

Another StrikeForce Conservation Success Story...

Talbot County, Georgia

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StrikeForce Helps Geneva Farmer

By Amelia Hines, Public Affairs Specialist Assistant, Athens

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) mission is to help people, help the land.

The agency proves its commitment to helping farmers and landowners by placing personnel in the field. These technical experts help clients install conservation practices on their land and offer information on programs that provide financial assistance. They're there to offer direct service to farmers like Ollie Chester.

Unfortunately, despite the agency's efforts to educate and inform the general public about the availability of its programs and services, Chester and others struggling to make ends meet; do not always realize that NRCS is there for them.



Ollie Chester (left) and NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Tracy Watson (right) are working to implement conservation plans to address water quality, quantity, and grazing.

Chester applied for his first contract and he was denied. Unfortunately, there were insufficient funds available at the time.

NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Tracy Watson encouraged Chester to apply again.

"The first year I was turned down and the second year I got it," Chester said.

Additional funding through the USDA's StrikeForce Initiative made it possible for Chester to get an EQIP contract the second time he applied.

The StrikeForce Initiative aims to help high-poverty communities where many farmers and landowners are historically underserved or socially disadvantaged; Talbot County is a designated StrikeForce county in Georgia.

In the year since Chester was approved for his contract, he has been able to make much-needed improvements on this farm.

He has been able to put up cross-fencing, install a well and build a heavy use area for his cattle operation.

Cross-fencing covers 940 feet of the property where cattle graze.

The Geneva farmer can now better manage pastures and implement a rotational grazing plan. In addition, cross-fencing will control where and when the cattle graze on the farm.

"It gives the grass time to grow back," Watson said.

"He's been doing a very good job of managing his cows, pastures and preventing erosion."—Tracey Watson

A 300 gallon watering trough has been placed in a heavy use area that will be fed by a pipeline connected to Chester's new well that pumps 10 gallons per minute. The heavy use area is constructed of concrete and will help prevent soil erosion and contamination while the cattle drink around the trough.

"He's been doing a very good job of managing his cows, pastures and preventing erosion," Watson explained.

Chester said he is thankful for the technical and financial assistance provided through EQIP. "It saves you a bunch of money," he added.

Chester also said that he hopes the steps he's taking to preserve natural resources like water and soil will be continued by future generations; especially his children.

"I'd like for them to leave it like it is when they take it over."



New cross fencing will now help Chester manage a rotational grazing system on the Geneva property.

Many times, knowledge of the agency spreads via word of mouth. In Chester's case, that's exactly how he discovered NRCS. He was in desperate need of a well when another landowner shared his knowledge of the agency. The Buena Vista field office is very active in outreach efforts and that is how that landowner knew about NRCS.

That friend and landowner told Chester that he should apply for an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract.

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