

# Another StrikeForce Conservation Success Story...

## Dodge County, Georgia

June 2012

### Dedicated Farmer Puts Conservation First

By Amelia Hines, Public Affairs Specialist Assistant, Athens

Milton Ussery isn't a baker but he knows what ingredients it takes to make everything come together. When it comes to his conservation plans, The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been essential in making his plans a reality.

*"It's like I bake the cake and they put the icing on it."—Milton Ussery*

"It's like I bake the cake and they put the icing on it."

That cake has taken a few years but NRCS financial and technical assistance have helped get his plans on the ground.

Ussery's efforts to restore and preserve important natural resources on his 570 acre property in Dodge County have been accomplished through three Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) contracts, two Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts, and a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract



The wildturkeys pictured above benefit from the WHIP practices that protect their natural habitat on Ussery's property.

Under WHIP, Ussery has restored longleaf pine trees on several acres as part of the Longleaf Pine Initiative. Longleaf pine is native to Georgia and is known to perpetuate wildlife habitat, prevent soil erosion and improve air quality.

Ussery has also been able to create forest openings where space is made to plant wildlife food plots or for the natural growth of native vegetation. The food plots include saw tooth turkey oats and chufa for wild turkey.

Forest stand improvements, which involve selective thinning on plantation pines, were also implemented on the Dodge County property.

"If I hadn't had financial assistance, I wouldn't have been able to do any of this," Ussery said.

An EQIP contract for row crops has addressed conservation concerns on several acres of cropland. Ussery grows cotton on 60 acres. Conservation tillage, cover crops, nutrient and pest management, and terraces have all been used to help address soil erosion, soil and water quality, and chemically treat invasive plants. "It has just enhanced everything," Ussery said.

Another EQIP contract for forestry has enabled Ussery to construct a stream crossing on one part of the farm where seasonal flooding made it difficult to pass some crossways. The stream crossing helps prevent vehicles from getting bogged down when it's wet.

Ussery said, "It's a good practice to help a landowner manage their property better."

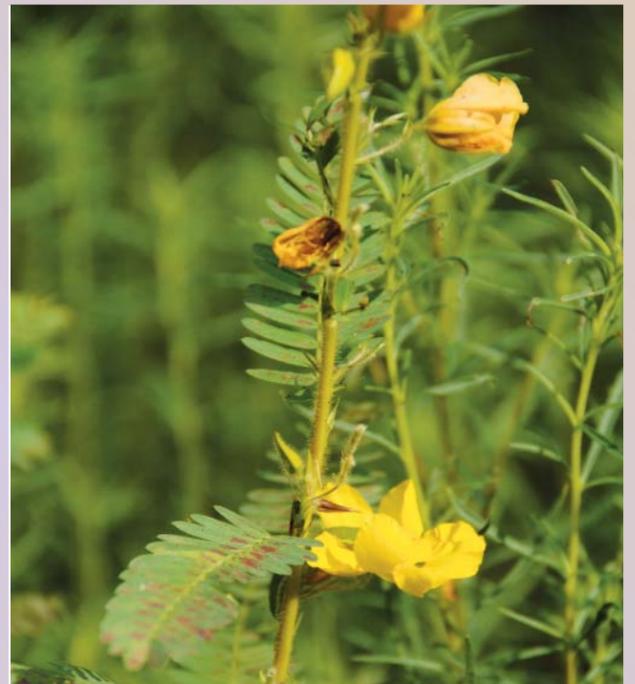
District Conservationist Chuck McCranie has worked with Ussery on putting several of the abovementioned practices on the ground. He said that Ussery "is real active in conservation programs. Whatever he gets approved to do, he gets it completed and he does it in a good way."

Because of those efforts, Ussery has also been awarded a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract



Milton and Wanda Ussery pose for a picture on their farm with their grandchildren who are triplets.

that allows him to continue improving his land and natural resources. But, his work doesn't stop with conservation on his property. Ussery, who



This is just one of several native plants located in food plots on the Fitzgerald property.

lives in Fitzgerald, also serves as District Supervisor for Ben Hill County's Soil and Water Conservation District.

He does all this because he feels land and natural resources are important. Ussery said, "You have to leave it better than you found it."

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

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