Another Conservation Success Story...

Elbert County, Georgia

July 2011

Elberton Couple Named Farm Family of the Year

Running an all-natural beef cattle operation is far from easy but Charlotte and Ron Ward thrive on a challenge. "Tough for him is fun," Charlotte Ward said about her husband Ron.

The couple, originally from Dacula, Georgia, have been farming in Northeast Georgia for the last 13 years. The Wards bought land a few acres at a time in Elberton and now R/C Farms comprises about 108 total acres.

EQIP funds helped treat pastures that were previously covered in weeds and damaged by soil erosion.

Soil erosion and water quality concerns made the transition into farm life even harder for the Wards. Through his involvement with the Georgia Cattlemen's Association, Ron Ward heard about the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Ward learned that the agency offers both technical and financial assistance to landowners who want to make improvements on their land.

NRCS employees Forrest Ferguson, Katrina White and Rita Harper assisted the Wards in putting in place several treatments through an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract.

The treatments addressed both water quality and soil erosion.

"Mainly, it was the pastures. They were in bad shape when we moved here. There were a lot of weeds but there wasn't any grass," Ron Ward described.

Heavy use areas were built in feeding areas and around water tanks to cut down on erosion.

Before a heavy use area was installed in a cattle holding area on the farm, Ron said that any amount of rain would wreak havoc on getting anything accomplished.

"The mud was so thick that it would pull your boots off," Ward explained.

Cross-fencing was also built to separate pastures for rotational grazing purposes.

Streams were also fenced out around the farm to protect water quality by keeping the cattle out of the streams.



When Charlotte and Ron Ward aren't busy on their farm, they stay very involved in their community. Ron serves as president of the Elbert County chapter of the Georgia Cattlemen's Association and as the regional vice president.

"I think they've done a very good job

fulfilling their contracts. You can see it whenever you come out to the farm," Harper said.

The Wards loved that EQIP helped them add nutritional value to their

pastures by cutting down on soil erosion and improving their rotational grazing plan.

They said EQIP also encouraged them to use best management practices to accomplish goals in a timely manner.

"It helps on the cost and forces you to get it

done because it's on a timeline," Ron said.

"You also learn about things you wouldn't know otherwise. It's real educational," Charlotte Ward added.

Because of their continued commitment to conservation, the Wards were named the Broad River Soil and Water Conservation District's Farm Family of the Year 2010. The couple said that they will strive to do even more to improve their land because "The better stewards you are,

"It helps on the cost and forces you to get it done because it's on a timeline." —Ron Ward

the more productivity and use you get out of the land," Ron explained.

The Wards hope to pass their legacy of conservation and cattle operation on to their three grandchildren.



Exclusion fencing separates cattle from streams and cross fencing serves as guidance for a more productive rotational grazing system

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Broad River Soil and Water Conservation District

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