

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Educated Farmers

Few, if any, would question the need for education in twenty-first-century America. A high school diploma or the General Educational Development (GED) certificate equivalent is widely considered the minimum level of education. To make it in today's world, however, some could argue, "The more education, the better."

Farming might be viewed as an occupation where more education beyond the high school level is not needed. Yet available statistics indicate that 70% of farmers today are college graduates. Two leading farmers in Bucklesberry who hold college degrees in agriculture and related sciences are Frederick (Freddie) Dwight Sutton and Robert (Sonny) Hardy Sutton, Jr.

Wesley Allen Sutton (1929-1992) was one of the first farmers in Bucklesberry to attend college. After graduating from La Grange High School, he studied agronomy at North Carolina State University (NCSU) in 1948-1949. His one year of post-secondary education sufficiently earned him the attention of tobacco researchers at NCSU.

For more than a quarter-century, Allen was among a handful of farmers in the State selected to partner with the NCSU's Agricultural Extension Service and their on-the-farm testing program in growing experimental tobacco crops. Certificates of appreciation awarded to him as a tobacco test cooperator acknowledged his "valuable contribution in advancing knowledge, quality and net profit of tobacco in North Carolina."

A case for the educated farmer was made by the North Carolina Grange movement in the late 1800s. Also known as the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, Granges were rural organizations comprised of farmers who used their collective political and social voice to promote community values and impact state policies. The report of the N.C. State Grange Committee on Education held in Tarboro, NC, in December, 1887, titled simply, "Education," is reprinted here:

"The subject of education becomes more and more interesting as we advance in knowledge. Each day it becomes more and more apparent that the successes of every man in every occupation depends upon their intellectual qualifications as much so as it does upon the skill with which they manipulate the tools connected with their respective industries. The intelligent mechanic works with advantages in his favor that are unknown to his less fortunate co-laborer. The intelligent merchant has many things favoring his success that are hidden from his less favored competitor. Similarly in all trades and professions, it is true almost without exception that the best educated, the most studious and the most widely informed have advantages at their

command that are unknown to those who have not been favored with an education, and who fail to study the progress of events and the changes going on in the natural, commercial, political and social world."

"Other classifications of men find it necessary to educate in order that their occupations and professions may command respect, and wield an influence powerful for accomplishing good as those classes see it. What other classifications of men are doing in this respect, the farmer should not fail to do. The farmer should not fail to educate his children, and by no means should he fail to inform himself. It requires knowledge of a peculiar and refined kind to cultivate the soil and harvest products in accordance with the principles of an unvarying natural law." (*The Daily Journal*, New Bern, January 13, 1888)

More from this report will be shared in an upcoming Bucklesberry article.