

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Collie Graddick by Hannah Garth
Conducted on April 23rd, 2023 in Berea, KY

[00:00:00] **Hanna Garth:** My name is Hannah Garth. I'm here with the Heirloom Gardens Project, sitting down with Collie Graddick on April 23rd, 2023 at Berea College. Um, I'm going to begin by asking you to introduce yourself and telling me some relevant things that you think are important to know about you for thinking about your history of gardening, farming, seed saving, all those kinds of things.

[00:00:30] **Collie Graddick:** Okay. My name is Collie Graddick Jr. I grew up on a 200 acre sustainable farm in Hamilton, Georgia. The farm was acquired by my grandfather in 1914. He was a, uh, a sharecropper, but he was able to get funding from the bank to purchase his land. It was interesting when I go back and look at those deeds and documents, my grandfather not only was able to buy land for himself, but for other people in the community who couldn't afford to buy land, he would go to the bank and borrow the money and then resell the land to those other people in the community.

Uh, one of the things that I noticed about, about his signature was that it was always an X. But when I look at and do some of the research of my grandfather, I think he was able to read and write, but he didn't want the people at the bank and the financial people to know that he could because they may not have loaned him the money. If they knew he could really understand what they were loaning him the money for and some of the terms and things, but it was interesting that he borrowed the money in 1914 and paid the property off in 1917. So in three years, he paid, paid for his property through sharecropping.

And he was also a rock layer. And at those times, and the part of Georgia where we grew up is kind of hilly. It's at the end of the Appalachian Mountain chain, so the land that he cleared to do his farming, there was a lot of rocks there. And he used those rocks to build houses, mailboxes, entrances to different parks and things of that nature. So, that's a little bit of, uh, my, uh, family history of the 200 acres that my father, my grandfather was able to acquire.

My family, we still own 100 acres of that land. Unfortunately, through the passing of my aunts, two of my aunts and their children, sold their land, 100 acres of it, before we were able to acquire it from them. But the other 100 acres are still in the family.

[00:02:45] **Hanna Garth:** Could you say what the name of your grandfather was?

[00:02:48] **Collie Graddick:** Uh, my grandfather's name was Charlie Graddick. My father's name was Collie Graddick.

[00:02:52] **Hanna Garth:** So you started talking about the land in terms of the rock. Can you talk about memories you have as a young person of the land and what was growing there and what was, what were some of the things that you ate off of the land, whether it was cultivated or not?

[00:03:14] **Collie Graddick:** My, like I said, my grandfather was a sharecropper. The other interesting thing was my grandfather passed away when I was six years old. So I didn't get a chance to spend a lot of time with him. The other thing is my, my father was 21 years older than my mother, and so, my father was 47 years old when I was born.

So he was old enough to be my grandfather. So when I talk about our family history, there's almost like a generation, we skipped a generation in there because of the age of, of my father. And so when I talk about either my father or my grandfather. In a normal, probably situation, it would be someone's grandfather and their great grandfather.

Especially when I talk about acquiring the land in the, in the 1914s. And so by being a sharecropper in those days in Georgia, cotton was the big thing that, that farmers were growing and sharecropping on. Cause I never got a chance to talk with my grandfather that much. And my father passed away when I was 24 years old, just before I graduated from Tuskegee.

Well, actually, it was a month after I graduated from Tuskegee that he passed away, but he was, he was ill just prior to graduating. And, so I didn't get a chance to, to talk to my father when I realized that I was going to be in agriculture and follow in their footsteps, in their tradition. I didn't get a chance to talk to them and learn as much of the history as I would like, but I did get a chance to go around, talk to some of the elders, other elders in the community about the work that both my grandfather and my father did.

And, and by being a sharecropper growing cotton, my grandfather also experimented with growing different types of soybeans. And there was, um, a gentleman named Cason J. Calloway who moved into the area. Created Calloway Garden, but he was a farmer as well and, and he bought his property adjacent to my grandfather's property. And so they worked together on, on some of the experimentation with, with growing soybeans. And I found that out from the, one of the sons of Cason J. Calloway, who was more close to my uncle, who actually worked for the Calloways rather than my, uh, my dad.

But when I went to some of the meetings and there's a church now that's trying to bring the African American community and the white and European American community together and the Callaway is a member of that, that church. And so, we've had a couple of different events together. So I get a chance to talk. And I can learn some of our history through just talking with, with the Callaways.

[00:05:58] **Hanna Garth:** Well, can you tell us about your, either your family or your practice of seed saving and how you came, how you started doing that or how they started doing that and, and, and why you did that instead of buying seed?

[00:06:13] **Collie Graddick:** Well the, you know, the, the alternative to, to buy seeds to save the, the money, then you would, you would save your, your own seeds, and so that was what we did. We grew, when I, was old, well, I'll go back and talk about my father because he was 47 years old when I was born. He had one older daughter that was five years older than I from his first marriage.

But my mom was his second marriage, so he, he had one daughter. And, and I have a sister that is with my mother and, and my father. So, and I have four brothers that's younger than I, with my father being four to seven years old, he was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, and probably when we were probably five or six years old, he had to go to the hospital, but it was different kind of muscular dystrophy that it, it slowly deteriorated his muscles.

And over those, probably from the age of five years old until I was 17 going off to college, my father lost the, the use of his legs. And so even when he started, when he took over the farming from my grandfather, he continued farming, but he, well, when we were born, he wanted to, uh, continue farming, but his, his physical ability wouldn't allow it.

So when I turned 10 years old he bought a tractor, all the equipment, and taught me how to use the tractor, and my brothers as well. And we did most of the farming. My dad was a, kind of a jack of all trades because he did all types of things. in our community, but, uh, I'll, I'll go back to the, the seed saving part of it.

When we started farming, okra was our main cash crop that we did, even though we grew okra, sweet corn, edible peas and beans, we had beef cattle as well as a feeder pig operation. And we did a lot of hunting and fishing and so, we kind of grew up, uh, and fed ourselves off the land, and, and when we would grow vegetables, it was always interesting that we were never able to harvest everything in the field, and we would miss a few of the crops, and I'll just use okra, for example, if you leave a part of okra on the stalk, it gets long, gets hard, but if you leave it there long enough, it'll turn to seed, but the plant will keep on producing, and so we'd always leave if we missed one and it got too large to sell, then we would just leave it on there to the end of the season and we will harvest that to grow seeds the next year.

And we would do the same thing with our beans and peas. With those, once you harvest a certain amount, the production goes down to the point where it's not feasible to try and harvest and sell. But it would be enough out there to go back and harvest and replant for the next year. And so we was always saving seeds just to see if they would grow the following year.

My dad would still buy some seeds because you can't always, you don't always want to put your plant production into that, but we've always saved different types of seeds.

My mother in addition to being an outdoor person and liked being on the farm, she also raised a lot of flowers. And so we had a greenhouse and she had flowers in her greenhouse and she would save a lot of seeds and flower seeds just to grow those seeds, uh, those flowers for the next year or so.

It's kind of been a part of our family history and, and I'm sure we, we weren't the only one because other people in our co-op, my dad started the West Georgia Farmers Cooperative in 1955, I believe, and started Federation of Southern Cooperatives in 1956. And with that, we were able to work with other farmers in the area.

And so they were doing the same thing. We learned from them and they learned from us as well.

[00:10:14] **Hanna Garth:** You told the story that it kind of just happened because you left certain things at the field, but it was a combination of, it kind of just happened, but also you knew what would happen and then.

[00:10:27] **Collie Graddick:** Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. So it wasn't, it wasn't a planned seed production, but we knew what we could get from, from, well, basically, I guess it's a way of utilizing everything, you know, on the farm and, you know, it was like when, when the Native Americans would kill the buffalo, then they would use the hide for clothing and things. And so that would, uh, you know, maybe even prior to that, they were just throwing it away. Didn't see a use for it.

So I look at, you know, uh, my, my father and grandfather and some of the elders in the community and it probably, you know, goes way back to slavery times when the slaves were, you know, they probably saved some of the seeds and things in the field that they were harvesting in, especially if people were doing some sharecropping and things of that nature. I'm sure they saved seeds so they wouldn't have to buy seeds for the next year and so. Whatever people could do during that time to help with their finances and things or with their living situation. I think people were doing those things, so.

[00:11:25] **Hanna Garth:** Um, so you mentioned also doing some fishing and hunting and maybe foraging. What, tell me about the kinds of things that you ate off the land.

[00:11:35] **Collie Graddick:** It's, it's interesting, you know, even though we, we grew up on a farm and, and like I mentioned, I have five sisters and brothers. And my dad always made space for recreation or for play or whatever. And even though we, we ate the fish that, that we caught, that was our family Saturday outing was to go fishing. And there was a, a pay for, for fish at a, at a local catfish lake. And, and that would be our Saturday evening family outing, we would all go and, and go fishing.

And so, in doing that, you know, that would be one of the meals because we all, we had our own, own feeder pigs or pigs and, and through the co-op, we would have basically what they would call hog killing day where all the members of the co-op, we had one of our co-op members who had a huge hog processing kind of outdoor facility on his place. And so, we would usually take two to three of our hogs that day and all the other farms in the co-op.

And at that time, our co-op started out, I'm not sure, had to have at least five members to start, but at the end we had over 200 members in our co-op. And so, everybody didn't have hogs, but everybody could buy their beef and their pork through the co-op and so when we have those hog killing days and all our co-op members would come to this one farm and, and all day long we would be processing hogs and then, and some of that processing would go on a couple of days later because we would do what we call salt cured, uh, our ham and our shoulders and our bacon and that would, would be taking the meat and putting it in, in a lot of salt and the salt would, would pull out the moisture and kind of preserve it.

And that's what a lot of people, especially in the African American community would cook with their, with their vegetables, their greens and peas. They put fat back or something like that, but we would use the, the shoulder and the ham, the lean part of the salted, salt cured meat and our vegetables and things and, as well as we would save some for just straight eating or putting in the freezer. And so we, we always kept two huge deep freezers on our farm because we froze meat and vegetables that would carry us throughout the year.

From the hunting, mainly quail, squirrels and rabbits was the thing that, that my brothers and I, my, my dad hunted when he was young, but by the time we were born, he had his muscle dystrophy had affected him, so he couldn't do a lot of hunting, but he would, uh, taught us, showed us how to hunt and things. And then we went out, my brothers and I would go out and do it kind of on our own and had my uncles and cousins and things like that because we had 200 acres of land. They didn't have land and they would always want to go hunting and to go hunting, one of the requirements that you had to take us with us and show us how as well, so, uncles and my uncles and, and things of that nature, friends of the family would go with us as well.

[00:14:50] **Hanna Garth:** Uh, what about any, did you forage any, like, nuts, berries?

[00:14:55] **Collie Graddick:** The main, berries that we had in the area was blackberries. And my mother would make blackberry pie during that season. We had wild plums, persimmons, uh, and on, just on our farm, we had peach trees, apple trees, and pear trees that we ate. And then there was a grape called muscadine grapes that grew in the wild. And so, during that season we would harvest those those as well.

So, yes, so, yes, I mean, we, with the land that we had, there was all types of wild type forages and things that, that we were doing, there was even a thing called rabbit tobacco that we was rolling up and trying to smoke that and things. So we experimented with all types of things on our little farm and the land that we had. Just learning down, you know, with, things being passed down through history, I think, so.

[00:15:49] **Hanna Garth:** And in the broader cooperative, once it got to be larger, could you talk about some of the variety or diversity that all the people were bringing?

[00:15:59] **Collie Graddick:** Yeah, right, yeah. So, like I said, my dad was a, was a sharecropper. He also was a school bus driver. I, growing up, I went to a segregated school to the fifth grade. Our school was integrated and, well, even though integration, uh, segregation had ended, our county didn't integrate until around 1970. And that was when, when we integrated the school system. But prior to that, we had, actually 1960, uh, may have been when integration started, or, or 67, really, because of my, we had a black high school that was a black school that went from, all the way from first grade to the, to the 12th grade. It was called Carver High School, and so that was the school for blacks, and it was last from, it was built in 1955, and it closed in 1975, because it was in existence for 20 years. And so that's when integration started. So it was actually, yeah, 75, when they closed the school and, and, and integrated.

But my dad was a, a, a school bus driver. And so he was, and it was interesting because apparently back in those days, it was hard to be a bus driver because they, they honored the black, there was only three black bus drivers. I can remember. My dad would have to make at least two or maybe three trips of going, picking up children to take them to school.

Because, uh, on, on days when we would harvest okra, we would, we would go to the market. We would harvest Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and we would take it to market Tuesday, Thursdays, and Saturdays. And I know on those Thursdays I would have to get up at 5 a. m., well we'd be headed out to market at 5 a. m., and my dad would have a school bus ride at 7, and then another one at 9, and on days that we didn't have to go to market, I could go to school at 7, but on days when he went to market, I would come back home and have to change clothes and get ready for school while he went and did the first bus trip, and then he would come back by and I'd get on the second bus load and, and go to school, but by being a bus driver he knew a lot of the African American in the community and knew whether they were farming or not.

And so when he started the co-op, he was able to start and talk to people and recruit people to be a part of the co-op. And so that's how he kind of got that started with recruiting people and being the bus driver, knowing people in the, in the community. And we lived near Fort Benning, which is interesting, the name is being changed now, I believe, to Fort Moore, just because of Benning's racial history and things, they're changing the name of that military base. But that was, we didn't sell directly to Fort Benning. We sold to the broker, the white broker, who was able to sell to the military base. But my dad was able to, to get a, an agreement or a contract from this broker because we were, we were growing okra, sweet corn.

Okra was our main crop, but we grew sweet corn, edible peas, watermelons. Kind of a variety of vegetables, but not that many. And so, we had a little small pickup, but we would load that pickup and we would take it to market. And so, my, my dad got an agreement, a contract, that whatever he had on the truck, the broker would buy.

And driving the school bus, he saw other people and he was like, well, if he's going to buy everything on the truck, well, then, you know, he can buy all. And so, my dad was able to recruit more people in the co-op saying that, you know, now we have a market where we can sell these vegetables. So they started the co-op and they went out and bought a bigger truck and the contract didn't specify what type truck and how many vegetables would be on the truck. And so, we bought a bigger truck and we started hauling to that broker.

And then there was a vegetable canning company in Montezuma, Georgia. And once our production got up to the point where we could get a, we could service that cannery because the cannery, you'd have to have, you know, so many pounds or bushels of, of different vegetables before they would buy. But, and so that was when we had different farmers started to grow different. Our best was at a larger scale. So at that time, when that started, we stopped growing watermelons.

And we didn't grow many bell peppers anymore. Our main crop scene, we always, we increased our okra production because that was a crop that we could get a premium price for. It was very

labor intensive, but my dad had enough children to cover the labor part of it. And so two hours after school, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, we knew that we had to go and pick okra. But, it was interesting that we had three acres and, and it would bring in between a thousand to 3, 000 a week during the growing season. And this was back during the sixties and seventies, and for that one crop to be generating that type of income on a weekly basis, that was kind of what my dad stuck with.

And when he would go to the market, that's what they would call him, the okra man, because he probably had more okra than anybody else that was coming to that market or to that broker just because of, like I said, the system we had set up and, uh, and so, yeah.

[00:21:32] **Hanna Garth:** In addition to the okra, what were some of the other vegetables?

[00:21:35] **Collie Graddick:** We had, uh, some farmers that got good in growing edible peas and beans. There's a, a pea called pink eyed purple hole peas that was very popular during that time. And we had farmers to grow, grow a lot of those that the cannery would buy. The cannery would buy lima beans. So we had a lot of farmers to grow that. They would buy bell peppers and farmers would, would buy that.

And so, like I said, our main crop was okra. We had other farmers growing tomatoes, watermelons, so different farmers and, and we would meet Monday, Wednesday and Fridays at the co-op and load up the truck and, and go to market the next morning and, and as my dad got older and his, and the muscular dystrophy, it affected him more, then other co-op members started driving the truck to market, and my dad just went along with them for a while, and once they learned the system, then they would, would go, and, uh, around that time, I had, was graduated from high school, a year later, my brother graduated, and so, that took two of the five people we had on the farm away, and so.

And then my dad, his M. S. had started bothering him. So, we gradually got out of the vegetable business. We kept some beef cattle and some feeder pigs up until, for another five years until my youngest brother graduated from college. And we all went to Fort Valley State University. So at one point there was four of us at Fort Valley and, uh, myself and my youngest brother, we both majored in agriculture and whereas my other brother, one majored in criminal justice and the other majored in business. They, they wanted to get out the farm.

They still eat some of the vegetables that I grow, but they don't, they don't, well, they, they will get out in the field if I ask them to help and things. But, I think they had enough of the farming when they were growing up and, and so they went into the business side of things.

But, my youngest brother unfortunately passed away a few years back, but he was, on the farm. Then I, I actually stayed in agriculture, but I moved away to Minnesota, worked with small farmers there, doing the same thing, creating aggregation centers, trying to create co-ops there. But it was a challenge in some of the other BIPOC communities just because of the community dynamics of trying to get organized and some of them are organized, some of them are organized as cooperative. The Latino community, there were some issues when we first started

with, you know, documented and undocumented and some exploitation around cooperative movement because the people with the documents thought that they were more important and would take advantage of undocumented, but then we were able to work through those, those things, so now there's an organization in Minnesota called Latino Economic Development Corporation that has several Latino co-ops going.

With the Marlin community, we created a couple of co-ops there, but through their family dynamics and hierarchy kind of, of, traditions, it was hard to be equal or for someone to have the same level or the same vote and the same power and vote as other people in the community. So their community dynamics didn't quite allow everyone to be equal and they couldn't quite comprehend how that would be, but, but there is, um, a couple of, uh, among organizations now, they're not cooperatives, but they are, there's, they are non profit farming organizations that use co-op principles, some of the principles of co-ops. And so they're working together. So they have, they collectively, they all, they, they have a hundred acre site and each farmer have five acres and they aggregate the vegetables. So they're not, they don't consider themselves a cooperative, but they say they use cooperative principles and things.

And so some of that came from, I would open it from some of the trainings and workshops and things that a lot of these farmers attended. For the last, since the pandemic, I haven't spent as much time in Minnesota working with those. And I've been in Georgia kind of, rebuilding or reestablishing the co-ops that my dad started. And then I have organized the West Georgia Young Farmers Cooperative, which are, my, my grandchildren are in that cooperative, as well as some of the grandchildren and children and heirs and descendants of the previous co-op members. And West Georgia Farmers Cooperative is still, still going.

When I moved back and, and restarted that co-op, well, kind of got that co-op back started, we invited some people in to be a part of the cooperative. That didn't feel that they owed anything to the original founders and owners. And so they changed the bylaws to where no one, none of the original owners own anything anymore. And I, I didn't leave the co-op, but, they decided since I didn't want to pay a thousand dollars to buy my own co-op back that I was no longer a member.

And which, when you look at things, some blessings are disguised. And I feel that that was a blessing in disguise because now I have the West Georgia Young Farmers Cooperative that's doing more than what that co-op is, is doing. And I feel better about guiding and leading a set of young people rather than trying to train people who have their own kind of agenda because basically we are a farmers co-op, a co-op of farmers, and they wanted a co-op grocery store.

And that was the difference and, and what we were looking for because I do, market, farm market stands with my young farmers cooperative, but I don't, I'm not a, a big fan of, uh, a co-op grocery store in the area where we are because I think co-ops have to come from the community and from people within that community and you can't, you can't put a co-op in a community.

It hasn't been, and the co-op, so they basically taken our co-op from, from our little rural town and moved it into a larger town instead of, and calling it a farmer's co-op that has a grocery

store, but no farm. They don't have any farmers to growing any vegetables, and so they run around and buy vegetables from farmers that are not in the co-op and call themselves selling it and so, it was just a difference in, in philosophy, and it's interesting because they can't, how do I, how do I put it because they have to depend on, on our history for their future. And this new co-op that, that my young farmers have started, can go on without them. And, and, uh, and I guess that's the beauty that they can't go on without acknowledging what these, these and these young people ancestors have done. And they have to justify why they aren't working with these, the, the heirs of the owners of the, of the co-op that, that you have and things .

And so, that was a, a real learning lesson. But it was interesting when I came back home to rebuild that co-op. I'm a very spiritual person and that co-op is still going even though it's not the direction that I want to go that may have not been the spirit wanted me to go here. But I can take credit, I can take credit for their co-op as to where they're doing, even with their grocery store because I was the one that put it together and invited them to be a part of getting them where they are. And this new co-op, they have nothing to do with, so, I see how the spirit moved my own spirituality in a way in which I'm okay with doing both of those.

But, but yes, it was sometimes that. Things were a little bit touchy during those times because I, I put 50 years in that co-op and things and, and to have it go in a direction that, that I, I didn't see it should go, but, but like I said, gave me an opportunity to work in a whole different capacity with a whole different group of, of young people and not, you know, people my age or older or whatever, so.

And that young farmers co-op we're, we're saving seeds, we're growing seeds for Ujamaa, and, and some of the Ultra-Cross okra, and so they're the ones that's participating in that, and they enjoy doing that, they're growing SRI rice, they're leasing their own land, growing their own beef cattle, they lease organic land to grow their vegetables, and so, this is something that I see these young people, they enjoy doing and they're learning Robert's Rules of Order, how to conduct a meeting and different things that there, uh, a lot of them are already 4 H and FFA, but they're not in a leadership role where they can be this president, the secretary, the treasurer, the sergeant at arms, committee chair, and so everybody in our co-op has a role to play and they report at every meeting and, just to see them learn Robert's Rules of Order, how to conduct a meeting and things of that nature is gratifying to me and satisfying to them.

And now they're holding each other responsible. They're looking at the bylaws and, and they're between the ages of 14 and 24, and there's 10 of them in the co-op and one of my grandson, he's the youngest one, he's eight, but he jumps in there with the, with the rest of them and learn as well. And the other thing, you know, that they're planning to do is to do an annual trip to Washington, D. C. to work with USDA and learn those programs and things that was, uh, in Minnesota, just through some other work that I was doing on environmental work for about seven, eight years, I lobbied Congress on funding uh, some federal programs and state programs and so, just going through the halls of Congress and visiting your congressional staff in Washington, D. C. and those types of things is what I want to teach these young people at an early age as well so they can know what, what their political system and what their vote means and things and so.

[00:31:40] **Hanna Garth:** I want to ask a question about going back to cooperative economics and how your, various cooperatives that your father produced and that you made or have been a part of have built a broader ethos of cooperative economics.

[00:31:59] **Collie Graddick:** , I think it, you know, the thing about our co-op, you don't see a lot of, uh, publicity and things that go on about how well, you're doing and how, you know, good the organization is and, and, and so the, the most gratifying and satisfying thing that I see is the people who actually involved in it, and that's why I'm a, I advocate for community co-ops that you, it has to be a part of your community and people within your community, outsiders, if outsiders are coming in and making money off of your community, I guarantee you that money is not staying in your community.

And so with that, then a lot of the word of mouth or, or, or things that they do don't get out beyond that, that community. And so that's what I'm hoping to teach these young people, not how to go out and, and extract income from other communities, but go out and show other communities how they can do the same.

You should be able to build a sustainable living situation within your own community, working with people in your own community. And one of the things we do with our Young Farmers Cooperative is that, we don't mind telling people that these young people make 20 an hour when they're in the field. And that's on the low end, because they're looking at 25 to 30 an hour for the work that they do in the field. And, that's why they're, our tomatoes cost this price. That's why our watermelons cost this price. And doing it through a cooperative. We can show you our production plan, what it costs for inputs and what it costs for outputs, and we have our labor costs in there. And so that's why, and so if that was my own personal business plan and things, I wouldn't be showing that to anybody.

But with a co-op, I don't mind showing it, and these young people don't mind, you know, saying I, I work for the state of Minnesota, so anybody can go on the state website and see how much money I make per hour. So it's, I don't go around telling people that, but that's public knowledge. And so the same thing with these co-op people. Public knowledge on what you make per hour is fine. They still won't see what your bank account looks like. They'll see what the co-op bank account looks like. It's going to be zero because all the money that goes to the co-op goes directly to you and things. And so all they know is what you get per hour out there in the field, they don't know, you know, what, what you get for that tomato because part of it is marketing too, to the cost of that tomato and things and so they don't see all that cost so in addition to the 20 that you're getting, there's still some profit on top of that, uh, that you'll, that you'll be able to benefit from.

And so, just using cooperative economics as a way to, I feel, justify the price that we sell our products for and a way to sustain our cooperative business and things for the, or for these young farmers to do it. And, and I, spent some of the years in the Marine Corps and doing that, I, I learned that the most effective leader leads from behind. And so that's what I do with these young people. I'm always promoting them to go out and step up. And you ask the question, don't follow me around. I'm going to take you to these places where you can build your own. And so

we go to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives meetings. We go to meetings where USDA people are going to be there speaking and talking about their programs.

The other thing that, that they're all preparing to do is to, uh, there's, uh, a Farm Service Agency, uh, youth loan, and they'll loan anyone under the ages of 18 up to 5, 000 with no questions asked. All you have to do is work with 4 H, FFA, or some program like that and have a good plan on how you're going to repay that money.

And so, our goal is to buy cattle. We've just in the process of assigning a 20 acre lease, so that we can, you can put one cow per acre, so now that's 20 cows. So each one of our members can get two cows. And we're not stopping there because we, our goal was to buy four greenhouses, but that got sold before we could get our finances together. But it's not like, we're still not looking. Cause we have a, a hoop house that wanna, that we lease our two acres of vegetables on there, there that we grow our seedlings and things in. But we wanted to acquire a grant and, and, you know, my thing with these young farmers is to buy as much property and do as much as they, as they can to show them that there is a business opportunity, and not only just the farming piece, the marketing piece, we have, uh, going to develop our website with this online store and things of that nature.

So, there's a lot of opportunities for them, uh, within the local food system and, and like I said, we want to get into, these young people are going to be going to college and getting out of college. How do we have a way to, to finance their transportation, finance, because, you know, credit unions are co-ops too, and things, and so how do we create or partner with some type of credit union where we can get those types of things without being taken advantage of by the financial institutions and systems and things.

So teaching them that as well.

[00:37:21] **Hanna Garth:** I just want to say, ask if there's anything else you'd like to talk about to have on this recording, knowing that we'll probably circle back to you to have another.

[00:37:30] **Collie Graddick:** No, I think I probably spilled my guts on this. I can't think of anything else to, uh, to add to it, you know, other than, and like, you know, I'm a firm believer in co-operative economics and, I saw how it helped the African American community during the toughest civil rights days in a predominantly European American county area and, you know, when I look back, you know, over what my father and grandfather, you know, did and, co-ops and economics and helping the community and helping build the community was something that they, that they were firm believers in and so, I'm believing in community, building sustainable communities with the people within those communities.