**FEEDING ALABAMA – THE LIFE OF A BLACK FARMER.**

Perry Caudle, Sr., was born on December 15, 1932 in Triana, Alabama, a hamlet populated primarily by African Americans. His mother birthed twelve children, all born at home. Young Perry attended the Triana School through the sixth grade. After leaving school, he went to work in a brick yard in Decatur, AL. Next, he moved on to work at an aluminum plant, also located in Decatur. This job ended when he got his hand caught in the machine at the factory. The function of this hand never returned to normal. Perry, who was about 15 or 16 year of age, then began farming with his father.

**THE PATRIARCH AND THE MATRIARCH**

Perry’s mother and father are a testament to healthy living and hard work. His mother lived till age 90. According to Mr. Perry, “She died in church. One minute she was ‘Shoutin’ to the Lord, and the next minute she was dead with a big smile on her face.” His father passed away at age 97 and was physically fit at his death. He died because a truck hit him. To treat illnesses in the family, Perry’s father would make medicines from locally grown plants. It was out of the question to go see a doctor due to the expense. Perry offered a tribute to his father, “My Daddy was a farmer. It was all he ever done, and he did it well.”

**FARMING WITH HIS FATHER**

Perry helped his father farm the 100 acres of farmland that he had purchased. When I asked him what crops they grew, he replied, “We grew cotton, sweet potatoes, peanuts, white potatoes, collards, cabbages, tomatoes…heck, we grew everything. Daddy also had a couple of cows, and I had to milk them.” I shared with him my experience of when I moved to Alabama with my husband. It was July, and the sun unmercifully beat down upon me when I went from our air-conditioned car into our air-conditioned apartment. By the time I arrived to our doorstep, I felt utterly drained from heat exhaustion. I inquired, “Mr. Caudle, how did you survive working out in the wicked Alabama summer heat, day after day, year after year?” His reply: “We had to do it. We had no other choice.” Yes, I admit I am a TOTAL WIMP when I compare myself to Mr. Caudle and other Alabama farmers.

**SNOUT TO TAIL**

“Most of our food was what we growed on the farm. We also raised animals for food.” recalled Mr. Caudle. Here are his instructions on how to kill a hog: 1. Shoot the hog in the head; 2. Cut the throat and let the blood drain out; 3. Boil the hog to help get the hair off and then scrape the hair off; 4. Hang up to hog to take out the guts. Also, take out the heart and brains and other organs; 5. Salt down the meat so it will keep.” Mr. Caudle’s favorite part to eat were the intestines. Here are his instructions on how to cook pig intestines: “Wash ‘em and clean ‘em and put ‘em in a pot and cook ‘em. Deelicious!” The January/February 2013 issue of the Food and Nutrition magazine reported “Snout-to- Tail” is currently one of the hottest culinary trends in America today. Well, using every part of the pig, now referred to as snout to tail, is what Mr. Caudle has done all of his life.

**SUNDAY DINNER**

Mr. Caudle attended church at GreenBriar Baptist Church, “where the preachin’ was real good.” They only ate chicken on Sundays. Mr. Caudle’s directions on how to cook chickens: 1. Chop off the chicken’s head; 2. Throw it in a pot of hot boiling water to help get the feathers off; 3. Remove feathers; 4. Throw it in a pot and cook it. Mr. Caudle went on to have twelve children, just like his parents. Every so often one of his sons would get a hankering to have chicken on a weekday. When his parents left the farm, he would kill a chicken and fry it. Of course, Mr. Caudle noticed the missing chicken and gave his son(s) a whuppin’. It did no good to hide in the barn or tell the parents that a fox had run off with the chicken. To top it off, the offending son had to go cut his switch for his punishment.

**PLANTING AND HARVESTING**

April was the month when most everything was planted on his farm. Mr. Caudle confidently proclaims, “I grew the best vegetables in the world.” He would load the “world’s best vegetables” onto his truck and peddle them in “white folks neighborhoods.” Customers loved his vegetables. There is only one way to describe “cotton-pickin’ days”…..”VERY HARD WORK!” Cotton was picked from sun-up to sun-down. He usually picked 250 lbs. of cotton a day. Mr. Caudle’s brother once picked 400 lbs. of cotton in one day.

**RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION**

Sadly, Mr. Caudle and his family have experienced racism and discrimination. One weekend, Mr. and Mrs. Caudle went to a theatre in Decatur, AL. Yes, this was in the days when Jim Crow Laws were in full force, and the theatre was segregated. As they started to leave the theatre, the Ku Klux Klan was marching outside, wearing their hideous trademark white outfits. They remained in the theatre because they feared for their safety. Mr. Caudle was part of the class action lawsuit brought against the USDA by Black Farmers. This suit was brought about because loans were provided to White Farmers and were denied to Black Farmers. Recent farm subsidy payments were to 18 percent of Black Farmers compared to 34 percent of White Farmers. Payments from the government to Black Farmers averaged $3,460 and to White Farmers $9,300. The purpose of the Food Energy and Security Act, which was signed into law in 2010 by President Barack Obama, was to release 1.2 billion dollars to Black Farmers because of the discrimination against them. As of this time, no monies have been released to Black Farmers, even though they are entitled to this compensation. Thomas Burrell, who is President of the Black Farmers and Agriculturist Association, released a statement, “It should not have taken this long.”1

**WORK WITH HONOR**

Did you know at the end of the last century, there were only 18,000 Black Farmers left in the US?2 Mr. Caudle can no longer farm due to his disability, though he would still love to be growing and harvesting his beloved vegetables. His daughter and my friend, Youlanda, is sad because her father loved growing food for others, and she loved “eating the best vegetables in the world.” “Mr. Caudle what are you most proud of?” I asked. He answered, “I am proud of the people I fed and the hard work I did throughout all of my life.” Amen!

References:

1. [www.blackfarmersjustice.com](http://www.blackfarmersjustice.com)
2. Ibid

**A BIG THANK YOU to Perry Caudle for sharing his great life story as a Black Farmer in Alabama with me and my blog readers. A BIG THANK YOU to Youlanda Caudle for introducing me to her father. God Bless the Caudle Family a million times over!**