

Another Conservation Success Story...

Coffee County, Georgia

March 2009

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Saves Money in Long Run

Wayne McKinnon has been farming all of his life. McKinnon Farms, located outside of Douglas in Coffee County, grew out of a partnership with McKinnon's father when Wayne was 18. In 1977 he purchased his first farm of 200 acres. Today he is farming 1,400 acres of crops with the part-time help of his son Clay, a fourth generation farmer.

What was once a hog farm has become a diversified farm of peanuts, cotton, tobacco, poultry and blueberries. "When the hog market went south, I eliminated hogs from my operation and diversified into cotton and also expanded my tobacco acreage. My poultry houses have been a big help by giving me a steady flow of income and providing 20 percent of my fertilizer needs. I also expanded into blueberries growing two different types of blueberries, became a partner in a cotton gin and a blueberry packing shed. My wife oversees the blueberry picking crews and manages the books," said McKinnon.

His natural resource issues were erosion, water conservation and poultry litter. "Wayne was stacking litter on the ground which was impacting water quality - runoff was flowing to a nearby intermittent stream and the farm pond. Wayne was using older inefficient high impact sprinkler type pivots in his farming operation to irrigate cropland. These sprinklers take more water pressure to work properly, requiring more power and more money to operate the center pivots; and Wayne

was farming using conventional tillage methods," said Zack Railey, soil conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Douglas.

With the use of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Technical Assistance and the 319 program, McKinnon's conservation resource problems were treated. A stack house was recommended and implemented to improve water quality downstream. By providing a covered enclosed shelter with an impervious concrete floor, litter was protected from rain, runoff, and wind preventing excessive nutrients from entering any nearby streams or ponds.

A comprehensive nutrient management plan and pest management was developed by the NRCS and implemented by McKinnon allowing for safe application rates of organic and inorganic fertilizers and pesticides onto fields during safe conditions.

The NRCS suggested McKinnon convert from conventional tillage to conservation tillage to improve soil quality, decrease soil erosion, increase water infiltration rate, and improve wildlife habitat by planting a winter cover crop and strip tilling into that winter cover crop the following spring.

Also, the NRCS recommended conversion of high impact sprinklers to the more efficient low pressure drops to disperse irrigation water. The low pressure drops allows water to be dispersed in larger droplets closer to the crop which decreases water loss from wind and evaporation. It also takes less water pressure & energy to pump water to crops through low pressure



The McKinnons - Clay (son) Lynn and Wayne standing by the farm sign outside of Douglas

drop sprinklers as opposed to high impact sprinklers.

McKinnon believes that EQIP is a benefit to the farmer. "They fund projects that benefit the farmer. These projects directly conserve

energy & natural resources. Because of the shared cost between the farmer and the funded program, it is a more attractive and affordable

program for the farmer to take advantage."

McKinnon said that the treatments have saved money. "It has saved me investment money that I can use for other conservation projects such as my boiler system for curing tobacco and heating poultry houses, which in return saves me \$100,000 per year in energy costs. Pivot retrofits have enabled me to conserve water and electricity. Strip-till has reduced fuel reduce erosion and labor costs by limiting the trips across the field. The stack house has enabled me to store litter in a dry environment which preserves nitrogen and ensures clean litter for timely application," said McKinnon.

McKinnon's conservation philosophy is about stewardship of our natural resources. "All farmers are stewards of natural resources - water and soil. As green technology becomes available, it should be implemented. The minimal cost and cost sharing has proven to affect my bottom line in a positive way. We are grateful that these programs are made available to each farmer and benefit the entire farming community and the consumer," said McKinnon.

"All farmers are stewards of natural resources - water and soil," — Clayton McKinnon



One of the new more efficient low pressure drops dispersing irrigation systems on McKinnon Farms

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