

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project  
Interview with Bobby Wilson by David Smith  
Conducted on July 19th, 2023 in Atlanta, GA

[00:00:00] **LuAnna Nesbitt:** The following interview is a part of the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. It was conducted in Atlanta, Georgia by interviewer David Smith on July 19th, 2023. The narrator of this oral history is Bobby Wilson.

[00:00:12] **David Smith:** So, now that we're on the record, could you go ahead and introduce yourself?

[00:00:15] **Bobby Wilson:** Yes, my name is Bobby Wilson. I am here at 3271 Main Street in College Park, Georgia. We own and operate a five acre farm with emphasis on many different things. One of the most important is educating the next generation of the importance of agriculture, making sure that marginalized and underserved communities have access to locally grown food. But we also provide food to those who are in need during these troubling times that we are dealing with.

There's also an issue around global warming that we are trying to, uh, address. There's also an issue around getting more minority students into agricultural programs, especially at historical land grant schools.

And there's also an issue around the federal government. And understanding the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and not just giving us lip talk, but really, really giving us a seat at the table so that we can be clear on the things that we are asking for. And allow me to give you one good example.

There are 19 land grant schools across the United States. There are 19 historical black colleges that's considered land grant schools. And those are 1890 land grant schools. But there's also 1862 land grant schools. And when you subtract the 1890s from the 1862s, there's about a 28 year difference before the government decided that we need to address African Americans in the field of agriculture. So what that says to me is that African Americans, we're 28 years behind. And how do we level the playing field? How do we make what has been wrong for so many years and the government has admitted that they have discriminated against African American people of color in the agriculture sector.

So I'm going to stop right there and let you ask the next question.

[00:02:57] **David Smith:** I'd like to hear more about that later, but first, I want to take it back and think about your family. Um, where did you and your family get their food?

[00:03:07] **Bobby Wilson:** Well, I grew up in a small town called Bay Springs, Mississippi, Jasper County. At the time, maybe 2, 800, 3, 000 people. The population hadn't changed that much today.

Uh, but most, my parents pretty much could not afford a lot of the luxuries of eating decent meals. So we had backyard gardens, so we grew our own food. We grew a lot of our vegetables. Our neighbors, they had, uh, livestock, so we would have killing feastes, uh, where they were, uh, kill a hog and they would dress the hog out. The hog would go into the smokehouse. They would share the meat with the community, and so we were part of that process. But most of our food came from the killing feast, as well as, uh, us being able to grow it in our own backyard.

[00:04:17] **David Smith:** And what did your family grow?

[00:04:18] **Bobby Wilson:** Well, we grew mostly vegetables, uh, collard greens was a staple, uh, black eyed peas was a staple, uh, sweet potatoes, uh, onion, some of the same things that we are growing right here at Metro Atlanta Urban Farm today, tomatoes, uh, I really know how to make a good tomato sandwich because I grew up on eating tomato sandwiches, and so we continue to eat those same types of tomato sandwiches today.

My, uh, grandmother was the real cook in the family, and so possums, raccoons, squirrels, pheasants, birds, and so all those wildlife things. We ate a lot of fish because there was a small pond behind our house, and we would go fishing, uh, and we would eat those things.

If we had chicken, chicken was a delicacy. When, as a little boy, I, I always said when I grow up, all I'm going to eat is going to be chicken and rice because I never had much of it as a small child growing up. But little did I know I was wrong about that. I still like my sweet potatoes. I like my rutabagas. I like my butter beans. I like my mussels and turnips mix. So I'm more of a vegetable eater right now than I was as a child because one of the things I did that I didn't realize as a child was that if you ate healthy food, that would most likely increase your longevity in terms of living and so as I got older and wiser, I eat less meat now, especially less pork now, less beef, so a lot of, uh, fish and chicken we still eat. So those are the things that we eat today.

[00:06:25] **David Smith:** Um, and what was your favorite meal that your grandmother cooked?

[00:06:28] **Bobby Wilson:** Mmm, butter beans. Butter beans has always been and continue to be one of my favorite meals today. Okra. I love okra. I eat okra any way you cook it. I'll eat, I'll even eat it raw out of the fields today. So I just love okra and butter beans. I would say it's my favorite meal.

She would always cook up butter beans with okra in it. And yes, a little bit of salt and pepper for seasoning. And as most of, uh, our cooks did back in the day, they would add pork for season. So that was good back in the day. So now we add turkey for season. So I continue to eat butter beans with okra in it. But, uh, turkey is added, smoked turkey is added for seasons today.

[00:07:23] **David Smith:** And when did you start transitioning towards this more plant based diet?

[00:07:29] **Bobby Wilson:** Well, I'm in my mid seventies now. I grew up in Mississippi, went the school at Alcorn State University, left Alcorn State University, went to North Mississippi, left

North Mississippi, went up to, uh, St. Paul, Minneapolis area. And when I transitioned out of Minnesota back to the South, I transitioned with a different eating habit. And so a lot of the salts and things that we were using to season became more herbs and, uh, less meat for seasoning. So I would say that was in the early 80s that we started making that transition.

But I also tried to encourage my children to start making that transition as well. Cause as most children are today. Uh, Wendy's was big back then, and I started telling my children, Y'all don't eat, need to eat all that. Wendy's got worms in them. So, uh, they still laugh at me today. But, the good part about it is that they changed their eating habits much earlier than I changed my eating habits.

But I was willing to change my eating habits back in the 80s, but I couldn't get the family consent to go along with it, and, uh, my, uh, children's mother didn't want to, uh, they, she thought that their children, they should have access to the same thing that their other children, Wendy's, McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and all of those.

But today, the whole family is eating a whole lot better, so I'm excited that, you know, sometimes folks don't come when you want them to come. But eventually, they make their transition, so they made it at an early age, so I got a family that's eating a whole lot healthier now, so I'm excited about that.

When I went to Alcorn, I had to make a decision on what I was gonna get a degree in. I made a decision I was gonna get a degree in agriculture. And the reason, this is a true story, the reason I got a degree in agriculture because I knew people had to eat.

And I figured out, I would always be able to get a job if I get a degree in agriculture. And that has panned out to be, uh, true today. And so, after, after Alcorn, it was, uh, North Mississippi, I taught Occupational Orientation and Horticulture up there. So, we were in the arena, but we really didn't have the facilities in the high school to really make it happen.

So then, I got an offer to come to St. Paul Public School System to teach horticulture. And so, we had 13 acres of land and three large greenhouses. So I really introduced some of the southern techniques of growing to the students that I was working with in the St. Paul area. So that kind of started process of, of farming and implementing the skills that I had learned in backyard gardening back in Mississippi.

And then after St. Paul, it was, uh, back to Jackson, Mississippi, and I started doing truck crops for companies like Campbell's Soup and growing vegetables for them. And then, uh, so I'm still in the movement of growing food and growing it using sustainable agricultural practices. So after Kalamazoo. I moved over to Atlanta, and I went back to school, and then I got a degree in, I got my master's in divinity.

And so I went down to Columbus, Georgia, and I pastored down there for four years. We were right in the midst of, uh, putting in a community gardening at the church. Here I am a new pastor and talking about a gardening and I couldn't get the congregation. It was new church development to kind of buy into it. And as I was getting ready to transition into the gardening

program, me and the church fell out. And, uh, I moved back to Atlanta, and then I went to work for the University of Georgia as an extension agent, and I coordinated a program that we call the Atlanta Urban Gardening Program. And so I crisscrossed these communities in the metro Atlanta area, uh, teaching, uh, unserved communities how to grow their own fresh vegetables on small tracts of land.

That was really the second phase in my mind of urban agriculture of inner city people growing their own food. And I would say the first phase was during World War I, World War II, when we had the Victory Gardening Movement, when the government was giving out seed for people to grow their food because all the soldiers and farmers, they were going to war to fight.

And then back in the mid 80s, uh, late 80s, then it came the urban gardening program. Now, as part of the urban gardening program, and this is a history that probably going to get lost somewhere, there were 23 cities that got money to do urban gardening. And Atlanta was one of those 23 cities. Andy Young introduced a bill that went into the farm bill for urban farmers, uh, urban gardeners to get that money. And so that's how the 23 city program came about. It last for several years.

And then during the Clinton administration, second administration, Bill Clinton. The second administration, in his attempt to balance the budget, the community gardening, the urban gardening program, was lumped into Cooperative Extension's budget. And then those 23 cities had an option to either keep the program or dismember it. And what happened was, Atlanta, Georgia, University of Georgia, decided that they would keep their program, but they cut it into a third of what it was.

And so that's how I was able to keep my job with the University of Georgia until we had grown over 350 community gardens across the metro Atlanta area. We were just about in every public housing in Fulton and DeKalb. And we were doing some work in Clayton and we were doing some work in Cobb County. So. So they kind of put me out there on my own with little or no help figuring out how to write grants. So I started writing grants. So I hired a couple of program assistants to keep me going, to help me keep going. Then we started a program that we call the Atlanta Urban Gardening Leadership Association. And the intent of the Atlanta Urban Gardening Leadership Association was to give, give, uh, these community based folks, uh, information on how to grow food, how to organize themselves, and come together on a monthly basis for networking and fellowship.

And then we started doing outreach programs to the homeless community. Where we were taking food, these gardeners would come together in a location like this. And they would bring, uh, nutritional bag lunches that they had made at their own gardening place. And we would deliver them down to Peachtree and Pine, the Atlanta Union Mission. We would even go into parks, uh, where homeless folks was hanging out and give them lunches. And then after that, uh, when the University of Georgia felt that there was no longer a use to have the face of the Urban Gardening Program that looked like me. They called me in one day and they told me, Bobby, if you tell me when you will retire, we won't fire you.

So I went silent, because I thought I was Mr. It. I thought I was really doing the work that they wanted me to do. I was doing the work, but I was doing it with the wrong people, because now, uh, people that don't look like me had caught on to this urban agriculture movement, and they wanted a face on it to be different.

So here I am in my mid 60s, I would guess, or early 60s, and, uh, I'm threatened with, uh, being fired. I thought about fighting it, because I knew I was doing the work. Anybody in this city would tell you that, that probably the most progressive person in the urban agriculture, gardening movement, if, if, if, if our path had not crossed, then they ain't been in Atlanta long.

And so after that, so I gave him a date that I would retire because I was trying to figure out the next phase of my life anyway. And, uh, it just so happened that I was able to take my retirement money and, and then it was like the relay race. And I'm, um, and, and, and we're on the fourth leg. So it was like passing the baton to Bobby right now. And we passed it right into where we are right now, here at 3271 Main Street in College Park. And, and if I just told you what has happened over the last month or so, it's more than most people have done in the urban agriculture community, uh, probably in a lifetime.

We just had the Nelson Mandela fellows. 25 of them from 19 different countries have been coming to Metro Atlanta Urban Farm for more than seven years. We had a break during the pandemic, but we Zoomed in with them. They just left a few months ago.

On Monday evening, we had about 70 farmers out here from around Georgia to come out here for an education program and a luncheon. That was just last, that was Monday night, day two, day one, when on, on today, we just left, uh, Farmer's Market out in, uh, Rockdale County with senior citizens. We just left couple days ago, a week or so ago, an elementary school down here in Hapeville where we took baby chicks and tomatoes and I call it a tomato festival.

So some of these kindergartners and young kids for the first time were able to taste and eat a fresh locally grown tomato and touch and feel a baby chick. So the list just goes on and on of what's happening with Metro Atlanta Urban farm hits.

I got a call yesterday, Bobby, can you come down to Savannah on Saturday and speak with the black state legislators? They meet once a year and we need somebody to come down and talk about urban agriculture. I'm one of ten people that serves on Secretary Vilsack's Urban Agricultural Committee. So the list just goes on and on of it.

I'm a top ten CNN hero. Um, I'm probably the first African American, uh, first person from the state of Georgia, period, to reach that honor. It's only ten of us, uh, for 2022. And, uh, I I I'm proud in terms of where we are. I'm proud in terms of the accomplishments that we have made. But at the end of the day, it's a whole lot of work that goes on, and it's just.

Well, to say that another way, I'm not sure how much longer I can continue to do this. I have a grandson. I just graduated from college 50 years ago. And I had a grandson graduate from the same school my wife and I went to. Uh, we got a chance to march together. Our 50th year is his last year of college.

So we convinced him that agriculture was the way, and he's excited about the career that he's in today. Uh, he got a job before he graduated. He already had a job offer with a major company. Uh, he spent a year up in the St. Paul area. He went to St. Paul because we went to St. Paul, you know. And, uh, that's where the Compton Major Headquarters were. And after his first year there, they sit down with him to go over a job plan. And they went over a logistical job strategy plan for him. And he just moved down, uh, between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. And so he's excited about where he is.

The hope is, is that one day when he's kind of seen all that other stuff out there over the next five years or so, that he'll be ready to come back here and take over and take this to the, uh, next level. I think we've done a pretty good job at what we've done here on these five acres. Uh, we've, I think we've done an excellent job at educating folks about programming, around agriculture and what the USDA has to offer. I'm going to step back a little bit right now. Cause at the end of the day, when, when I bought this property with my retirement money, I went back to get it financed. I was paying 8 percent interest back then. And, uh, well. The government has a program for farmers and, uh, normally would it take a person that don't look like me to process an application and get a loan. It's about 30 to 90 days. I went through the process. It took me two and a half years to get that same loan that a person don't look like me. And get in 30 to 90 days. But the point that I wanted to make, my wife and I was discussing it. It, it, it gets so frustrating till you want to give up. She said, we don't, we don't need it. We just give up on it.

But working with minorities and disadvantaged farmers across this state and other states, I hear it so much that, uh, they just don't want to go through being treated like less than a stepchild and, uh, it was just the other night, Monday night, a guy that, uh, he's an attorney, Princeton, graduated from Princeton University, and he was sharing with me how he had been discriminated with. And he was also sharing with me some programs that he didn't think it was worth it to go through the process of accessing them government programs. But after, uh, And he's an attorney, and after talking with him on Monday night, he said, Bobby, I'm going to take your advice. I'm going to go back and I'm going to meet with my NRCS agent, and I want, I want to, um, go through the process of getting the hoop houses and allowing the government to pay for it.

But also, after I got my loan, this guy in Decatur, Lithonia, I shared with him the process of how I got my loan. And how much time it took, he was able to get his loan in 90 days. So, the point that I'm making, part of my, part of my job, and part of my mission, and part of my commitment is to get people of color to understand that the government can and it will work for you.

But you gotta stick to it. You gotta stick to it. You gotta stay with it. So the hope is, I already know that I made it better for this guy then, in Lithonia. I just convinced this guy on the other side of Macon on Monday night. Now he's gonna go back and rethink it and look at it and go for it. Because at the end of the day, at the end of the day, I wanna make this perfectly clear, the government subsidized farming in this country. Now, if you tell me as an urban farmer, you want me to be self-sufficient and self sustainable, but you don't want to subsidize me, the boy that's got the 100 acres or the boy that's got the 5, 000 acres. Think about this. We lost 90 percent of the peach crops in Georgia this year. Those peach growers are gonna get paid because they

got crop insurance. They're gonna make more money off the crop insurance than they would have made if they had harvested 100 percent of their peaches. It was less expensive, because now they ain't got them farm labels they got to pay. So, what we don't realize that farming can be lucrative, but it's so hard for people of color to get into farming.

One, is that we don't have land, and so now we got to access land. And I'll tell anybody, I think it's foolish to go out and lease land. That you're going to farm, because if you lease the land, what you're doing, and especially if you're using sustainable agriculture practices, you're only going to build that land up.

You're going to make it better. I could have leased this land, and the government would have come in here and put a well on it for me. They would have put drip irrigation throughout it. They would have ran lines throughout. Uh, 24, uh, 2 feet deep into the ground. And if I lease it, then when my lease is up, I leave all of that. I done just made this land a whole lot better for somebody else. I've increased the property value of this land. So I think it's foolish to lease land. I think new and beginning farmers need to figure out how they can actually purchase land.

It's the stigma that has been placed up on us. They think if you get into agriculture, you gotta do what I do. Think about my grandson. He's working for a major company right now. But he also got his start right here at Metro Atlanta Urban Farm. But I do more than planting seed and watching it grow. I'll be in Indiana next month speaking to a group.

I was down in Tuskegee a few weeks ago. I've been to Tuskegee three times over the last month or so. I took students down there to participate in their summer agriculture program, exposing and some of my students that, some that went down there took on leadership roles. So they were able to see themselves among their own peers with about 75 or 80 other potential ag students and being leaders in those positions.

So there's a whole lot more to just planting a seed and watching it grow in terms of what I do. So I'm excited about it and, uh, I'm enthused and I really want to try to make a difference.

I think my faith plays a role in my sustainability. Being able to, to, to sustain all the stumbling blocks. Yes, it makes me stronger because at the end of the day, my faith teaches me that I have to figure out a way around it, over it, or through it. And then when I can't do that, then I understand that there's a higher power that I have to go through.

And, and, and, and, and the other thing that, I don't down you because you're a Muslim or Buddhism, uh, whatever. In the midst of praying, I always pray to the God of your understanding. That is so important to me. But for me in my house, Christianity has been my means of sustaining a way of life for me. But I don't down you because you practice something else. And that becomes so important because if there is a heaven, and a hell, I mean, it's going to be all sorts of people that just ain't going to be Christians up there. It's going to be some other folk up there, too, that didn't practice the same thing.

[00:30:51] **David Smith:** And just like that, I'm sure the people that are learning from you and that are eating your food are very diverse, too.

[00:30:57] **Bobby Wilson:** Very much so. Very much so. Um, the one thing that I would say about my religion, and I see Metro Atlanta Urban Farm as my mission of helping people, I would be willing to bet that I do more for marginalized and underserved communities than most of the over 70 percent of the churches in the Metro Atlanta area.

Metro Atlanta Urban Farms fed more than 25, 000 families during the peak of the pandemic. More than 25, 000 during the peak of the pandemic. We had lines all the way back, uh, almost to the Marta station down here in East Point. And people would come and just grow. People on this side with businesses were mad because cars couldn't turn in because the line was so long.

So, and we continue to do that today. We, we, we continue to feed on the average of about 150 to 200 people a week. But we do that in conjunction not with just the food that we grow, but we do that with conjunction with the Atlanta Community Food Bank. And at the end of the day right now, the food bank is having a shortage in terms of getting food in.

And so, we were having, I was having a conversation with somebody today and we were saying that we gotta learn how to grow our own food. And so, that's one of the things that we are working for.

[00:32:42] **David Smith:** I'm going to go back to my, my grandmother. My grandmother was raised by one of her uncles because her daddy had to leave town in the middle of the night under the cover of darkness from being threatened to be harmed. So her uncle that raised her, Uncle Joe, was a big landowner and a big farmer. I knew Uncle Joe as a little boy. And, uh, knew Aunt Annabelle well because she lived into her 90s and I visit with her. I knew Uncle Joe as a man that was strong in his faith. Uh, and I always kind of envied the fact that Uncle Joe was a big landowner. A big farmer, and this, and, and was recognized around town. And as I grew up, I always wanted to kind of be like Uncle Joe, because Uncle Joe was known, was, was kind of like my granddaddy, that I didn't know, because Mama's husband had to leave town.

[00:34:10] **Bobby Wilson:** So, I think in terms of, of the work that I do, and the reason that I do it, is because of my, the way I look at ministry, which is helping minority, helping disadvantaged people tell this story. Uh, a few months ago, Ralph came by, Ralph was out there going through the garbage can. And I asked Ralph, you need some food? He said, yeah. Brought him in, I gave him some food. A few weeks later, we were giving away food in the line, and Ralph came up, and he and this other guy was having some back and forth words. And so I said, Ralph! Ralph turned around and looked at me, and Ralph said, and Ralph said, he'll remember my name. I said, Ralph, come on up here.

So I took Ralph, Ralph back there to the storage bin, and I fixed him up a box for homeless folks. And Ralph said, I got money. I got money, and I want you to have half of my money. Ralph had six dollars, and he tried to give me three dollars, and I wouldn't take it. Ralph came by Monday evening again. I've seen Ralph several times since then. He said, uh, Bobby, I need some cheese. I need some cheese. And something else. So, I fix him up another homeless bag. And, uh, Ralph said, that lady told me that I was smelling and I'm starting to smell myself. So, I'm going down here and I'm gonna get me a bar of soap. And there's a stream over there where



the water is clean. And I'm going to wash myself off. I said, Hold up, Ralph. So, I came back in the house. I gave Ralph a bar of soap, and some deodorant, and Ralph said I love you, man. I love you.

So, to me, that's what ministry is all about. So, if, if, if I tie the farm to anything, I tie the farm to, back to my religion, and how we need to be about helping one another. And so, uh, it's, that's, that's what I really tied to more than anything other than Uncle Joe as a big land owner. And, and, and one of the things that I tried to do is move towards owning more land. Because I always tell my children, land is the one thing that they're not making any more of. And, my mother said, you 70 years, you 70 plus years old, why are you buying land? What's going to happen? Blah, blah.

But, you know, the two of us, we got different perspectives. Uh, right now, she's 94 years old, and she realized that I, I just had a classmate that died about a week and a half ago. I got another one, they're going to have a funeral on Monday. And she, she reminded me that I'm getting old and your classmates are dying, so it may not be long before you be doing the same thing. But at the end of the day, the succession plan that we talked about with my grandson, I got two other children that they could move into this, but I doubt it very seriously, you know. But, but, but when you think about an urban farm right here in the heart of the city, and we have really put the city at heart, in terms of the work that we're doing, we're working with the people that nobody else wants to work with. So, uh, uh, but it's all about ministry for me. This is my ministry.

[00:38:19] **David Smith:** what happened to your grandmother's uncle's

[00:38:22] **Bobby Wilson:** Uncle Joe's daughter has a son. We bought some of the land me and my three, two brothers. We own about 15 of the acres. And then his grandson owns the majority of it. And he still has another son that stays in the old family house. So it's still connected to the family there. But, uh, you know, the grandson went to work for, uh, a major company and he still stays on the land. He still pastures some, uh, got some cows in and out on it and got some horses on it. Uh, uh, but the majority of it has actually been sold off.

[00:39:11] **David Smith:** How did you come into position on this land here?

[00:39:17] **Bobby Wilson:** Well, about 12 years prior to purchasing this land, Mae Stone, who, we were in college together at Alcorn State University. Mae and I came by here and looked at this property, it had been vacant. And, uh, it was an attorney's office, and she was looking at turning it into, uh, a bread and breakfast. And so, at the time, the prices were right here. And 12 years later, prices was doing this. And so, it was just at the time that we were transitioning out of, uh, UGA. And I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to stay in the agriculture. I wanted to stay into working with communities around the metro Atlanta area. And that's how we got here twelve years later, it was still vacant.

[00:40:15] **David Smith:** To be clear, the prices were decreasing.

[00:40:17] **Bobby Wilson:** Yeah, right. Yeah. The price is, I mean, we were over a million dollars when Mae was looking at it. And by the time I got to it, we were less than a half a million dollars. It's five acres.

[00:40:31] **David Smith:** Uh, what's your favorite thing you're growing right now?

[00:40:34] **Bobby Wilson:** You know, I had my best corn crop this year and I haven't grown corn, uh, in 12 years here. And the reason that I don't grow corn, because it depletes the soil, uh, quite a bit. My, my best crop that I like to grow is okra. The best crop that I got in the field right now is going to be my sweet potato. So, uh, it kind of changes with the season in terms of what we, what we do. Yeah, we, we always, last year we had some of the best collard greens that we, But also that year that we had that big freeze to come through the ice storm. We had great collard greens then and, and, and after the ice threw up, uh, uh, the frost and the freeze went away, those greens popped right back out.

So, uh, but, uh, I love my tomatoes, so, uh, there are some things that, uh, I was, uh, at a market today and I had taken some of my, uh, plum tomatoes and I convinced the lady that she needed to try them. And she reminded me if they ain't good, when you come back next week, you gonna give me my money back. So, uh, but, but we always have a good time at the market with the seniors. And I prefer working with seniors, uh, because they have so much energy and enthusiasm and appreciation for locally grown fresh vegetables, so, uh. But those are some of my specialty crops that I really like growing.

Uh, I'm loving my sunflowers right now. Yeah, I'm loving my sunflowers. If people want to come cut my sunflowers, I ain't ready for them to be cut, you know, yet. But, you know, it's, all this is for the people, and that for me is for the people.

[00:42:34] **David Smith:** Do you let other crops grow the seed?

[00:42:37] **Bobby Wilson:** Well, we, we, we, um, started a field of heirloom seeds this year. So, I tell anybody, if you gonna save, if you gonna save seeds, they need to be heirloom seeds. You don't need to save hybrid seeds. If you save hybrid seeds, it's a transitional period that you got to take that seed through. So it's going to take you five years to breed it back. And people, most folk, when they think in terms of five years, ooh, that's too long. But five years really ain't that long to tell the truth. So, so we are saving some heirloom seeds right now.

We have shared some of our Luffa seeds with folks as far away as, uh. Ohio, and, and, and they have been sharing those Luffa seeds with other people. So, so we have a legacy of saving Luffa seeds and sharing them. I had a lady on Monday night, she got some seeds. I sent some, uh, Luffa seeds back to Africa the other week with some of those Mandela fellows and so, uh, but we've been to start saving some peas that we, we got growing and we got some, uh, heirloom tomatoes that we're going to be saving the seeds on those. So we've been, we've, we've been to do a whole seed saving bank that we're starting to work on this year.

[00:44:10] **David Smith:** And what made you start working on that?

[00:44:14] **Bobby Wilson:** What, what, what made me start working on heirloom seeds is just by talking to people and being at conferences and understanding the challenge that the country is going through right now with these major conglomerates, buying up the seed companies, hybridizing the seeds so that you got to come back to them year in and year out. So we need to start protecting ourselves. And so, what better way to do it than start a seed bank here at 3271 Main Street in Cotts Park, Georgia, and sharing those seeds with others and getting them to start seed banks at their location, and, uh, we won't be, uh, crippled or hand cooked by the powers that meet.

[00:45:07] **David Smith:** Do you use food as medicine?

[00:45:10] **Bobby Wilson:** Well My, my wife is a physician, and so one thing that I try not to do is to get in trouble by saying, if you take this, it's going to cure this. But I tell folks, if you eat healthy food, that you will become more healthier. Because at the end of the day, we don't use commercial fertilizer. No pesticide, no herbicide, no insecticide, no fungicide. Because at the end of the day, if it, if, if, if what I'm putting gonna kill the weed, and I use it over and over, and then that plant start taking it up, and then I start eating it over and over. If it kills the bug, and I start eating it over and over. So it's going to have some adverse effect with me somewhere down the line. And maybe the pill that the doctor going to give me to suppose to cure it at some point in time is not going to work.

And so I was just at the doctor the other day and they said, Well, you've been on this medicine a long time. So it's probably got immune to your system. So we got to change your medicine. And, uh, I take a pill every day, so one thing that I gotta do a better job at is, uh, getting on a regular eating habit rather than going long periods of time and not eating. And so, uh, I think I'm 73 years old now. I think I'm in pretty good health. I'm still going strong. I'm working from six o'clock in the morning to seven, eight o'clock at night. But when I go home and I hit the couch to watch the Braves, I'm out till about the eight or nine inning, then I wake up and see what's going on, then I get up and go to bed. So that's the way it works for me, but it's always a hard day's work, and I, I, I still can do it.

As a young man, I used to drive from St. Paul, Minnesota, back home to Mississippi at about 23, 24 hours. And now I'm about five hours, five hours home. And, uh, I just figured out the other, the last time I went home, I drove all the way back without, you know, any interruption. So, I still can get out there on the roads, do, do pretty good. You know, I can still get a good day's work in, uh, here at the farm. And, uh, do the things that I need. Uh, uh, my blood pressure is good. My cholesterol is good. Yeah, yeah, so, uh, I feel pretty good about my health right now, so.

[00:47:58] **David Smith:** You mentioned sustainability a lot. What does sustainability mean?

[00:48:02] **Bobby Wilson:** Well, sustainability means to me is that I need to make sure I'm teaching the next generation the importance of sustaining that that has been placed in our care. And the one thing that I, I talk a lot about is that we got to continue to work on clean water, clean air, and clean soil. And we can't take those things for, for granted. You think about Flint, Michigan, a few years ago, no clean water. You think about Jackson, Mississippi, a few months

ago. No clean water. You think about the fires in Canada blowing over into New York and other northern states up there. No clean air. You think about the pollution of the soil from all the fires out in California and it impacting the streams and all of that. So, uh, it is important that we teach the next generation the importance of those natural resources that have been placed in our care.

And I think there are programs that the government offers that helps us to really move towards a more healthier air, water, soil situation. And that's why I want more minorities, especially in the farming industry to take advantage of those programs that the government has to offer.

[00:49:37] **David Smith:** What do you wish somebody told you when you were young?

[00:49:40] **Bobby Wilson:** I'm not for sure whether anybody could told me anything when I was young. Okay. Because I, I was just kinda out there. I, I didn't do the best that I coulda did in college. Had a great time in college and when I, when I talk to people about going to college, I think in terms of all the people that I had an opportunity and chance to meet and some of those same people I'm interacting with today, the friendships and the relationship, uh, all the good times at the football games and the basketball games and all of those type things.

And then I think about, well, uh, I met my wife on the tennis courts and, I think, if I had put as much time into, uh, the classroom as I did all those other things at college, I probably wouldn't be where I am today, you know, cause some, some company would've came through like they do a lot of us, sweep us up and change our whole lifestyle.

I'm excited about the journey that I've taken. And I'm excited about where I am right now. And I'm more excited about what I see in the future and the possibilities. Because being a 2022 CNN hero has really opened up a whole lot more windows and doors of opportunities for me. And so, uh, I'm just looking forward to what, maybe eight, ten years has to bring.

What I, what I, not just a young person, but the advice that I would give to any person that's going to get into this, and I'm going to call it an urban agriculture movement, is go sit at the feet of somebody that has been doing this work. That is so important, because at the end of the day, you don't have to fall into the same pitfall, the pits that I've fell into, so you can learn from my mistakes. So that's what I would tell anybody, go sit at the feet of somebody that has been doing this work. And maybe not just one person, but a couple of people.

The guy that I was talking about, that got the loan, the one thing that he told me, He said, Bobby, I wish I had came and spent six months with you before I got started. I would be much farther along. But for me, being an extension agent and coming from St. Paul and what I learned in St. Paul and what I learned in Mississippi, and I was just an agent. We had a coordinator. And once they start seeing the work that I was doing and the way that I was doing it, it changed their whole practice, a way to do things. So, so I, I, I, I would say I was kind of a leader from the start since being in Georgia. But I already had a lot of experience. And one of our challenges is that a lot of folks that's getting degrees in agriculture today, they got the theory part down, but they don't have the practical experience down. So you need the practical experience.

