

Another Conservation Success Story...

Glynn County, Georgia

January 2010



Betty Ann Lewis pauses in the midst of harvesting fresh herbs.

Niche Market Makes Farmer Successful

Betty Lewis didn't plan to become a produce farmer supplying 25 families with seasonal produce and specialty herbs to some of the finest chefs on Georgia's eastern coast. It happened quite by accident.

When her daughter Gabe came home in Noah's Truck (as she calls it) with 50 chickens, 12 cats and 7 dogs, she began searching for ways to get rid of extra eggs. A Language Arts teacher, she put up a sign in the lounge at Glynn Academy and the adventure began. In the fall of that year, she had an inquiry from an Executive chef at Sea Island. He wanted to come by and visit her farming operation. She had no idea what to expect.

In February, five chefs in white hats and coats with a bottle of olive oil and a salt shaker

piled out of a van. A few hours later, she had an agreement to grow specialty herbs "What we could do is pick in the morning and they could cook it at night," she said.

"We are a farm in a niche market--the only one (specialty farm) between Jacksonville and Savannah," she added. Being able to grow what the chefs wanted for their kitchens placed her in an enviable position. Nestled

between the main highways of Interstate 95 and Spur Highway 25, the farm stands out as an oasis with fresh produce, an abundance of flowers, cattle and goats grazing in green fields and birds, insects and other wildlife making frequent appearances.

Farming is hard work. For one customer, she picks baby arugula; another wants the full grown plant. She grows basil, anise, corn, field beans, okra, squash, cucumbers, melons and planted 1,200 tomato plants this past year. "We grow crops 11 months out of the year," she says.

In addition to growing for some of south Georgia's top chefs, Lewis stays in business by selling to 25 local families in what is known as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Customers pay a set price in advance and pick up produce on a weekly schedule. Lewis doesn't stop at vegetable farming, though. Her first

Lewis is a participant in the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). "In 4 of the past 15 years, we've been in a drought situation; we were struggling to maintain our grasses and our sod. When we shifted to GRP, we had one of the most lush fields we've ever had," she said. "We reserve thirty acres that we do not cut for hay and use for rotational grazing. This also provides wildlife habitat." Lewis also has 35 acres of Longleaf pine in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. She has this advice for future generations: "If we follow good conservation practices we preserve the land for future generations. We try to follow all of the conservation measures we can. We've been a lot more active since Rita's (Rita Barrow, NRCS district conservationist,) involvement."

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In addition to her farm duties, Gabe writes a column on the Sapelo Farms website.



(Above) Fresh flowers add a little extra income to the vegetable farm. (Right) Wildlife benefit from conservation; an old tree makes up part of a fence; and a new fence helps cattle rotate from field to field.



love is raising beef cattle and she is proud of her line. "I can sell all the heifers I can raise," she said. "I know them; I raised them; I can trace them back 50 years."

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