

Another Conservation Success Story...

Decatur County, Georgia

February 2008

Fence Helps Cut Calf Mortality Rate and Improve Environment

Larry Edwards, who owns 100 acres of beautiful pasture in Decatur County, has been farming almost his whole life.

Edwards first learned about farming from his grandfather in Marian, Alabama, who he still considers one of the best farmers ever. He later moved to Georgia to help work on his uncle's farm, and 35 years later, he is still here and still farming.

Edwards runs his cattle operation completely on his own. He raises calves and grows grain for their feed. He used to grow peanuts and corn, but stopped in 1995.

Although he enjoys farming, it isn't always easy.

Due to an existing wetlands area located on his property, he struggled for years with trying to keep his cattle out of it; a place they were naturally attracted to as a source of water and shade.

Not only were the cattle trampling the vegetation of the wetlands, but the lower, more wooded grounds created dangers to the cattle, particularly the calves.

Sometimes, mother cows would deliver their calves in the wetlands area and the calves would die because they were not strong enough to climb out of the mud. Also, coyotes would often prey on the calves.

In a business where income depends on the number of healthy calves you produce, these occurrences hurt Edwards financially.

Recognizing the frequent hardships that come with farming, Edwards said he visited the USDA Service Center every so often to keep informed on programs that aid farmers.

About two years ago, Edwards received such aid from the NRCS and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). Through this program, Soil Conservationist Tres Collins and a team of engineers were able to design an efficient plan to keep the cattle out of the wetlands and improve the quality of water.

To control where the cattle roam, Collins planned exclusion fencing around the wetlands area. This ensures that the cattle stay in the higher, more open fields.

For the cattle's alternative source of water, a well was built that pumps water through pipeline and then into two separate watering troughs from which the cattle can easily drink. Each trough can hold 450 gallons of water and has an automatic valve that senses the water level.

NRCS employees also planned for efficient heavy use areas by placing geo-textile and crusher rock down on the grounds surrounding the troughs. This prevents erosion and mud, which helps the cattle stay cleaner and healthier.

NRCS and EQIP provided cost-share assistance to help fund the new fencing and watering troughs.

Before the fence he turned out about 25 calves per year, but now he will be able to turn out about 45 calves per year. The calves have also been heavier.

"I got the best calf crop this year that I've ever had," he said.

Edwards said that he very grateful for the knowledge and guidance he has received through the NRCS and EQIP programs.

"They helped me design the best way to build the fence," he said. "The new fence has been a huge help to me."



Soil Conservationist Tres Collins, left, with farmer Larry Edwards.



Before the exclusion fence was built, cows were giving birth to their calves in this wetlands area.



The cattle drinking from the new watering trough on Larry Edward's farm.

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