FATHER OF 22 CHILDREN

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He fathered 22 children. And he's a truck farmer. As a matter of fact, out of 35 truck farmers who drove horse drawn wagons, he's the only one left in the Lafayette area.

Whether he is known as "Bumblebee" to residents near Souvenir Gate or "Black" to those who live near Four Corners, Leo Caillier has long been a familiar sight to fresh vegetable buyers. He can be seen delivering vegetables early in the morning in his wagon pulled by his 13th horse, this one named Blue.

He smiled when asked about Blue. "There is a special attachment between him and his well-trained horse. He demonstrates how well Blue listens by commanding him to move backwards and stop. Blue did, and his master commented, "That horse does everything but talk."

43rd Year

This year will make the 43rd year of his trade. And Caillier, age 57, still enjoys his work as early as nine years ago, he retails being interested in farming. His father, also a farmer, grew cotton, corn and sweet potatoes.

He was born to Leo Paul Cailler Sr. and the former Martha Breaux in 1918 in the Scott Community, near Judice High School. But for the last 30 years his home has been on Willow Street here in Lafayette. When he was 14, he started selling vegetables for Stamp Fiero for 60 cents a day. Fiero grew the crops and Caillier sold them. Later, he sold vegetables for H.H. Richter earning one-third of the profit. Eventually, he graduated to growing and selling his own crops.

Caillier's work, like many another farmers, begins at daylight. He picks his vegetables late in the evening, loading up the wagon for an early start in the morning. During the day, after delivering the vegetables, he works in the fields planting and caring for the plants.

Presently he is starting his fall garden of onions, shallots, mustard greens, cabbage, beans, broccoli, turnips, parsley, cauliflower, radishes, and carrots. In the summer garden he grows corn, beans, tomatoes, eggplant, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, peas, squash, cucumbers, bell peppers and tomatoes.

"A lot of people would rather get their vegetables from the farmer," he said. "They buy in large quantities for storage in the freezer."

No Success Secrets

He admits to having no secrets for his successful garden but says the "more fertilizer the more crops!"

"Rain hurts the vegetables more than hot weather," he remarked, noting that his corn and okra were the only two crops that did well this summer.

Caillier farms his eight acres of land by himself but during the summer months his son, Russell, an elementary school teacher, gives him a hand. He has two work horses to pull the plow but the other children, mostly girls, are usually in school.

And he his wife, the former Ethel LeBlanc, are the parents of 12 living children. His eldest daughter, Mrs. Marie Adam, age 33, died on August 13, 1973, from a head injury in Houston, Tex. He is now rearing his two grandchildren in addition to the six children still living at home.

The couple have seven grandchildren. And they are proud of their children — two teachers, a state policeman, a nurse and a restaurant chain manager. Three are in college and the others are still in public school. The youngest child is 13 years old.

Caillier has been selling his own vegetables to the public for the last 30 years and sees no retirement in the near future. He still has eight children left to raise and enjoys great satisfaction in watching them grow — even as he takes pride in his growing crops.

OF 35 TRUCK FARMERS who drove horse drawn wagons Leo Caillier is the only one left in the Lafayette area. In this wagon drawn by Blue he returns home each day around 10:30 a.m. having finished delivering his vegetables. Blue, his 13th horse, is one of his favorites. Caillier has been selling vegetables for 30 years and sees no retirement in the near future.

PLOW HORSES — Caillier's day begins, like most farmers, at daylight. His two plow horses are almost ready for the fields. Presently he is getting ready to plant crops for the fall garden located on Willow Street.