

Another Conservation Success Story...

Polk County, Georgia

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Polk County Sheep Farmer Improves Water Quality and Pastureland with EQIP

By Karen Buckley Washington, Lawrenceville, GA

What do sheep, cattle and improved pastureland and water quality all have in common? For Polk County landowner David Jackson, they equal a successful farming operation, with help from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

For five years, Jackson has been operating his 60 year old family farm in Polk County, initially raising only cattle.

"I grew up watching and helping my dad. He was a cattle farmer," said Jackson. "He did the farming, but I chose to go into the construction business. I started out with beef cattle, but have now switched to producing sheep exclusively. The switch all started when I got a few sheep to train my dogs."

"I've had 100 percent improvement, especially with the cross fencing we installed under our EQIP contract." — David Jackson

Due to lower feed and maintenance costs, along with having 3 or 4 lambs as opposed to 1 calf a year, Jackson found sheep farming to be a much better return for his investment.

"There is a good demand for sheep," said Jackson. "I often have a buyer even before the

lambs hit the ground."

When Jackson became concerned about the contamination in his pond from livestock watering, he turned to the local USDA-NRCS for assistance.

"I didn't have cross fencing and knew I could improve my production by rotating the cattle between pastures, said Jackson. "I first learned about the availability of assistance and programs from attending the Polk County Cattleman's Association meeting. A lot of people just don't know about the help that is available through USDA, but I have told a lot of people about it since getting involved."

NRCS Rome Field Office District Conservationist Sheri Teems and Technicians Jennifer Odom and Pam Traylor assisted Jackson with a plan to fence out his pond and develop an improved water source for his livestock. To do so, they blended the resources of the USDA-Farm Services Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). Under CRP



Jackson's dog looks after the sheep.

fencing, pipelines, heavy use area stabilization and frost free water troughs were installed and trees were planted around the pond to establish and improve the riparian buffer.

Under EQIP, additional improvements to Jackson's farm were made by installing cross fencing in pastures to facilitate the development of a rotational grazing system and overseeding legumes into his existing cover to improve the quality of forage and maximize efficiency. "The FSA worked closely with NRCS and Jackson to provide the conservation assistance that he needed" said Teems.

Jackson said that he's already noticed a tremendous improvement on his farm.

"I've had 100 percent improvement, especially with the cross fencing we installed under our EQIP contract," said Jackson. "I never would have believed it would make such a difference. I still have grass when most folks don't. I can see an improvement in the quality of my pond water from fencing the livestock out of that area as well. The sheep do much better on the clean water provided in the troughs we installed through CRP."

When asked about the advice he would give to future farmers, Jackson stressed the importance of protecting the land from contamination.

"I would like future generations to learn that the land is our most important and valuable commodity and it should always be protected," said Jackson. "Anything that could contaminate the soil or water should be avoided. We should make every effort to learn how to get the most productivity from every acre."



Jackson in the pasture with his sheep.

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Sheri Teems 706-291-5651

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