

Sidetracked: Travels Across the Undiscovered South

Eugene Thomas Quincy, Florida

I live not too far from Georgia. It's about a mile. I was born and raised right around this area — right up the road. I've never lived anyplace else but here.

I'm a one-man show as a farmer. I was growing cigarette tobacco in the 1970s up until about 1995 along with a few peanuts, some corn and a few hogs.

I graduated from high school in 1966. I got a little public work but I was never really satisfied. I worked several different jobs. I mowed yards, on the weekends.

I went to work for a company in Quincy doing mechanical work.

I applied for a farmer's operational loan 1974. But I was turned down for that. So I reapplied the next year, and got accepted. So I started farming full-time in 1976.

I was growing tobacco and that was pretty much a full-time thing at that time. When they did away with the tobacco, the government agreed to pay us not to grow. I accepted my payment.

Then I went into the produce business growing a lot of greens, squash, snap beans, butter beans and different stuff like that. And I grew my peanuts. I did that up until 1996 or 1997 or somewhere along there. I got out because my kids had grown and I couldn't get any help.

In 2004, I said, "Well, I need to get some bigger equipment. With the tractors I got — basically I started doing about 90% of the work myself.

It's not hard. You just have to learn how to do everything. Sometimes it gets to be a mental thing. You need to be here — you need to be there. I just learned to cope with it. I enjoy doing it.

It's changed a great deal over the years.

One of my biggest problems that I have now is that I'm not really set up for moving from field to field. I have to depend on my wife to help me a little bit. You got to take your tractor and and someone to take a truck. We've got to have someone take one and then bring it back to get another. One of the major things I'm working on now, is getting so that I can get myself to move around from field to field. I'm scattered over a great portion of this side



of the county.

This year, I've got 350 acres of peanuts, 250 acres of corn and about 25 acres of grass hay. I got a few cows, too.

Most of the time I just drive the tractor to the different fields with whatever piece of equipment is hooked up to it. But then you got have your fertilizer and chemicals. That's one of my biggest problems — getting moved around from field to field without having help. My wife helps me, but if you're married, you know how your wife looks at you sometimes. They got other things they want to do.

I guess you could call it a hangup — but if I'm working on the field, I like to have my truck at the end of the rows. I like to have my truck. You never know when something's going to break. Anything can happen. I just feel more comfortable with my truck at the end of the field.

For people with good irrigation, farming's pretty good. When your dry land farm like me and couple other farmers around here, you've got to depend on what the good Lord sends you. Sometimes, He don't want us to have any rain. So, I have little worry spaces. Right now he's given us some rain, and we still got problems.

When He sends that rain, all of us are in the same boat. It's been a pretty good year so far. I wouldn't tell anybody to go into farming if you've got no farming experience. It's too high a risk. I remember a time when I first started farming, a bag of seed cost \$15. But now a bag of seed is over \$200. And now you're faced with high fuel prices.

I tell everybody that farming is somewhat similar to a person who is sick. When a person is sick, they've got to have medicine. Farming is the same way. My crop has got to be sprayed for weeds and you can't put it off and say, "I'll do it tomorrow." Because, tomorrow you don't know what'll happen. If you get started today, need to get started as quickly as you can. You've got to be on time.

My parents were involved in farming a little bit. They could take 4 or 5 acres and survive. They grew 75% of their food. My father passed when I was nine years old. After he passed, my mother still had farming experience. We had a mule and we tried to make it work.

I think a person should do what they like. I enjoy farming. Im a lonesome person. A lonely person. If equipment is going fine, I'm happy. And, and I'm by myself. I'm happy.

My family wanted me to go on a cruise. I got no money to waste on any cruise. When you get back, you got nothing to show for it. But, that's me. Some folks like to go to malls and walk around, do a little shopping. I'd rather be in the fields. I don't want to be that close to anybody.

I don't have much down time. I'd rather just stay busy. My energy isn't what it used to be.

I never wanted to go to college. I know my mother could never afford for me to go.

The farm has been my longest occupation I've ever had. I choose farming. I never liked it too much for someone standing over me and telling me what to do.

I knew if I could be a full-time farmer, I could be my own boss.