

Another StrikeForce Conservation Success Story...

Terrell County, Georgia

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Sub-surface Irrigation System Helps Row Crop Farmer Survive Drought

By Amelia Hines, Public Affairs Specialist, Watkinsville

Ronnie Lee has always been involved in Agriculture. He ventured into farming in the early 1980s with roughly 40 acres.

"I started off real small," Lee said. Over the next three decades, Lee's operation grew bit by bit. In 1995, he bought more land and built a cotton gin. The Terrell County farmer now runs a 7,500 row crop operation.

Even though his operation was doing well, Lee wanted to improve sustainability by improving his irrigation method. In 1998, he learned about sub-surface drip irrigation when he visited a farm in Arizona that was benefiting from that type of irrigation. Lee felt that sub-surface irrigation would work well with small and irregularly shaped fields in Georgia as well.

In 2010 the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) formed a partnership with the Georgia Cotton Commission to install sub-surface drip irrigation on several farms throughout South Georgia through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). Lee was interested in participating in the project and wanted to try the method on one of his farms. Lee applied for the EQIP contract and was approved to install the sub-surface irrigation. He

has installed sub-surface micro drip irrigation system on 80 acres of his property now.

The sub-surface irrigation system allows Lee to more efficiently provide water to crops and avoid water loss through evaporation and run-off. A well pumps 325 gallons of water a minute for the system.

Lee said, "EQIP's been a good program. Before we had this system, we couldn't efficiently irrigate these fields because the shape and size of the fields were irregular. Now, this system allows us to irrigate these fields."

NRCS District Conservationist Rich Hosmer worked with Lee on the irrigation project and agreed that the new system has helped improve water accessibility to difficult to reach areas of the property. "In some areas, the water availability just isn't there to operate a center pivot. The sub-surface drip system allows crops to be irrigated using less water," Hosmer said.



Ronnie Lee (left) worked with NRCS District Conservationist Rich Hosmer (right) to install the sub-surface irrigation system on 80 acres.

"We're trying to maximize productivity and minimize abusing the land and water resources."

Lee said that he also wants future generations to take the challenge and take conservation seriously.

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Lee's corn fields have benefited from the new irrigation system on the Dawson farm.



Lee's well pumps approximately 325 gallons of water per minute to 80 acres of corn.

In addition to installing the sub-surface irrigation, Lee has taken conservation to another level by retro-fitting pivots, converting diesel irrigation motors to electric, and installing grassed waterways on other sections of the row crop farm.

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