: They, we would, White people would let us farm from let us see, a half-crop, share crop. And we was Black people, and they could tell us anything, and we would believe it, because it was a good sharecropping \_\_\_\_\_ .... And we made good. He wouldn't tell us the [inaudible 2:44]. They were the same. Well, we didn't have—they did good this year, but next year, "we hope you do better!" They would only give us a little bit of what we made, what the sharecrop was. And they share, was never gave to us. We didn't know we was cheated.*

*Rebecca: You was cheated out of your portion of your earnings.*

*Nathaniel: Uh-huh. Right. Right.*

*Rebecca: How did they get along otherwise, Nathaniel? Back in those days?*

*Nathaniel: Well, we got along all right, because most—we didn't know we was cheated. They would just pretend along, what they wanted us to have. But we wasn't equal. We wasn't equal in fact as sharecroppers.*

### **Helping with farm labor**

All of the 34 interviews selected indicated that they provided important farm labor for the family even at a very young age. In some cases this meant to miss school, but most of the time it meant that they were very busy with field chores and school chores. The following quote from Daniel Gainey illustrate this:

*"My Dad was a small-time farmer. And Mama was a housewife, which of course that mean in the field as well... [They grew] basically vegetables. That included beans, squash, tomatoes. Corn was one of the big things, and the thing that really got them through was tobacco.... The children was the hired help.... I got up early mornings and did so many chores to keep from missing a day from school. And upon returning I spent the rest of the evening in the field 'til dark to make sure that my homework as well as the fieldwork was maintained."*

### **Food self-sufficiency**

At least 11 people indicated that they were food self-sufficient due that all their needs were met by the farm products they produced. Some of these people stated that they would

not buy anything from the food stores. The following dialogue with Joe Dell provides an example:

*Interviewer: So you didn't go to the convenience store?*

*Joe: No, no... All the vegetables came from the farm. All your milk came from the farm. You want a watermelon; you go out there and get you a watermelon. Corn, peas, okra, tomatoes came from your farm. Nowadays, it cost so much, the cost of living ridiculous. See we had everything there on the farm....People back then, like I say, you had to live on a farm, and if you wasn't farming to grow your vegetables and fruits you didn't have it.*

Another example comes from the interview with Mary Alice Aaron:

*"[My father] always raised almost everything we ate. All of our vegetables and all our meat. We were just like little boys when he would go to kill hogs. We would fall right in there and help him.... He cured all his meat in the smoke house, cured it all in the smoke house."*

One last example of food self-sufficiency comes from the interview with Rebecca Hall and Nathaniel Hall:

*"We got along good because we had the farm. And we lived mostly off of the farm. Didn't have to do all of this going to town too much. We had, like sugar, and flour, things of that sort. But as far as grits, meal, meat, we had it right there at home."*

### **Sharing food**

A few people stated that their farm and garden products were freely shared among the community, especially to those in need, the old and poor among them. This created a strong sense of community, which has been lost since. The following dialogue from the interview with Freddie Hickmon illustrates this point:

*Freddie: It seems to me like he sold some of it. No, I don't think he sold it, but different ones. They was farms. Different people had farms. And just like if, if your farm, you had peas right now, the neighbor, you would give some to them. You understand what I'm trying to say?*

*Interviewer: Kind of barter?*

*Freddie: Uh-huh....And they would give it to one another. They didn't sell it to one another, they would give it to one another. And we always had plenty to eat, plenty of vegetables.*

The same food self-sufficiency and food sharing took place among those who had gardens, as the interview with Janie Williams shows:

*"I know we ate a lot of vegetables because most time we always had a garden. And you would go outside and get whatever you wanted in the garden and it was like, even if mom didn't have something growing in her garden in somebody else did, we shared."*

According to Mamie Lee Leath, a resident of the Porter neighborhood, the food produced in the individual gardens were seen as community assets. What is more, this culture of community support went beyond food sharing:

*"Everybody had a garden. What I didn't have in my garden, you welcome to go and get it. What you had in your garden, I'm welcome to go. I didn't have to ask, you didn't have to be home, you just go and help yourself. That's just the way we lived it down here. You got your work, you depend on me. We look after your children."*

### **Buying groceries**

A few oral history interviews include some details about the food market and grocery shopping in the Gainesville area. Janie Williams describes the food market back then:

*"Everybody came to town. They were either coming to buy their livestock food or come into to supplement in getting things that they didn't have at home that they were growing. And they came into sell. There were a lot of farmers and things that came in to sell their products on Saturdays. Some of them actually sold to the stores and some of them actually was selling on the back of their—I guess you would call it the, what would you call that—the buggy, your house and buggy. They were selling on the horse and buggy. They were bringing their greens and potatoes and onions and almost tomatoes, but basically it was greens, greens and potatoes... that was collard green, mustard green, turnip greens. I mean beautiful, just, I mean if you saw it you would just wanna buy it just because of the way it looked it was really nice and sweet potatoes as well as white potatoes."*

Beatrice Certain recalled the prices at the grocery stores when she was growing up:

*"Cause everything along then was cheap. You could get twenty-five cents worth of meals or grits or something, it'd last you a long time. See it ain't that way now. You buy them by the pack. You go into these people stores, if you don't get a hundred or two hundred dollars, you ain't getting no groceries. So it ain't like it used to be. Everything is going up. Everything but wages, they don't wanna pay you nothing with wages."*

## Sources

Interview sources from Joel Buchanan African American Oral History Archive (<https://ufdc.ufl.edu/ohfb>) include:

Interview Name	DOB	Date
Affie N. Wright	November 7, 1921	January 30, 1986
Alberta Rivers & Beverly Rivers	--	November 9, 2011
Alethia Viola Brown	July 18, 1921	August 20, 2011
Alvin Butler	--	June 2, 2010
Anna Cooper Nealy	--	April 25, 1985
Antoinette Jackson	--	February 16, 2013
Beatrice Certain	January 24, 1924	October 28, 2010
Carnell Henderson, Henry W. Jones and Jettie Henderson	December 2, 1926	June 8, 2010
Claranolle Smith Griffin	--	April 21, 1985
Cornelius Norton	--	April 24, 1984
Cornell Hale and Louise Perry Hale	August 18, 1906	April 2, 1986
Daniel Gainey	--	November 17, 2010
Doris George Manning	October 29, 1945	June 15, 2009
Eddie George Sr.	December 17, 1922	September 6, 2016
Ellen Jordan	--	October 10, 2011
Eugene Mack	March 27, 1913	February 23, 1983
Eugene Gainey	--	June 23, 2012
Eula Harris	November 26, 1916	April 11, 2013
Freddie Hickmon	October 28, 1942	August 7, 2012
George Washington	June 25, 1945	November 28, 2011
Isaiah Branton	1953	February 17, 2012
Jancie Vinson	August 9, 1958	July 23, 2012
Janie Roberts	1915	July 10, 1984
Janie Williams	September 2, 1938	October 11, 2011
Joe Dell	January 16, 1943	June 26, 2009
Leoris Mercedes Jackson Richardson	September 22, 1933	May 12, 2016
Louise Buchanan	1890	November 18, 1982
Louise Perry Haile	1920's	March 3, 1983
Mamie Lee Leath	December 19, 1927	October 31, 2011
Margaret Weston, Patricia West	July 24, 1952	May 12, 2016
Mary Alice Aaron	1909	June 11, 1986
Mary Lee Myrick	July 1, 1917	November 4, 2011
Mary Lee Myrick	Same as above	October 12, 2011
Oliver Jones	December 20, 1920	January 28, 2010

Rebecca Hall and Nathaniel Hall	--	September 22, 2011
Robert Coleman	January 9, 1939	April 22, 2012
Rufus Brooks	February 14, 1910	September 18, 2012
Sadie Florence	November 19, 1905	January 10, 1983
Susie Mae White	--	February 14, 1984