

Another Conservation Success Story...

Early County, Georgia

December 2006

Silvopasture Maximizes Land Use in Early County

You might not think of a former New Jersey field engineer with International Business Machines (IBM) as a leader in conservation farming, but when it comes to Mack Evans of Jakin, Georgia, that's not all that will surprise you.

Evans purchased some land in the late 70's that had been in his wife's family for more than 100 years and planted it in loblolly pine. "For me, it was an investment," he said. "After doing some research, I found that farmers can make more money out of saw timber," he added.

Evans came back to Jakin in 2003 to manage his trees—after spending another 5 years with Eastman Kodak. He thinned his pine stand in 1996 and again in 1999 and was receiving a "nice income" without managing his farm.

Evans, who said he gets all of his farm information from the internet, was surfing the web one day looking for information on removing understory vegetation and discovered silvopasture. "I would go on the web at night. I found silvopasture on a USDA web site." Silvopasture is an agroforestry practice that combines trees, forage plants and livestock management.

He called USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) District Conservationist Joe Wilson, who said, "Mack that's a great idea!" Current District Conservationist Steven Cleland echoed the sentiment and recommended silvopasture as a good conservation practice because it maximizes the use of the land while helping conserve the natural resources.

Evans, who bought his first herd of cattle in 2003, said that he has noticed his trees growing faster since he adopted silvopasture. He received cost-share funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help plant pasture grass.

He hosts field days on his farm to teach other farmers, and said that he wishes farmers would take better advantage of the research being done at universities. "Farmers out here don't use the universities as

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much as they should—the researchers do the work and it just sits on the shelf," he said.

"You'd be surprised at how many people stop and say your cows are out," he laughed.

Evans would also like to develop a mentor program for new farmers. "There was no farmer I could go to—to talk about silvopasture." Some farmers might have stopped here, but Evans keeps on finding innovative ways of maximizing his farm income.

He rents land 6 months out of the year from his neighbor who is using no-till, a conservation practice that reduces soil erosion and improves soil quality. Evans came up with the idea to rent the land and graze cattle on it during the winter months. "A lot of farmers thought it was kinda weird—renting six months—but it's a win-win situation—using winter grazing as a cover crop," he said.

Cleland said that he hopes other farmers will model this farming operation. "He's innovative in his approach; he's really put the work in to gather information," Cleland said. Evans was selected as a participant in the 2005 Georgia Agri-Leaders Forum, whose mission is to provide a forum for developing individual leaders skilled in communications, educated in local, national, and world affairs, familiar with the changing needs of our society, and prepared to meet the present and future challenges.



L-R: Ray Jones, Outreach Coordinator; Mack Evans, farmer; and Steve Cleland, District Conservationist.



Mack Evans' silvopasture. In silvopasture, timber and pasture are managed as an integrated system. The interactions among timber, forage and livestock are managed intensively to simultaneously produce timber commodities, a high quality forage resource and efficient livestock production.



Silvopasture systems provide a relatively quick return on investments in livestock and a long-term source of income in the tree crops. This stand of trees will mature and be ready for harvest in 20 to 25 years.

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