

Another Conservation Success Story...

Whitfield County, Georgia

December 2006

Voluntary Conservation Awarded to Petty Dairy

Conservation is often viewed of as a hurdle to be overcome rather than a necessity to be embraced. History has revealed that absolute conservation will never be realized. It is an ongoing and dynamic process that commands attention and conviction. As stewards of the land, we will be held accountable for our dealings with the environment. This is why the concept of voluntary conservation is vital in protecting our natural resources for future generations.

Don, Jerry and Jimmy Petty of Petty Dairy, along with their families, have established a tradition that subscribes to this notion. On March 21, 2006, they were awarded the inaugural Governor's Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Award by Governor Sonny Perdue at the National Agriculture Week in Atlanta, Georgia. The award was sponsored by the Governor's Agriculture Advisory Commission "to honor farmers who are good stewards of all aspects of the environment in their farming practices," according to a press release issued by Governor Perdue's office. A district winner was chosen from each of the five designated regions in the state of Georgia. From there, a judging team visited each farm and selected the award recipient.

Petty Dairy is a working dairy, beef cattle and row crop production operation spanning Murray and Whitfield counties in Georgia and Bradley and Polk counties in Tennessee. The farm has been in the family since 1915 and encompasses over 5,000 acres.

Through the LaFayette/Dalton Field Office of the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Petty Dairy has been involved in numerous conservation programs including the Conservation Reserve Program, Continuous Conservation Reserve Program, Forestry Incentives Program, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

"Petty Dairy was a true innovator in the implementation of the Continuous

Conservation Reserve Program," according to Cindy Askew, District Conservationist in the LaFayette/Dalton Field Office in Georgia. "The work done on the farm was groundbreaking for both NRCS and the Farm Service Agency to implement the program at the scale the family was willing to participate."

Through this program, over 15 miles of river frontage on the Conasauga River was enrolled in riparian forested buffer (94 acres) and filter strips (80.4 acres). Additional acreage in Tennessee has been enrolled since the initial contracts and acreage in Georgia is currently planned for future enrollment.

Other USDA programs have also been utilized on the farm. The Forestry Incentives Program has assisted with improvement in forest health and resources by restoring beetle damaged and cut over sites. Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program a waste application system is actively functioning on the dairy. A pump with piping to transport waste from holding ponds to a retrofitted irrigation system has been installed through EQIP with the aerator on the lagoon being made possible with economic assistance from the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission's 319 Water Quality Project. Numerous other EQIP practices such as heavy use areas, watering facilities, fencing and stream crossings have also been applied as part of an intensive beef cattle management system.

"We couldn't do it without the help of you (NRCS) because we have found out about things we could do that we may not have even known about," stated Jimmy Petty about the technical assistance and information available through the NRCS. "Cost-share assistance has also allowed us to do things that we may have not been able to do otherwise," Petty further explained.

The protection of the Conasauga River, which meanders through a majority of the property and is known for its endemic, threatened and endangered, and diverse species, was a primary concern for the Petty's.

"We want to conserve the land and water not only for us but for our kids and grandkids," said Jimmy Petty concerning their primary goal for implementing conservation practices. Through the Conasauga River Alliance Pollution Abatement 319 Project with NRCS technical assistance, Petty Dairy is currently converting approximately 75



Petty Family L-R: Jimmy, Don, Phenna, Chris, and Jerry Petty

acres of cropland to permanent grass cover as measure for protecting the river.

Another instrumental contribution to voluntary conservation by Petty Dairy has been the application of practices outside the realm of monetary assistance. The initial lagoon that was constructed as part of the modernized dairy was completed with no USDA cost-share assistance. Recycled water is retained and reused as a component in the flushing of the dairy. Petty Dairy has also been an avid proponent of implementing conservation tillage on their 2,800 acres of cropland and employs precision farming technology as part of a fixed rate nutrient application system on a portion of those acres. In addition, countless field days and tours have been hosted by Petty Dairy over the years as part of its tireless promotion of conservation. "All of this was done out of a love for the land before there were even any incentives in place," stated Cindy Askew.

The Petty family also has a long history of activities in conservation beyond the scope of the farm. Carlton Petty, father of Don, Jerry and Jimmy Petty, served as a Limestone Valley Soil and Water Conservation District supervisor for many years. Jimmy has since succeeded him in that vacancy after his passing. Chris Petty, one of the third generation grandsons serves as a member of the Board of Directors for the Conasauga River Alliance.

The future success of conservation depends on the struggles of today. Great strides are being taken by passionate landowners such as the Petty family. Natural Resources Conservation Service staff as well as a host of others have enjoyed working with multiple generations of the Petty family to facilitate the duties that we all have as stewards of the land through voluntary conservation.

"We felt honored and privileged to receive the award," Jimmy Petty added regarding their recent achievement. "We're just trying to leave it better than the way we got it."



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