

A StrikeForce Conservation Success Story...

Macon County, Georgia

July 2011

NRCS Helps Farmer Move from Hand-Watering with a Bucket to a Top Line Irrigation System

No profession has more dependency upon the natural resources than that of the farmer. A single weather event can devastate a farm and a lifetime of hard labor.

John Lowe grew up on a farm in rural Georgia where his family raised cotton, corn, okra and other vegetables.

After he graduated from high school, he went to work for Armstrong Manufacturing and raised a few pigs.

There wasn't enough profit in pig farming, and with an emerging world market for nuts, he decided to take his chances and plant some pecan trees.

So, in 2005, he planted 95 pecan trees on a small piece of land near Montezuma and started watering the trees by hand.

Three times a week, he would fill up a 300-gallon water tank and drive to the field. There, he used an old five-gallon bucket and, for the next two years, spent four to five hours

watering the trees three days every week. Then, disaster struck.

In 2007, a hard freeze killed a bunch of the trees—trees that had not yet begun to bear.

Lowe had been applying to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) program for several years—without success.

“I tell you what happened—they were putting in wells when I talked to people (other farmers) and they said go see NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service),” Lowe said. “NRCS recommended goats, but I didn't want goats,” he added.

“These trees have put on so much new growth; Man, it's just amazing how much they've grown,”—John Lowe.

So, working together, local NRCS employees Calvin Essex, NRCS district conservationist in Perry and Soil Conservation Technician Tracy Crawford recommended a whole-farm irrigation plan and Lowe applied.

“When John first came in, he wanted a well,” said Essex. “I told him we could do the whole system for 75% cost-share, but he couldn't afford it,” said Crawford.

Finally, in 2010, NRCS was able to offer 90% cost-share. “When the 90 came out, that was the ticket,” Lowe said. Now, instead of 15 hours a week spent watering, he spends just five minutes watering the trees.



John Lowe is happy with his new irrigation system. He used to water his trees by hand three times a week.

“The engineers told me “you're not gonna believe it once this system is in place,” Lowe said. “These trees have put on so much new growth; Man, it's just amazing how much they've grown,” he added. As a result of Lowe's perseverance, he now has a system better than he ever dreamed of and farmers like him are applying for NRCS programs because of what they see on his farm.



Several trees were lost during a hard freeze in 2007. A new irrigation system is helping the trees receive the water they need to thrive and put on growth so as to become stronger and ultimately produce a pecan crop.



A new well provides on-farm access to water and support two irrigation systems.



478-472-7012 x3

Ocmulgee River Soil And Water Conservation District

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