

Another StrikeForce Conservation Success Story...

Bulloch County, Georgia

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High Tunnel Makes the Difference for Lee Farms

By Amelia Hines, Public Affairs Specialist, Watkinsville

Jay-Jay and Victoria Lee grew familiar with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) over the years as they worked to make a living on their Statesboro farm. NRCS personnel had helped the couple by providing technical assistance but that working relationship grew after the couple saw an article in a farming magazine.

The article in FarmTek discussed high tunnels and how the structures protect produce and extend the growing season for vegetables like tomatoes and squash. As they read more, the Lees learned that the NRCS offered a program that provided not only technical assistance in constructing high tunnels but that the agency also offered cost-share assistance to eligible farmers like them.

As far as the Lees were concerned, any opportunity to grow the family's 500 acre farm was worth a try. They visited their local NRCS office in Statesboro where they talked with Soil Conservationist Jason Gatch about the agency's conservation assistance programs.

"They're very conscientious farmers; not just



This high tunnel has helped the Lee family expand their produce operation by extending their growing season.

in money but in the way they manage the land. They hold themselves to a high standard," Gatch said.

After they applied for an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract and were approved, the Lees put their plan into action.

The 2011 EQIP contract provided financial assistance for the Lees to construct a high tunnel, technical assistance to help them treat critical areas around the structure to control rain water runoff, and plant cover crops to prevent soil erosion on a few

acres of their fields where they grow row crops.

Lee said building the high tunnel was a good decision for them. "It's been an asset." He added that the growing season

has also benefited, "It put me about 3 to 4 weeks earlier for harvest. The yield hasn't seen a lot of difference pound wise but it's in time; stretches



Lee Farms specializes in growing a variety of peppers including those pictured above.

it [the growing season] out."

In addition to having an earlier harvest, Lee said that the high tunnel has helped some of his produce aesthetically. "The skins of my tomatoes are almost flawless."

from the seedling stage in their greenhouses to full maturity in their high tunnel where they can be harvested sooner while the row crops in the field continue to grow.

Bulloch County is a designated StrikeForce county in Georgia. The USDA StrikeForce Initiative is designated to help relieve persistent poverty in high-poverty counties.



Jay-Jay Lee is a 4th generation farmer who lives in Statesboro.

High tunnels also help keep foliage dry during rainy weather and this also helps fight disease.

The Lees acknowledge that a high tunnel wouldn't have been feasible for them without the financial assistance provided by NRCS. "The cost-share is a bridge for me," Lee said. A bridge that now helps the family take produce

Central Savannah River Resource Conservation and Development Council

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