

Another Conservation Success Story...

Coffee County, Georgia

January 2008

Mr. Max: Godfather of No-Till Farming in Coffee County

Max Carter started farming in the 1950's. By his own admission, he thought his worst problems were dead batteries and overdrawn bank accounts. In the early 1970's he realized he had a much greater problem.

Water and wind erosion were depleting his topsoil, his ponds were muddy, and so much silt had accumulated against one fence, he could step over it. As his land deteriorated, farming required higher and higher inputs of fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, and water.

Max thought there had to be a better way to farm. He heard about no-till farming. In the early to mid 1970's, many Georgia farmers tried no-till farming. Most of them failed to make it work on their farms and quickly returned to conventional farming methods. The reasons were many. Basically, neither the equipment nor the chemicals were adequate to allow for wide-spread use on different soil types and a wide variety of crops.

Max Carter decided to find a way to make it work. He was tired of soil erosion. He was tired of muddy water in his ponds. He was tired of setting fire to his crop residues and watching them go up in smoke. He was tired of moving irrigation pipe from field to field.

Max reasoned that if mulch residue was good for flower beds, it should be good for his fields. He kept his flower beds mulched down to control weeds and conserve moisture. Why not make it work in his fields. He never gave up on no-till. He altered and adapted his equipment to make it fit his needs. He experimented with different cover crops and different chemicals until he found a system that worked for him. At times he practiced his no till in the back fields, away from the road and out of the

public view, but he never quit. He found a way to make it work. He sold his irrigation equipment and his disk harrows.

More than 33 years later it is still working, and Max is a much in demand technical consultant, speaker, and over all "expert" in no-till farming.

He enjoys the many benefits of no-till farming on his farm: clean water, better soil quality, reduced use of insecticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, sustainable crops, less fuel consumption, less wear on equipment, and more time to enjoy life.

Serving as a NRCS volunteer, he has presented his story to agricultural councils, civic clubs, seminars, sustainable agricultural conferences, and other agriculture related functions all over Georgia traveling thousands of miles and volunteering hundreds of hours.

His educational efforts include hosting more than 30 farm and environmental groups at his farm to promote no-till farming. Senators and Congressmen seeking information to help develop the Farm Bill, Environmental and Educational groups, research scientists from all over the U.S., India, Brazil, Germany, and other countries have come to "Mr. Max's" to hear his story and see conservation in action.

He has presented his story to groups all over the United States including: The National Research Council in Washington D.C., The National Association of Conservation Districts in Nashville Tennessee, The University of California Cooperative Extension Service at Davis, California, the Southern Sustainable Ag Working Group in Mobile, Alabama, the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Norman, Oklahoma, the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors, SARE, Eastern North Carolina Conservation Districts and more than forty field days, sustainable agriculture conferences, Conservation District meetings and other functions in Georgia.



Bo Bannister (District Conservationist) left and Max Carter look at No-Till peanuts in wheat residue.

His story has been told in numerous publications including: The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, The Georgia Times Union, the Conservation Technology Information Center Magazine, Progressive Farmer, South East Farm Press, The Furrow, The New American Farmer, Panorama (the Georgia Conservancy), ACRES USA, and many local news papers.

He is a charter member and helped develop the Georgia Conservation Tillage Alliance, and the Coffee County Conservation Tillage Alliance. He was selected Conservationist of the Year by the Altamaha Soil and Water Conservation District, and Farmer of the Year in Coffee County. Due in large part to "Mr. Max's" efforts, working with NRCS, the Cooperative Extension Service and other partners, Conservation Tillage in Coffee County has increased from a few acres to more than 65% of the total cropland in the county.

In the Southeastern United States, conservation tillage has seen a phenomenal rise in popularity and nationwide more than 40% of all crops are planted using conservation tillage. "Mr. Max's" untiring efforts to promote adoption of conservation tillage have been a big part of this movement.

Once he developed a no-till system that fit his operation he claims it was like retiring. He has a lot more time to enjoy the increased wildlife populations, particularly quail that are a great secondary benefit of no-till, and even took up golf for a while. Although he claims to have been retired for several years, he still plants 400 acres of cotton, peanuts, and wheat and still finds time to assist other farmers getting started with no-till.



More than 80 members of SARE listen to Max Carter explain the benefits of long term No-Till farming.

Seven Rivers RC&D
912-376-7679

 **NRCS** Natural Resources
Conservation Service
478 272-1797

Altamaha Soil And Water
Conservation District

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.