

Another Conservation Success Story...

Dawson County, Georgia

May 2008

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helps Horse Farmers

In 2000 John and Moira McCracken started clearing their 50 acres of land so they could move their horse farm from one side of Dawson County to the other. It took them three years before they could move the horses onto the land and another year before they could move into their new home.

“Breeding Irish Sport horses is what we have focused on, although our nine horses are certainly a mix of horses—from our retired foxhunting horses, a miniature donkey to a quarter horse,” said Moira McCracken. “Within a two-mile area there are 10 people that are horse owners with horses on their property.”

The McCracken’s did not know that they could receive help from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), so for the last eight years they have been doing everything from their own knowledge and out of their own pocket.

“Horses are beautiful, powerful creatures that capture our hearts, and everybody wants to own them, but most people don't realize all the work that goes along with owning horses. It is a real conservation challenge. You must plan ahead and make sure you have enough pasture for them and rotate the lots. Otherwise, you wind up with a horse standing in a dirt lot and that is what we are working so hard here to prevent. That’s my conservation statement.”

Moira McCracken

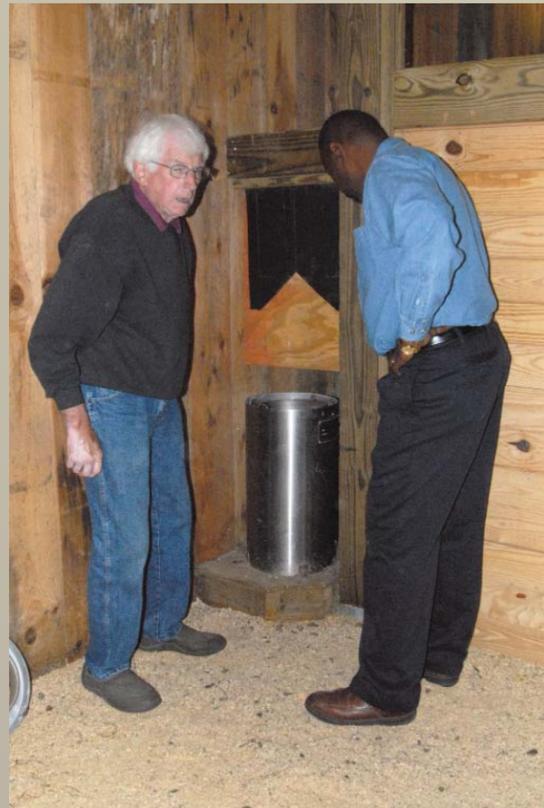
When asked how they heard about the NRCS, John McCracken said, “read about it in the newspaper.” Louise McPherson, soil conservationist for the NRCS elaborated, “The McCracken’s saw the EQIP article in the newspaper and called to see if they would qualify. I already knew Moira from helping her with some classes she did for the elementary school students a few years ago.”

McPherson took a trip out to the farm to see how the NRCS could help the McCracken’s with their horse farm. Now they have an EQIP contract. “I went out and went over their farm with them to see what we could help with.”

The McCracken’s had concerns about the pastures, water for the horses and some erosion. “Their concerns were lack of forage and erosion due to the drought. The little creek where the horses drank also dried up during the drought,” said McPherson.

“The EQIP contract will help them with reseeding pastures which were damaged by the drought. It will also help cover cross fencing, a well, water troughs and heavy use areas at the troughs. The well and water troughs will allow them to rotate the grazing so that none of the pastures get overgrazed,” said McPherson”

After a good spring rainfall the pastures at the moment are green and full of grass. Moira believes the farm will benefit from the cross fencing and a well. “Right now I’m not a great rotator of horses and I’m not using cross fencing. I try to keep one pasture unoccupied. That big field down below, never seems to get a rest, right now I have my two young horses on it. I need to divide that



John McCracken shows James Tillman, Georgia state conservationist for the NRCS, the watering system they installed for their horses during a visit that Tillman made to their farm.

field. That will be the benefit of cross fencing and putting in the well—it will allow us to rotate the horses.”

This is a farm moving toward conservation. Their success is not in the past but in the future. “We signed up for EQIP and we’re going to put some cross fencing in that big pasture. We have only signed up to do the first pasture in the front and we are going to divide it and we’re going to put the well down there and we’re going to seed everything,” said McCracken.

McCracken’s conservation philosophy is simple and to the point. “Horses are beautiful, powerful creatures that capture our hearts, and everybody wants to own

them, but most people don't realize all the work that goes along with owning horses. It is a real conservation challenge. You must plan ahead and make sure you have enough pasture for them and rotate the lots. Otherwise, you wind up with a horse standing in a dirt lot and that is what we are working so hard here to prevent. That’s my conservation statement,” Moira McCracken.

The future for the McCracken’s will be brighter as the NRCS will continue to work with them. “We will continue to work with them to help get these practices established successfully,” said McPherson.



Maggie is just one of the horses that the McCracken’s own. But Moira McCracken feels she is special, “She is now a beautiful horse but when we saved her she was thin and heading for the slaughter house.”

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