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Mr. and Mrs. Jones at the 2007 Marengo County SWCD awards ceremony where he received the award for Outstanding Conservation Grazing Farmer of the Year.

Moses Jones – Taking Care of People and the Land

By Fay Garner

Amazing! That is the word that many people use to describe Mr. Moses Jones, a large scale beef producer in the Black Belt area of Alabama. At 90 years of age, Mr. Jones successfully manages cattle and hay operations on three separate farms while serving as a pastor of two churches. When most people his age prefer a sedentary lifestyle, Mr. Jones is up at dawn getting ready for a hard day's work.

In 2007, Mr. Jones was the Alabama nominee for the annual Lloyd Wright Small Farm award presented by the National Organization of Professional Black Natural Resource Conservation Service Employees (NOPBNRCSE). During that same year, Mr. Jones received the Outstanding Conservation Worker award given by the Marengo County, Alabama, Soil and Water Conservation District for his commitment to conservation in his community. He is highly respected in his community as a cattle producer, a conservationist, and a spiritual leader.

Mr. Jones has prospered in the Black Belt, partly because of his respect for people and the land, and the good work ethic that his father and grandfather instilled in him. The Joneses obviously encouraged these traits in their only child, Moses, Jr., because he continues to help out on the farms, when he is not performing neurosurgery in Jackson, Mississippi.

Mr. Jones was raised on a farm in Marengo County, Alabama, on property that has been in his family for almost 100 years. After completing a stint in the Army during World War II, he returned home to Uniontown and started cattle farming with his father while attending the seminary at Selma University, Alabama.

Mr. Jones has been in the cattle business for over 70 years. He taught Social Studies and Math during 30 of those years. His commitment did not stop there. While he was farming and teaching, he also pastored a church for 53 years, and for three years, he pastored two churches at a time.



Moses Jones with dogs that help him tend his farm.

Beginning in the late 1940s, Moses Jones traveled every other Sunday to lead the Macedonia Baptist Church in Talladega, Alabama. When he started, he had to stay overnight and would travel to Talladega by bus on Saturday and ride back home to Union Town on Sunday evening. (Today it is a 2.5 hour drive one way.) During his last years at Macedonia, he became the leader of Gillfield Baptist Church in Marengo County and sometimes filled in for another church in the area. He retired from the Talladega ministry about three years ago, but he continues to lead the other two churches. When asked why he quit pastoring in Talladega, Mr. Jones said, "Fifty-three years is a long time. I quit because it was getting too much for me to continue traveling each week and also take care of my obligations at home. I took care of churches," he continued, "and when I was gone, my wife took care of things at home. She is a helper."

Mr. and Mrs. Jones own 275 acres in Marengo and Hale Counties. He and his wife own 185 acres in hay and pasture on their homestead where they raise mostly mixed breed cattle and grow some hay; they have 30 acres in hay in Marengo County, and transfer young heifers and new mothers to 60 acres that Mrs. Jones inherited in Hale County.



Mr. Jones talks with Duane Andrews, Marengo County NRCS Soil Conservationist.

Jones also raises cattle and hay on 200 acres his son owns in Hale County.

Mr. Jones has a simple philosophy on raising cows. He believes that if you give a little quality food and provide them lots of water, they will grow out pretty good. This requires some planning ahead for problems like this year's drought. He said, "If you prepare for the bad times, you will make it through." Mr. Jones works tirelessly to keep pastures in good condition, and they are weathering the drought well. You can see some cracked earth at times, but his grass is still living and growing.

When asked how the drought affected his cattle operation, Mr. Jones said that this year's drought did not affect him as several did others. He has deep wells on each of his farms. He said, "On each farm, I drilled a well. Wells are a little more expensive than ponds, but they are better for a cattle operation. Ponds dry up, the cows get stuck in the muck, and it takes a lot of work to get them out. I do not have streams, creeks, or ponds on my farms, we only use our wells."

Mr. Jones helped feed his cattle during the drought by using hay that he kept stored for just such an occasion. He said, "If you see things properly ahead of time, unseen things will not hurt you so bad." Unlike many of his fellow producers, he did not have to sell off any cattle because of this summer's drought.

Duane Andrews, Marengo County NRCS Soil Conservationist, said, "Mr. Jones is a good steward to the land; he's a conservationist. People across the county grazing the same acreage as Mr. Jones, try to produce as many cows as they can, and they usually overgraze. Mr. Jones keeps his stocking rate lower so when there is a lack of rain; he is not under as much pressure for feed and water."



Jones' homestead in Uniontown in the Black Belt.

Mr. Jones does not have hired hands on his farms. He depends on the four-legged kind. He has four dogs which are instrumental in helping him manage the cattle. The cows are trained to come when he calls them, but he could not herd them alone without the dogs.

Duane Andrews said, "You will not find many weeds or out of control erosion on Mr. Jones's property. He works quickly to stop soil erosion and believes in using what he has available to create good erosion control measures. He does not like to burn brush, limit old hay. He uses the natural materials to help hold the topsoil on his property."

Mr. Jones advises, "You do not want the water rushing across your property to deposit your good topsoil in your neighbor's yard. I bought this place, it had a gully almost big enough to swallow a house. Over the years, I took some old hay and tree limbs that people burn up and put it in the washed-out area. Pretty soon bushes and grass started to grow up through the materials, and after big rain, instead of washing larger, the dirt was held by the debris and it built up the land fairly level, without using a bulldozer." Today there is no sign of a gully on his property, just gentle, grass covered slopes.

In talking with Mr. Jones, you realize he is also a philosopher. He uses his wisdom to guide people to consider life's lessons. He says, "You should be as close to the best as you can be. My aim is to do the best job I can. That is what I want to do."

As you look across his aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sound cattle farm, you can see that that is exactly what he has done over the years. Mr. Jones has taken his life-lessons and used them to help his family, his community, and his ministry.

The Jones' cow-calf operation is a shining example of what a small farmer can do with limited resources. The Jones' are doing it right—important—taking care of people and the land.

Fay Garner is a Public Affairs Assistant with the NRCS in Auburn.



The Jones' cow/calf operation is a shining example of what a small farmer can do with limited resources.

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