

# How Chester Worked: Cotton, Hogs and Dairy, South Carolina

As told by Givari Barber, Keycia Fourney, Meg Garner, Alana Hawkins, Hope Thompson, Cole Taylor, Chester, South Carolina

## Introduction:

The history of agriculture and dairy in Chester, South Carolina, is examined through interviews with locals. John Cousar, who now sells his produce at the Chester Farmers Market, is the son of a sharecropper; Dr. W.T. Holmes lives on the family farm that his great-grandfather bought in April of 1863.

## Story Narrative:

**John Cousar:** Well, you're looking at a sharecropper's son. You're kind of young, but you may or may not know about sharecroppers. So that just means I've been farming since I was a child with my parents. And now, I'm doing it for myself. It was at a time when a great amount of cotton was being... Cotton is still growing in South Carolina, but at that time, it was high volume. And I think if you check, you'll find in the heyday of cotton in South Carolina, South Carolina was close to the richest state in the United States. And may deliver because of that cotton.

And of course, part of that time, I was a high school student. So I was able to see all this close up and kind of master it with the agriculture studies. If you see the signs behind me on the wall, it has a NFA sticker there, a logo. That's the New Farmers of America. The New Farmers of America is a counterpart of the Future Farmers of America. The only difference, Future Farmers of America at that time, was only white students. New Farmers of America was all African-Americans. So I was in agriculture for four years at Finley High School, here in Chester. And if I was to look at all the studies I did in my 78 years, that study in agriculture at Finley took the most effective on me.

I'm afraid, I just about went across the board. At that time, the major mode of transporting stuff would have been a mule and a wagon. So I had to learn how to, not to drive a truck, but to drive that mule and wagon. And to turn the soil, one of the major pieces of equipment would have been a turn plow. And that turn plow was pulled by a mule.

**W.T. Holmes:** [inaudible 00:02:44]. We lived in [Blackstock 00:00:02:46]. We lived on the farm. I have 67 acres of land that my great-grandfather bought for \$300 in April of 1863. And yes, we lived on the farm. We raised cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, peanuts, things like that. And we had cows. That we milked the cows at that time. [Borden's 00:03:17] Milk Company was right here on [inaudible 00:03:19] Street. So we'd milk the cows. And we put the cans out on the road every day. And the truck came on, picked it up, brought the milk to Chester. And every two weeks, we would get a paycheck. Then when I got ready to go off to college... Well, back then in the '50s, room, board, and tuition for nine months was only

\$650. So we just sold two or three cows. We sold a few loads of pulp wood. I had my tuition for a year.

And when I needed money at Johnson C. Smith on Saturday and Sundays, I worked at the Fourth Street Car Wash, for the big sum of 60 cents an hour. We worked from 8:00 to 6:00 on Saturdays. Social security was only 2% at the time. So [inaudible 00:04:20] at 6:00 on Saturday, I got a paycheck of \$5.88, because they took 12 cents out for my social security. And on Sundays, we would go back there, work from 8:30 until 1:00. So that got me the money, for spending money while I was in college.

Well, daily routine. Well, to get up, you had the first milk, go get those cows, take them out to the pasture. Take the milk back and strain it, put in the coolers until time to take it to the side of the road. Do on farming season, we had to do a little plowing, [inaudible 00:05:05] cotton, picking cotton. I never did get the 100 pounds in my life.

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