

Another Conservation Success Story...

Walton County, Georgia

September 2010

EQIP Funds Aid Organic Farmer to Survive Drought

Whippoorwill Hollow Organic Farm in Monroe is not only a farm that provides fresh fruit and vegetables to surrounding communities, it is an outdoor classroom where children of all ages can learn where some of their favorite foods come from.



This is some of the okra that is grown on Whippoorwill Hollow Organic Farm in Monroe.

Julie Watkins and her mother-in-law Janice Watkins visit the farm frequently to get vegetables and fruit grown by Andy Byrd and his small team.

On their most recent visit, the two brought 3-year-old Kiersten and 6-year-old Katie along to pick blueberries. Julie feels that it's great that she can bring her daughters to a local farm to learn about agriculture while they're still young.

"It's a wonderful asset, especially out here in the suburbs. It's nice to have," Julie explained.

Andy Byrd, the owner of Whippoorwill Hollow Organic Farm, said that's exactly what he wants residents in surrounding communities to know about his operation—it's open to the public as a market and learning experience.

Byrd has been farming for 15 years and specializes in growing organic blueberries, pomegranates, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, and other fruits and vegetables. "Health is why I chose organic and it's better for the environment."

Byrd's plans of serving the community fresh, locally grown and organic food was threatened by a water shortage on the farm three years ago.

He struggled with getting a stable water source established on his five acres of land that is dedicated to vegetable production and another four acres for livestock.

Through previous knowledge of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) programs, Byrd applied for financial assistance from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help him install a more sustainable water system on the farm.

After he was approved for the program's aid, Walton County's District Conservationist Jose Pagan assisted Byrd with tracking down the best source of water for the small organic farm. "He faced a lot of obstacles but he was very patient," Pagan said.

Byrd had to drill four wells before he finally found a good source of water.

There is now a drip irrigation system that gets that well water onto the crops.

"This type of

system puts the water directly onto the root system. There isn't a lot of water wasted. It's a highly efficient irrigation," Pagan said.

Byrd was also accepted into the high tunnel pilot program and will install a high tunnel and monitor his production to determine the conservation benefits of this type of structure.

An added benefit of high tunnels is that they extend the growing season for farmers. They insulate the produce while it's cold.

With less of his time spent worrying about a reliable water source, Byrd is able to put more of his energy into growing fresh organic produce and spreading his message of



Andy Byrd has been farming for 15 years in Walton County.

"Our generation now has to learn we need to take care of our environment and our water."-Andy Byrd

taking care of our resources so that we can rely on them years from now. "Our generation now has to learn we need to take care of our envi-



Julie Watkins, her two daughters and mother-in law, Janice Watkins, feed goats at Whippoorwill Hollow Organic Farm. They also visit the farm to pick blueberries during the summer.

ronment and our water. We've got to learn to use fewer resources. We need to learn to grow without chemicals," Byrd said.

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Walton County Soil And Water
Conservation District