

Another StrikeForce Conservation Success Story...

Tift County, Georgia

September 2011

Determined Beginning Farmer Stays in Business with help of StrikeForce Initiative

Ellen Kitchens' story is one of determination; determination to overcome obstacles that could have prevented her from farming.

It all began three years ago. Kitchens had to make a tough decision.

A pediatric nurse by trade, she could no longer hold the small babies she cared for on a daily basis. Rheumatoid arthritis was the culprit.

"It got to the point where I couldn't even lift the babies," Kitchens explained.

That's when she decided to end her career as a nurse and start a new phase. She moved to her grandfather's farm in Tifton and gave goat farming a try.

Not long after Kitchens moved to the farm, she visited her local USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Tifton to seek assistance. She didn't have the funds she needed to improve grazing for the goats and protect water quality of a pond on her property.

However, getting that assistance did not happen overnight.

"I heard there was assistance available and I applied for two years. I had about given up hope and



NRCS District Conservationist Mary Leidner (left) goes over an EQIP contract with program participant Ellen Kitchens. Kitchens applied for financial assistance for two years before her application was approved this summer.

back in February I decided I wasn't going to apply again."

Kitchens said, "I was tickled to death. I was very happy."

"When you sit down and talk to them, you don't feel like you're asking for the impossible. No matter what the question, they're always able to give you an answer."—Ellen Kitchens

Mary Leidner, District Conservationist, has worked with Kitchens over the years and encouraged her to not give up. Finally, a USDA initiative helped Leidner find a way to get Kitchens' the assistance she so desperately needed.

The StrikeForce Initiative is designed to help relieve persistent poverty in high-poverty counties. Tift County is among 60 targeted communities in Georgia.

"This was the third go-around on the regular funds for 2011. Then we were able to get Ellen in under the StrikeForce funds and she was elated," Leidner explained.

Kitchens, who now currently has 12 mature goats, will be able to increase that number to 50. An Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract for grazing land will help her grow her operation.

Over the next three years, Kitchens will work with Leidner to install conservation treatments on her farm.

"This financial assistance provides a foundation under the Kitchens so that they can get their plans for the farm done," Leidner said.

They will eventually build 10 paddocks as part of a rotational grazing system. Each paddock will be separated by cross fencing.

Rotational grazing helps farmers like Kitchens better manage pastures and improve forage quality for livestock.

Clover will be planted in the paddocks to improve nutrition. Rotational grazing also prevents soil erosion by allowing pastures an opportunity to replenish during rotations.

A fence will also be built around a pond on Kitchens' farm to prevent the goats from contaminating the water.

As an alternative water source, a well will be installed and a pipeline will carry water from that well to the water troughs in paddocks.

While Kitchens admits she's had to be patient and persevere through the application process to get the financial assistance she needed, she said NRCS employees made it a good experience.

"When you sit down and talk to them, you don't feel like you're asking for the impossible. No matter what the question, they're always able to give you an answer," Kitchens added.

Leidner and Kitchens hope to have the first section of four paddocks completed by January 2012.



A retired nurse, Kitchens and her husband raise goats that they sell to 4H students in the area and other breeders. The farm currently includes a dozen animals.

 **NRCS** Natural Resources
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**Middle South Georgia
Soil And Water
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