

Interview with Ginette Jean
Conducted by Jordan Scott
March 28, 2025

Jordan Scott: My name is Jordan Scott, and I'll be conducting today's oral history interview. So we can go ahead and get started. What is your full name?

Ginette Jean: Ginette Jean.

Jordan Scott: And where did you grow up

Ginette Jean: I grew up in Haiti

Jordan Scott: And what kind of stuff did you do for fun growing up in Haiti?

Ginette Jean: We used to play with dolls. We used to play in the mud building houses. We used to go to the backyard garden and pick up vegetables and ask the parents to cook for us or teach us how to cook. We used to play mom and dad and kid like a family. That's what I can remember.

Jordan Scott: And what are your earliest memories related to farming?

Ginette Jean: Oh, my earliest memory was, I was like 7, 8 years old. I was watching my dad planting sweet potato, and then I asked him if I can help him. He let me. So and he gave me some to work to do for myself that I did. What I remembered was two days later, I was right there on the the soil, digging, and see if the potatoes was already there. So I kept digging, digging, and I mess up the place and the sweet potato never come to mature because I was constantly looking, and see if there's any potato yet. So that is what I remember. Yes, so I from that point I learned how patient you have to be with nature. You know there is a time for everything and you have to nurture, you know, the plants so they can grow food for you.

Jordan Scott: Well, I'm glad you learned patience rather than being discouraged. So how did you become aware of the Black Church Food Security network?

Ginette Jean: I think the first contact was Ashley. Then I receive a letter from, I think, a pastor to because he was trying to get a grant. You needed support, a letter of support. I was invited to talk about gardening one time, but it was canceled in the church it was canceled. So yeah, I think that's what I can remember now.

Jordan Scott: And what if anything has been the benefit of working with the Black Church Food Security Network?

Ginette Jean: You know, I forget one important thing they used to buy from me. I remember very well they used to buy vegetables from me.

Ginette Jean: You. The question was, what do I remember?

Jordan Scott: What's been beneficial with working with the Black Church Food Security network?

Ginette Jean: Well, to me it was, it was so great that Black people get together all over and make sure that we have something to say about food security, because in the past, you know, we didn't have that opportunity to make sure that our people eat well and eat the best food. I like it because that food is medicine. So, making sure that our people eat well and they live well. So that's why I'm glad to be part.

Jordan Scott: And what crops or livestock are your primary focus on your farm?

Ginette Jean: Primary is okra. I do bush beans, wind beans, herbs. You name it, I have it. Herbs, culinary herbs. I do shell beans, too, the wind beans. And I do jute. I don't know if you're familiar with jute, because in Haiti we that's a legume like spinach. That's jute of the Caribbean, and also part of Africa. They eat jute. So I do, jute also.

Jordan Scott: Have you noticed changes in access to fresh, healthy food for local Black communities over time?

Ginette Jean: You know, I noticed that because when people in the community come to buy they always wish they have a garden or they feel like, oh, they have to take care better care of their backyard garden. And they enjoy the cucumbers, the fresh cucumbers, and you know all the fresh food and they always say they can taste the difference on the fresh food. So yes, yes. We also have so many friends built, you know their own backyard garden last year, and we're willing to do it, continue doing it this year.

Jordan Scott: Now do you own the land that you work on? And if so, how did you come to obtain it?

Ginette Jean: No, I don't own it. I went to the Urban farming Class school from Eco City Farm and I got a certificate. And then during that time they had a place at Watkins. I applied, so I had half acre and it's been since 2022, April 2022. I'm still there. This year. I have another half acre that I lease in Brandywine also

Jordan Scott: Okay, and how do policies and agricultural programs affect Black-owned farms?

Ginette Jean: But so far, so far it seems to be working. I'm not too familiar with the policy But at least you see, more Black people interested in in farming, and when it's come to soil health, we got some help from Maryland Department of Agriculture to make sure that we use proper

fertilizer, we do proper amendment of the soil, and we don't use chemical stuff. So that's like we do naturally grown food. What else? They also help with equipment. Well, so far I don't have any grant on equipment, but I know people who gets grants for equipment, and also I think the USDA, if I'm not mistaken. We had a small marketing grant not long ago. I don't know if maybe we are placed in a better position to maybe know about all this. Some other platform don't. Yeah, maybe

Jordan Scott: Yeah, it's okay not to know so much about the policy it does get sort of complex.

Ginette Jean: Yeah.

Jordan Scott: Could you speak a little bit about food sovereignty and land rights, kind of people having the right to their own land, or even growing on their own land, and those kinds of things

Ginette Jean: Growing on their own land? So to grow in your own land, no matter who you are, you're going to need support from the government because growing food really require lots of money. You know, even if you want to build a high tunnel, it's up to \$10,000 to build a good one, maybe more. So I would say, I don't know if I'm answering the question right, but it takes it takes passion to be a farmer, to grow your own food. You have to really like to do it. You enjoy it, you know. Yeah, you need it, it's you can do it collectively. It's better to do it collectively. Farming require, you know, other farmers around you. You know, we learn from each other. We know why we want to go food together, you know, for better food and also for money, you know. Yeah, but that's not something you really can do alone. If you cannot get grants you need, you need loans that you can repay, you know so you don't be in debt by going through it.

Jordan Scott: So I kind of want to shift a little bit. Now I know it's been a little bit more popular for people to sort of start their own gardens in their backyard, maybe somewhere in the community. Or maybe it might just be growing things in and around their house, or something like that. So do you think more people should be starting their own gardens? And if I wanted to start growing something today, where should I start?

Ginette Jean: Well, as I said before, growing, your own garden requires so much. Do you have the time? Do you have the passion, you know. Are you willing to learn? Because growing food is, you have to have skills to grow food so, well, what's the other part of the question?

Jordan Scott: So the first part was, do you think more people should start their own gardens? And then the second part is, where should I start?

Ginette Jean: Well, more people should. It's a good thing because gardening also is good for your mental being. You know, it's bring, you know, life to your life. Good energy, you know this soil, we have energy from that, from the soil that keeps you grounded. I do think more people should because we didn't have so much, so many diseases before of young kids have diabetes, you know, or high blood pressure, or other or cancer or other complicated diseases. So it's all come from what we eat. So I would say, I don't know if you have a question on kids. But I would

say, if you are a family with your own kids, it's a way to teach them that this is what food looks like, you know, because a lot of things that we eat they are not food. Another thing that we buy, you know they're not food. So I think more people should grow their own food. It's more than about eating, but it's also bring more to your existence. You know, your mental being, etc. And the kids need to know. The kids have no idea. The kids now have no idea about where the food come from or they don't, you know family, mother, father, they so much disconnected with nature, they have no idea. So yes, I truly believe that more people should learn how to have a garden

Jordan Scott: And where could I start? If I wanted to start growing things today like, is there something specific? I should start out growing? Or should I educate myself first, and build skill?

Ginette Jean: Of course you have to. That's the first step you have to educate yourself. You know, first build, you know, scale. You know, volunteering in a farm. You know, talk to people who grow food. And you know, yes that's where you start. You have to learn first. Yeah, it's a good way to make good friends, too. I noticed that people who are interested in on playing on this, under, on the soil. Usually they are passionate people, and they are very, very good hearted people.

Jordan Scott: And what's the best way to support farmers like you? Would you like to see more volunteers at your farm? Is it with our dollars? Or should we be educating others?

Ginette Jean: Well, for sure. I always they always welcome, because not only they help, but also I I'm always ready to answer questions, you know, and you know, talk to them about how to go. For, of course, yeah.

Jordan Scott: And is there anything I should know about that I haven't asked you already?

Ginette Jean: So right now, the what happened is when you go, is farming is a business for you. You're always worried about 'Okay. If I grow food where I'm going to sell them.' You know, you have to market, and sometime it's not, it's not that easy, because you don't want to really sell one piece here, one piece there. You want to sell box, so you know, you have, it's important that you have contract, you know people, you know where your food is going. Yeah, is it too, Giant, is it, you know, Safeway, or things like that? You want to know.

Now what I like about right now with Food Bank is that we know the churches that really need it. That's where our food, you know, get delivered. We sell with Food Bank, but we know we heard that very soon we might not even have that, you know, contract because of government stuff going on now. Yeah. So yeah. Growing good food, yes, but selling them. It's important to know where your food is going. You don't want to any little bit to be going to waste. So maybe that's why my worry is now after the contract is over in November, you know, to find markets to sell the foods. Yeah.

Jordan Scott: And do you feel like the Black Church Food Security Network is helping relieve any of that kind of tension by purchasing?

Ginette Jean: Yeah, yeah, of course. Of course. That's a good alert. That's a good thing. That's a good thing that people know. Okay, there is, there is a community. There is a huge, you know, organization called Black Church, you know, Food Security, you know. That's helping. Or you know, that can buy your food. And okay, things like that, of course. Yes, yes, yes.

Jordan Scott: All right. Well, thank you so much for today's interview, that's all I had. Did you have any questions for me, or anything like that?

Ginette Jean: Yeah, I have one question, which is even though I'm glad to support, but I don't know the whole detail about yet what you really doing, you know, talk about food security, but I don't have the whole picture.

Jordan Scott: Today's oral history interview is a part of a larger project. My two advisors, they received a grant. And we're doing research through these oral history interviews. And we're working to develop a digital exhibition so we can encourage the community to engage with programs like the Black Church Food Security Network and understand more about, like the cultural significance, the historical significance of Black heritage as it relates to farming and faith.

Ginette Jean: Yeah, to that to that. Without holding you to that since what I'm doing now is collecting all natural seeds from homes. You know, make sure making and talking to them to make sure they have the real, the real seeds, the heirloom seeds. And we should do that here also make sure that we don't. I mean that sometimes I think it's too late. We've been giving hybrid stuff to, you know, to farm, and then every year we have to every year buy seeds, because we don't have the original seeds. So we have to have. I would what I, if I had to add something, that I would love to see Black Church Food Security do is to have a seed bank to make sure we have all our original, you know, all natural heirloom seeds.

Jordan Scott: Yeah, I've heard of that before being an issue. I think a seed bank is a great idea, and I think it'll help in terms of sustaining the Black Church Food Security Network.

Ginette Jean: Yeah. Yes.

Jordan Scott: Alright. Well, thank you so much. Those were all my questions.