

Another Conservation Success Story...

Bleckley County, Georgia

March 2009

Conservation Programs Help Make Farm Profitable



Tom Bradbury standing in one of his croplands planted using no-tillage, in cover crops.

Bradbury Farms located in the community of Cochran been named the winner of the Governor's Agricultural Environmental Stewardship award for District III. The farm is owned and operated by Tom and Nell Bradbury.

The Bradburys' purchased their 7,200 acre farm in 2003. The farm has 1,800 acres in cropland; major crops produced include corn, soybeans, wheat and sorghum. Approximately 5,100 acres are in timberland – a large percentage in longleaf pine. The farm has another 300 acres in various other uses, including a 185-acre lake



One of Bradbury's crops using Irrigation water management; center pivots have been retrofitted to maximize water conservation.

Before purchasing the Bleckley County property, the Bradburys farmed in Alabama and West Georgia.

Bradbury's goal is to keep his farm profitable while maintaining a high level of conservation practices. "Tom wants to give priority to farming practices that result in improved benefits to soil and water resources. He also strives to give priority to wildlife habitat," said Danny Bennett, soil conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Cochran.

Bennett went on to say, "Tom's practice of strict no-till is unique to our area. This, along with planting cover crops, has already shown progress in establishing a healthier, more productive soil medium for growing crops."

In addition to his no-till practices, Bradbury has also implemented precision agriculture practices such as yield monitoring, zone soil sampling based on yield variations, and a variable rate fertility program. This fertility program includes the use of a specially designed poultry-litter spreader that makes precision applications of analyzed litter. Bradbury has outfitted all of his center-pivot irrigation systems with nutrient-injection systems.

This allows him to apply almost all of the nitrogen fertilizer needed for his corn and wheat crops. Careful nutrient monitoring, including tissue sampling, has allowed Bradbury to reduce the amount of fertilizer applied by 25 percent.

All pesticides are applied with machinery equipped with a sprayer guidance system that prevents overlap and off-target applications. Bradbury utilizes the services of a precision agricultural crop consultant to stay current on the latest technologies and equipment available to implement conservation practices.



Variable rate litter spreader that allows for spreading only in zoned areas determined by soil testing.

Several of the practices implemented on Bradbury's farm are part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Conservation Technical Assistance (Conservation Planning), and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

"My goal is not to run a plow through my land, not even subsoil, but use cover crops to improve the tilth by using a strict no-till operation. I am aware of the fact that what you do to one natural resource affects the other resources on the farm," said Bradbury.

Among the practices Bradbury incorporates for wildlife management are food plot establishment, prescribed burning, vegetation control, predator trapping and leaving part of the crop unharvested in the field borders.

Bradbury's forestry operation uses Best Management Practices (BMPs), as outlined by the GA Forestry Commission. Bradbury has most of the corners of his center-pivot irrigation systems planted in longleaf pines. These pines have been thinned and limbed for maximum wildlife habitat.

Paul English, Central GA Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor, states, "Tom is 100 percent committed to protecting the natural resources and conserving the water supply on his farm. His passion for conservation is evident in his willingness to try innovative ideas and share the results with others."

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