

Another Conservation Success Story...

Fulton County, Georgia

October 2012

Urban Farmer Sets Out to Prove That a Healthy Lifestyle Is Possible Anywhere

By Karen Buckley Washington, Lawrenceville

Urban farming is a growing trend in the Atlanta metropolitan area. For Fulton County landowner Arletha Dixon, it's more than a trend – it's a passion.

Dixon's history in agriculture began with her father's educational studies in horticulture. Combined with her mother's commitment to promoting good health as a physician, Dixon adopted her parents' career paths and began teaching urban agriculture to children.

In March 2010, Dixon's dedication to urban agriculture led her to start Metro Atlanta Urban Farm on 4.5 acres of land in urban College Park.

Placing a piece of the country within the city came with numerous concerns. After

researching on assistance programs for socially disadvantaged farmers through land grant institutions like Fort Valley State University and Alabama A&M University, Dixon discovered the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Valarie Pickard, district conservationist for NRCS in Marietta, helped Dixon learn about NRCS programs available to small and beginning farmers. Dixon applied for cost share through Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2011 and was awarded a contract, as a socially disadvantaged farmer.

"My favorite aspect of NRCS is that they are very hands-on with farmers." - Arletha Dixon

"The odd shape of her (Dixon's) land limited her possibilities when it came to irrigation," said Pickard. "Then, there were also concerns over possible erosion due to the unusual location of the farm."

Pickard recommended a micro-irrigation system (commonly known as 'drip' irrigation) to conserve water by limiting the amount wasted, yet allowing the flexibility to accommodate almost any field shape. To address the erosion concerns, Pickard suggested planting a cover crop.



Arletha Dixon shows off her green beans.

"My favorite aspect of NRCS is that they are very hands-on with farmers," Dixon said. "Farmers can work closely with NRCS employees and connectively problem-solve conservation issues. The assistance provided by NRCS has been invaluable."

These conservation practices have helped Dixon to develop the foundation for what will be a thriving farm in an urban area.

The early success of the Metro Atlanta Urban Farm has been so significant that the farm is now catching the attention of metro Atlanta at large.

"This farm not only belongs to me, it belongs to the public," Dixon says.

With public service in mind, Metro Atlanta Urban Farm hosted the Fulton County Small and Beginning Farmers Workshop Oct. 20, 2011, where new farmers attended to learn about the assistance they too can receive from NRCS.

Dixon is working to send a message, especially to children, that as long as you have the right knowledge and help, you can have fresh food anywhere – even in the city.



Dixon grows a variety of vegetables on her urban farm.



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Fulton County Soil and Water Conservation District

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