

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Farming at its Best

Bucklesberry's strong agricultural roots are undeniable. Since its earliest years in the mid-1700s, the heart and soul of the Bucklesberry community and its people has been farming. The long-standing Sutton family of Bucklesberry farmed their land well. It was their livelihood. They took it seriously. It was the basis of their very survival. Simply put, farming in Bucklesberry was big for many years. Moreover, it was some of the best farming anywhere, and locals willingly acknowledged it.

In 1906, the industrial issue of the Kinston Free Press reported there were 28,179 acres in the Moseley Hall Township, including the town of La Grange. The Census for Lenoir County in 1850 recorded a total of 7,249 acres of land collectively owned by Bucklesberry Sutton descendants. One-fourth of the acreage in Moseley Hall, then, was Bucklesberry land. The KFP article characterized Bucklesberry farm land as "exceedingly productive...[that] produces cotton and corn in abundance, tobacco, etc. It is excellent fruit and strawberry land; as good as can be found anywhere."

But local folks weren't the only ones who recognized Bucklesberry farmers for their expertise and productivity. They also drew a State-wide audience of admirers. One study of North Carolina newspapers identified 49 articles from 1873 to 1924 that reported on Bucklesberry farming. These articles appeared in major city newspapers that spanned the State, including, Charlotte, Enfield, Goldsboro, Greensboro, New Bern, Pittsboro, Raleigh, Statesville, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem.

Most of the newspaper articles acknowledged crops in abundance grown on the nutrient-rich soil of Bucklesberry. The crop mentioned most often was cotton, and understandably so, as cotton was the chief cash crop in the South for much of the nineteenth century. A 1903 news piece in the Kinston Daily Free Press credited Albert Hardy Sutton with growing some of the finest cotton in the State, and noted that Bucklesberry had acreage that could produce as much cotton "as the great Mississippi Delta or the Brazos Valley."

Corn was the next most-mentioned crop in this newspaper study, followed by potatoes, then tobacco, rice, peas, wheat, berries, and water melons. Tobacco farming in Bucklesberry was referenced in only three of the newspaper articles, all dated in the early 1900s. But Bucklesberry at this time, as with other farms across the State, was beginning to realize extraordinary growth and production of tobacco. In 1916, The Charlotte Observer reported that Bucklesberry in Moseley Hall was "unequaled in East Carolina as a cotton and tobacco neighborhood."

Many of the news pieces from the 1880s to the 1920s discussed hog production in Bucklesberry. Sutton farmers slaughtered some of the biggest porkers in the State, one in 1907 weighing an extraordinary 1,000 to 1,110 pounds undressed on the Roy Sutton farm! A 1907 article in Raleigh's News and Observer stated that Lenoir County, specifically, Bucklesberry, was "entitled to the banner this year for raising the largest hogs that will be killed in the State." The Greensboro Daily News in 1920 identified Bucklesberry as "the champion pork-producing section of eastern Carolina."

Bucklesberry farmers were also recognized as pace-setters in the use of progressive farm equipment. A 1916 news piece in the KFP described a two-row corn planter operated on the Jeremiah Sutton, Jr. farm, one of only two in the county at the time. With one of his sons leading the way on the harrow, Jeremiah drove the triple machine (planter, fertilizer drill, and row-marker) pulled by four mules. He and his son were able to plant an unheard of 12 to 20 acres of corn in a day.

Farming in Bucklesberry today is still some of the finest you will find anywhere. It may not be as big or on as grand a scale as it was generations ago, but it is done well nonetheless and with respect and reverence to the forefathers who paved the way as exemplars.