

Since my arrival in January I have had the opportunity to meet many of you and observe the outstanding conservation assistance being provided to Georgia's land owners. The dedication exhibited by the staff is beyond compare. I've also had the opportunity to observe the outstanding partner relationships that are continuously being cultivated. These strong partnerships will strengthen Georgia's ability to meet the conservation needs of the future. I appreciate the opportunity to share in the application of "helping people help the land." As you move forward with implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill, I would like to leave you with three words that I believe are essential to our existence: professionalism, cour-



Continued on Page 2

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Helps Farmer Improve Farm

Terry Hollis grew-up on a farm in Upson County, learning about farming from his father and uncles and began a love affair with farming that exists today.

"I grew up on this farm watching my dad and uncles' row crop and raising cattle. When I got old enough, I started to help out around the farm. I guess that was when the love for farming began to grow inside me," said Hollis. Hollis's father passed the farm to him in 2002.

FOCUS ON THE FIELD



Terry Hollis sitting on his tractor

Hollis had some concerns about his farm and he wanted to make it productive but the only places he knew where to go was the local Farm Service Agency (FSA).

"The farm had been a hobby farm and provided a small supplemental income for Dad. I, like him, was a factory worker at the time and I wanted the farm to be a more productive operation.

Continued on Page 3

7

**GACDS
Hall of
Fame
Inductees**

10

**Students
Learn
about
Agricul-
ture**

11

**Sheep
Take Aim
at Chinese
Privet**

13

**Conserva-
tion Tillage
Training**

17

**Plant
Material
Center**

continued from page 1

tesy, and respect. It is my belief that if we approach each day with these three words in mind, at the end of the day we can be proud of the job we accomplished.

We have hit the ground running with the 2008 Farm Bill rollout and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 roll out.

Each of you has done a great job of not only supporting the agency but providing much needed information and support to our customers. I want to commend everyone for the great work being done in Georgia keeping conservation rolling. Here is where we are on the Farm Bill rollout.

The Guidance Documents and the Payment Schedules have been completed for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), EQIP Forestry, and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The ranking questions have been released so Area Resource Conservationists can load the local ranking questions in each funding unit in preparation for ranking on the EQIP and WHIP contracts.

The Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) proposal deadline has passed and Georgia received 15 CIG proposals. The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) proposals were sent to the chief. Georgia partners submitted three AWEP proposals.

The deadline for the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) proposals is April 23. Funding cutoff for Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is June 1.

The application deadline for the HFRP is May 9. We have sent ranking and guidance documents to the field. We will be setting up one ranking team to look at applications, since threatened and endangered species and forestry habitat drive this program, the ranking team will be made up of the NRCS state biologist and at least one District Conservationist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources staff member.

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) sign-up has closed. We received approximately 14 applications. The guidance documents and ranking criteria were sent to the field and the ranking teams are scheduling site visits for ranking.

Unused EQIP and WHIP funds will be swept for redistribution July 1, and obligation deadline for EQIP, WHIP, and FRPP is July 15.

Along with the Farm Bill we are also moving forward with the ARRA of 2009. President Obama's administration plans to modernize the nation's infrastructure, jump-start the economy, and create jobs. Funding associated with the ARRA is being allocated quickly to states for rapid implementation. All implementation activities associated with this funding must be completed by September 2010. Three NRCS programs fall under this stimulus package, Watershed Rehabilitation, Floodplain Easements and Watershed Operations.

Nationally there is \$50 million to address critical safety and health issues under the Watershed Rehabilitation Program, with 27 projects in 11 States. Georgia has received \$6.3 million for 6 of the

27 projects, creating approximately 168 jobs.

These six projects are Little Sandy and Trail #1, Marbury #22, Sandy Creek #23 and #15, and South River #4 and #10; and are located in Barrow, Jackson, and Madison Counties.

NRCS Georgia will also receive funds under the stimulus package in a new program for Georgia: Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) - Floodplain Easements.

This program helps to safeguard lives and property from natural disasters, improve water quality and recharge groundwater, retain flood water, conserve and improve wildlife habitat, create and maintain open spaces and restore floodplain hydrology and native vegetation. Nationally \$145 million is available for flood damage reduction, and no state can receive more than \$30 million. As of this printing, interest has run high for this program and we anticipate completing offers to purchase easements for eligible landowners by May 4, 2009.

At this time, we have received no monies for Watershed Operations in Georgia. We do have plans for future projects with water supply.

I would like to take this time to thank those that have moved on in their careers to other positions for their support of the agency and welcome each new member to the agency. I know each of you will enhance our ability to provide conservation assistance to our customers.

I would like to leave you with this quote; "Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful." – Albert Schweitzer.

continued from page 1

The first step in doing that was a trip to my local FSA office and that is where I learned about the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS),” said Hollis.



Cattle grazing in one of the eight paddocks

When he visited the Barnesville field office to find out about the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) he went prepared to do what was needed. “When Terry came into the office to apply and find out what EQIP was, he brought with him a farm plan; he had a vision and that is where he has taken his



Carol Oliver and Terry Hollis reviewing paperwork in the field

farm,” said Carol Oliver, soil conservation technician for the NRCS in Barnesville.

Oliver went on to say, “The cattle farm was in need of many repairs. Over the years, the cattle had run in one big pasture and rutted the land badly causing an erosion problem that had to be repaired. This area was fast becoming a gully.”

Many practices were recommended by the NRCS, all of which Hollis completed. He used cross fencing to set up a rotational grazing system with eight paddocks and also to fence out two streams on the land. Once this was done, a prescribed grazing system was established.

The cattle were using the streams as a watering place causing ruts to form on the land. To fix this and give the cattle limited access, water ramps were designed for heavy use protection.

A well was drilled and watering troughs placed in each paddock where streams were not available. Pipelines were laid to each trough and heavy use areas were installed so the cattle would have fresh water available.

The area around the working facility and the path the cows used from the working facility to the bottom pasture was rutted out and

eroded from many years of neglect. The area was graded and reseeded using critical area planting and a heavy use area was installed around the feeding tanks.

Because of overuse, very little maintenance and neglect over the years the pastures were worn down.

A plan was established to reseed the paddocks and establish a hay field and over-seeding was done on each paddock to extend the winter grazing.

Hollis has seen many benefits with the use of EQIP on his farm.



Watering ramp to one of the streams

“With the help of EQIP, I have been able to put in a watering system, fence out streams, build watering ramps, over-seed existing pasture, put up cross fences, and start a rotational grazing system. This has allowed me to run more cattle on less land and be more productive. With the help of EQIP, it is growing into a productive and environmentally sound farm,” said Hollis.

Oliver says Hollis is committed to conservation and very happy with the NRCS. “He was dedicated in the very beginning and commit-

Continued on Page 5

Administration

Conversions:

Name	From		To		Location (City), GA	Eff. Date
	GS	Title	GS	Title		
Brian Collins	08	Civil Engineering Technician (TERM)	07	Soil Conservation Technician	Moultrie	01/04/2009

Intermittents:

Name	Grade GS	Title	Location: City, GA	Eff. Date
Rhonda Byers (Ext. of Appt. NTE 1/10/2010)	05	Public Affairs Specialist	Athens	01/10/2009

Extension of Appointments:

Name	Title	Location: City, GA	Eff. Date
Philip Brown (TEMP, NTE 2/4/2010)	Grasslands Specialist	Washington	02/04/2009

Promotions:

Name	Grade-GS		Title	Location: City, GA	Eff. Date
	From	To			
Chan Ly	09	11	Civil Engineer	Calhoun	01/04/2009

Reassignments:

Name	From			To			Eff. Date
	Grade - GS	Title	Location	Grade - GS	Title	Location	
Philip Brown	09	Grasslands Specialist	Area 2, Washington	09	Grasslands Specialist	TST Staff, Washington	02/15/2009
Al Hubbard	09	Grasslands Specialist	Area 1, Carrollton	09	Grasslands Specialist	TST Staff, Carrollton	02/15/2009

Administration

Retirements:

Name	Grade GS	Title	Location: City, GA	Eff. Date
Bo Bannister	12	Soil Conservationist	Douglas	01/03/2009
Herman Wheatley	08	Soil Conservation Technician	Washington	01/03/2009
Lyndon McCavitt	12	Soil Conservationist	Dawson	01/03/2009
Earl Brantley	13	Assistant State Conservationist FO	Athens	01/03/2009

Terminations:

Name	Grade GS	Title	Location: City, GA	Eff. Date
Robert Lindsey	06	Soil Conservation Technician	Ocilla, GA	01/01/2009

continued from page 3

ted to restoring the farm to its full potential. He took all the ideas and the conservation plan that the NRCS offered and applied them.

He has been very receptive to any recommendations that the NRCS has made and is well pleased with the outcome," said Oliver.



Hollis' poultry operation in Crawford County

Hollis' conservation philosophy is to preserve the land for future generations.

"To provide stewardship to all earthly resources in order to restore, protect, and enhance; so that present and future generations may benefit from our conservation practices.

The land is one of our greatest resources and as a farmer, it's a blessing to be able to produce food from that resource — I want to preserve that for generations to come," said Hollis.

Besides raising cattle, Hollis owns and operates four poultry houses on land he inherited from his mother in Crawford County.

FOIA Reminder

This is a friendly reminder that all Freedom of Information Act requests need to be routed through the State FOIA Officer, Sharon Gipson.

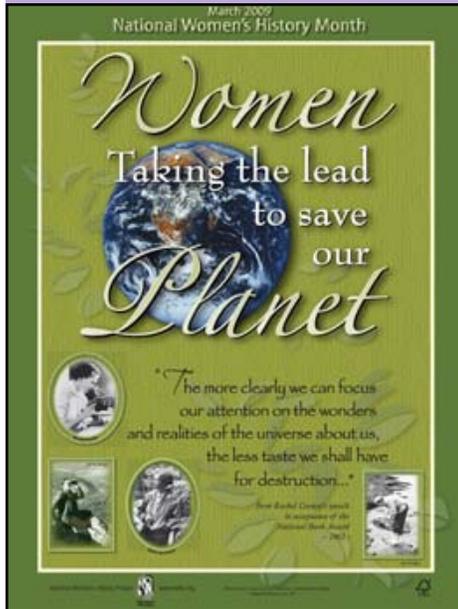
If you receive a FOIA request directly, please forward the request by fax, email, or hard copy to Sharon Gipson at the State Office in Athens and notify her by phone that it is on its way.

Public AFFAIRS

Celebrate Women's History Month

Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet

by Carolee Osborne, Federal Women's Program Manager, Carrollton



Each year, March is designated as National Women's History Month to ensure that the history of women will be recognized and celebrated in schools, workplaces, and communities throughout the country.

The National Women's History Project (NWHP), a nonprofit educational organization founded in 1980, works every year to mobilize and unify the national celebrations by choosing an annual theme. The theme for the 2009 National Women's History Month is Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet.

Everyday, the women who work for NRCS demonstrate leadership in protecting the environment on a local, state, and even a national level. We are all doing our part in helping people help the

land and fulfilling our agency's mission.

Whether you are in the field helping conservation efforts at the local level or in upper management helping focus our agency's efforts on the most critical environmental needs, we are all working together to help leave our planet a little better off than we found it.

So as we celebrate Women's History Month 2009, I want to salute the Women of NRCS for all that they do and the leadership that they provide. Keep up the good work!

For more information about Women's History Month and the National Women's History Project, please visit their website www.nwhp.org.

There you will find a full listing of the 2009 NWHP Honorees, with brief biographies.

As always, if you have any questions about the Federal Women's Program please contact Carolee Osborne at 770-832-8942, Ext.3 or carolee.osborne@ga.usda.gov.

It's Never Too Late To Start Planning For Your Happy Retirement!

Take time now to prepare for a comfortable retirement by logging into AgLearn and completing the Pre-Retirement Planning Course that's right for you. In addition to the concept of advance retirement planning, these courses provide valuable information on:

Continuing FEHB into retirement

FEGLI into retirement and the amount of life insurance

Eligibility requirements for immediate and early voluntary retirement, discontinued service (DSR), deferred, and disability retirement

How to file a claim for Federal Employee's Group Life Insurance

And much more!

Take the first step to planning by going to AgLearn and completing the right course for you!

Remember to have your login and password ready and complete either Pre-Retirement Planning For CSRS or Pre-Retirement Planning For FERS.

Articles for the next Conservation Connection are due by May 21 2008.

Please e-mail them to ron.morton@ga.usda.gov. For photos please use the Sharepoint site.



You may be one of the hundreds of people who get the information they need--instantaneously--from DigiTop, the USDA's Digital Desktop Library. New and repeat DigiTop users made Fiscal Year 2008 a banner year, downloading more than one million articles from authoritative journals as well as leading newspapers and magazines. That's a nearly 20 percent increase in DigiTop FY 2007 use!

Since it was first launched in 2002, DigiTop has provided a whopping 4.5 million articles from its extensive online resources, which today include more than 5,000 scientific journals, 1,600 news sources--including 600 U.S. newspapers and magazines--and 34 databases. Whether you're working at your desk, at home, or on the road, these DigiTop resources are just a mouse click away <http://digitop.nal.usda.gov>.

DigiTop is a service of the National Agricultural Library for USDA employees worldwide. If you have questions or comments about how you can make DigiTop work for you, please contact the DigiTop Team at DigiTop@usda.gov.

(GSWCC) in 1974 as a Field Representative (later Regional Representative) and worked to establish the Commission's first southeast Georgia regional office. As a Regional Representative, Bennett worked diligently to establish the no-till and lagoon pump-out programs as a partnership between GSWCC, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD's) and Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils in Middle Georgia.

He was instrumental in expending Section 319 Clean Water Act funds to aid local dairy producers in meeting the water quality demands around Lake Oconee and Lake Sinclair.

Bennett was instrumental in securing funding from county and city governments to add additional GSWCC staff in high priority areas and to supplement GSWCC activities.

Bennett accepted the position of Deputy Executive Director in 1999. With his leadership and the support of the GACDS board, GACDS was transformed into a modern organization with functioning committees, revised Articles of Association, and an active legislative influence.

He also had the vision to recognize that the Conservation Commission needed to broaden its focus and thus the Water Conservation Program was borne.

Following the retirement of Director F. Graham Liles, Jr. in 2003, Governor Sonny Perdue named Bennett as the Executive Director of GSWCC in June 2003.

He continued making operational changes to the GSWCC,

Continued on Page 8

Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors (GACDS) Induct Three Members into the Hall of Fame



Pete Waller (right) introduces David Bennett, one of the GACDS Hall of Fame inductees.

Calloway Gardens in Pine Mountain. They inducted three members into their hall of fame.

The first inductee is David Bennett. A native of Dodge County and 1974 graduate of University of Georgia with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Agriculture.

Bennett began his career with the Georgia Soil and

The GACDS held their annual conference Jan. 22-24 at the

Water Conservation Commission

continued from page 7

especially related to financial matters and in supervising the initial setup and successful launch of the Agricultural Water Metering program and Erosion Control Certification Program in 2004.

Bennett retired from the Commission in December 2005, and became the first Executive Director for GACDS from January 2006 until 2007.

He volunteered his time and efforts to continue to see GACDS flourish. He was a crucial part of the planning and execution of the 2006 Legislative Tour in Georgia.

This tour attracted congressional staff from around the United States, and the benefits from this tour are still being reaped by Georgia Agriculture, especially during the recent Farm Bill negotiations.



Edsel Nix a GACDS Hall of Fame inductee.

The second inductee, Edsel Nix has been living within less than one mile of where he was born and raised in White County for 81 years.

He graduated from White County High School in 1945, and went to work full time on the farm. In July of 1951 he bought his first

farm, raising chickens, hogs, and cattle, and grew crops, hay, and pasture to provide feed for animals.

In the 57 years he has been working on his land he has strived to conserve, protect, and improve the resources entrusted to him. To Nix, stewardship is not a word or slogan; it is a way of life.

He has been a cooperater with the Upper Chattahoochee River Soil & Water Conservation District ever since he began farming and in 1973 he was asked to become a District Supervisor for White County.

As a District Supervisor Nix has been a tireless supporter of soil and water conservation. He served the District many years as the Vice-Chairman, and the Chairman of the Upper Chattahoochee River Soil and Water Conservation District.

From being the first to try new soil and water conservation practices, to hosting field days to show other farmers the benefits of soil and water conservation, Nix has strived to practice what he preached.

He has always supported giving grants to schools for outdoor classrooms; he encourages other supervisors to forge partnerships with their local schools like he did.

Nix was one of the leaders in developing and implementing the District's Scholarship program which provides thousands of dollars to deserving students every year from each county in the District.

Another enduring legacy of his service is Tesnatee 11M, a District sponsored Watershed lake, that serves as the water supply reservoir for White County.

Nix along with fellow supervisor Telfold Hulsey, foresaw the growth that was coming to White County and knew the county had to have water for these future citizens.

He drew on all of his experience and contacts with the District, RC&D, NRCS, and local county officials to help lead the effort to get the reservoir constructed.

After the reservoir was constructed, he was one of the founding board members of the White County Water Authority, and helped to start building the infrastructure to deliver water to White County's citizens.

Soon after becoming a District Supervisor, Nix became interested in working with the Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D Council.

He has been a staunch supporter, and has served the council in many roles over the years, and still serves on their executive board, and as the Vice President.



Barbarianne Russell

The third inductee, Barbarianne Russell passed away in 2007. Her husband Russell accepted the award for her.



Central Georgia Soil and Water Conservation District 2009 Conservationist of the Year

K. Byron Sanders was born in Cordele in Crisp County. He was raised on a 650 acre farm, which now belongs to him and his sister.

The family farm has been put into timber except for 45 acres which are planted in wheat. He is a 1967 graduate of University of Georgia (UGA) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture.

He worked on the farm for one year with his father before going to work for the Soil Conservation

K. Bryon Sanders on his farm in Washington County

Service in Barrow, Jefferson, Franklin and Banks Counties.

He transferred to Jeff Davis and Appling counties in 1970 where he worked for two years before transferring to Washington and Johnson Counties.

Sanders was the district conservationist in Washington and Johnson Counties from 1972 until retiring in January 2007.

During this time he made the transition from Soil Conservation Service to USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) along with completing a lot of Conservation Plans, Erosion and Sediment Control Plans, pond design and layout, terrace and pipe outlet design and layout.

He assisted farmers, producers, extension agents, Soil and Water District Supervisors, County Commissioners, County Managers,

City Managers, Plant Materials staff, Natural Resources Conservation Workshop, contractors, builders, landowners, Department of Transportation, Kaolin plants during his time with NRCS.

Sanders is an outstanding manager of his 400-acre farm in Washington County. It has 392 acres of timberland that has been thinned to the basal area of 70, except for 35 acres that will be thinned in the next couple of years.

Approximately 8 acres are used for wildlife and being planted with sorghum, small grain and clover. Ponds are managed for recreation and fish production for the family.

Byron and his wife Betty Ann have three children, Kelly, Chad and Jay along with four grandchildren, Kathryn, Caroline, Ellie and Kate.

Byron said he has had plenty to do since his retirement; he has designed and laid out 22 ponds, does daily consulting along with trying to manage the land for future generations, as he has for most of his life.

He said his dad once said to him "If you look after your land, it will look after you" which Byron said he still believes that is true.

Outreach

Implementing these practices results in

Students Learn about Agriculture from the Team Conservation Tillage Group at EXPO in Moultrie

Story and Photos by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist, Athens



(Left to right) Danny Tyson, Bennie Moore (NRCS Alabama) and Rosalin Churchill provide information about conservation tillage to FFA members.

The Team Conservation Tillage (TCT) group is comprised of representatives from the Agricultural Research Service (Auburn, Dawson and Watkinsville), Auburn University, Georgia Conservation Tillage Alliance, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Soil and Water Conservation Society (Alabama and Georgia) and the University of Georgia. The Alabama Farmer's Federation (ALFA) joined in the group this year.

Every year, the TCT participates in the Sunbelt Field Day and the Sunbelt Expo (EXPO) held in Moultrie in July and October, respectively. The major goal of TCT group at both events is to educate producers to adopt conservation tillage practices, such as no-till cultivation and planting cover crops.

reduced soil loss and increased yields. Producers obtain additional income and achieve conservation goals as a result of adopting these practices.

Although producers are the major audience for both of these activities, attending the EXPO is a family activity.

Many farm families tour the EXPO site together. Several schools give students the opportunity to attend the events for a day. Also, groups of students wear matching Future Farmer of America T-shirts that identifies their schools.

The following TCT displays were of particular interest to students:

Watching fire ants scavenge

The fire ant colony was a big hit. The ants lived and foraged dead insects in separate containers. Students learned about the beneficial effects of the ants as they "cleaned up" some comparatively large insect parts. Fire ants may be important predators of other insects in fields with a mixture of clover and rye cover crops.



Students learning the beneficial activities of fire ants

Viewing soil biology

Students used a dissecting microscope to view the numerous insects found in compost. The life forms found in compost are similar to those found in the undisturbed soil in conservation tillage fields.



A student using a dissecting microscope at the soil biology demo

Playing a CD game with youngsters

The "Scoop on Soil" or "Help Stop Soil Erosion" CD game raises awareness about the importance of our soil resources. The game is recommended for children in grades 4-7. It only takes 10 minutes to learn a lot about "dirt". <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/soil/index.html>



Two students playing a CD game during the EXPO

Creating a soil profile card

Another display that students liked was the soil profile card. Students could put sieved soil from the horizons on a strip of carpet tape attached to a small

Continued on Page 11

continued from page 10

card. The soil horizons were described on the back of the cards. <http://soils.usda.gov/education/resources/lessons/profile/>.

Most students participated in the interactive displays. However, many students took the time to learn about the principles of conservation tillage by obtaining information from TCT group sitting the tables and reading information on posters just like the adults. We were pleased that our educational efforts benefited both age groups of people attending the EXPO.

The TCT group would like to thank the following Georgia NRCS coworkers (and their supervisors) for helping with the activities at EXPO 2008: Richard Barrett, Sherry Carlson, Rosalin Churchill, Charlene Lankford, Mary Leidner, Randall Odom, Hal Simpson and Danny Tyson.

2009 Children's Water Festival

By: Shanda Thompson, Wayne County employee, Jesup Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Office

Fourth grade students from Coastal Georgia and surrounding

counties attended the 2009 Children's Water Festival at the College of Coastal Georgia in Brunswick March 11.

Approximately one thousand students, educators and parents enjoyed exhibits and demonstrations presented for the purpose of educating them about drinking water and ground and surface water. Another topic that was addressed was the importance of sustaining wetlands as related to water quality and conservation issues.

Paul Harris, soil conservation technician for the NRCS and Shanda Thompson, Wayne County employee in the Jesup NRCS field office teamed up with Georgia Forestry Commission personnel James Armstrong, Donnie Bennett, Bo Chesser, Robert Danley, Jason Harris, Mark McClellan, and



Fourth grade students from coastal Georgia counties pick up information about watersheds, wetlands, and water quality.

Daniel Westcot to present an interactive demonstration to the students on how wetlands act as a filter to help maintain water quality by limiting pollution from runoff.

They discussed the importance of wetlands in maintaining water quality, flood control, and providing habitat for many plant and animal species. The students and teachers also were given posters and literature on watersheds, the water cycle, soil erosion, best management practices, and water conservation.

This educational event was the result of a collective effort by various federal and state agencies as well as non-profit organizations whose interest is in the protection and conservation of the Altamaha, Satilla and St. Mary's River Basins in Coastal Georgia.



Shanda Thompson, Wayne County employee in the Jesup NRCS field office and Bo Chesser, GFC Water Quality Specialist, demonstrate to 4th grade students how wetlands filter pollutants such as sediments from water before it enters our rivers.

Technical Support

Sheep Take Aim at Chinese Privet and Japanese Honeysuckle.

By Philip Brown, grassland conservationist, Washington

We've all seen Chinese Privet and Japanese Honeysuckle invade fencerows, right-of-ways, fields, and forests. Both plants are considered invasive, and can form dense monocultures altering the composition and structure of forests. They overtop and out-compete desired species, altering wildlife habitat, and inhibiting regeneration of timber producing species. While chemical and mechanical control have all been tried with varying degrees of success, the use of livestock grazing as a control agent has not been widely considered.

The Oconee River Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), Fort Valley State University, American Sheep Industry Association and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS) have partnered with Shady Brook Farm, LLC to use the David Henry Hardigree Wildlife Sanctuary in Watkinsville as a demonstration site to determine the effect of intensively grazing these invasive species using sheep.

In early January, 80 sheep were released into four acres dominated by privet and honeysuckle. Photo points were established and photos taken before grazing began, and then weekly during the grazing period to document the impact. A browse line was noticeable in the first five days, and heavy use of the honeysuckle was evident as well.

As the grazing period went on, continued defoliation of honey-



Dennis Chessmen, state grazinglands specialist Athens (right), Al Hubbard, grassland conservationist, Carrollton (middle) and Philip Brown, grassland conservationist, Washington (left) check on the progress of the sheep the second week.

suckle and the lower privet leaves and stems was observed. Sheep demonstrated a cooperative effort in "walking down" some taller privet plants and browsing leaves and stems in the upper canopy. With available forage rapidly declining the sheep were removed from the site after three weeks. There was certainly a noticeable impact with almost total defoliation of honeysuckle and smaller privet plants, but vegetation remained on many taller privet plants at a height of five feet and greater.

Monitoring of privet and honeysuckle re-growth on the site is expected to continue for several months. Experimental plots within the site will be selected for herbicide application to determine the impact on privet and honeysuckle when grazing and herbicide are used in conjunction.

While not expected to eradicate an invasive plant species in one grazing period, sheep, through this demonstration have come to light as a potentially viable tool in an integrated approach to control of invasive plant species such as privet and honeysuckle.



The left picture is of the test area before the sheep were allowed in. Right is a picture of the same area after 30 days.

Georgia's 9th Annual Conservation Tillage Training Conference

Note: The next several articles are from the conference

An Educational Opportunity for Large and Small-Scale Farmers

by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist, Athens

The 9th annual Conservation Production Systems Training Conference was held Feb. 3-4, at the Southwest Georgia Technical College in Thomasville. The Georgia USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was one of the sponsors of this training conference.

Conservation tillage to conservation planners in the field who were not able to attend the conference. Conservation tillage/cover crop continues to be among the more important practices that we fund through Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The keynote speaker presented information about AgAmerica Empowerment Agency, a nonprofit group. The Agency has established Dooly and Crisp Counties as an Empowerment Zone. AgAmerica obtained federal funding for implementing strategies that promote agriculture in the area as a result of this designation.

The conference included classroom lectures. The topics of cover crops and crop rotation, energy and water conservation, the challenges of producing peanuts and weed management were covered in the breakout sessions. Most of the sessions included a presentation by a representative from NRCS/Extension, a farmer and a

research scientist. Farmers were encouraged to present information to other farmers in order to improve the probability that other farmers in the audience would adopt conservation tillage.

The program also included two tours. Participants had the opportunity to tour the John Deere Training Center at the college. This center is one of only 22 company training centers in the country. There is a 100% placement of graduates with John Deere dealers after seven quarters of instruction including an internship at a dealership.

The other tour was held in a farmer's field. The need to plant rye, rather than wheat, as a cover crop was discussed because rye produces enough biomass to cover the soil through most of the subsequent cropping season. Wheat and many other grains do not produce enough cover to protect soil from erosion and provide the other benefits of planting a cover crop.



Photo by J.M. Dangler

Bobby Sharpe, instructor, John Deere Training Center, Southwest Ga. Technical College

Improving Communication between NRCS Employees and Producers

by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist; Natasha Brown, assistant state conservationist Area3; and Wes Harris, county coordinator, Bulloch County, University of Georgia

This presentation was the opening session of the training conference.

Wes Harris provided some background information about Farm Bill programs. He did a good job considering that the 2008 Farm Bill is still being developed and he is not a NRCS employee!

Harris emphasized five points about how producers could improve communication with the NRCS. These points can also



Photo by J.M. Dangler

Natasha Brown, assistant state conservationist, Area 3

serve as tools to help field office personnel to enhance customer service and build relationships in their local communities:

Cultivate a relationship with the local soil conservationist or district conservationist.

Learn how decisions about conservation are made at the local level. For example, the local working group determines the priorities

Continued on Page 14

continued from page 13

among the resource concerns and the cost share percentage.

Study the programs. Learn about them from other sources. For example, attend meetings or talk to your neighbors about their knowledge of the programs.

Keep accurate records as they may be necessary for specific programs. Learn to use a computer.

Later, he suggested that these producers could ask for help obtaining information about programs available on the World Wide Web from family and friends.

Natasha Brown commented on the results of the national audit. Georgia NRCS met the deadline for its completion. We learned a lot about properly managing contracts; including how to secure the eligibility documentation from producers. She encouraged the producers to work with the staff of the local Farm Service Agency to complete the forms needed to participate in the 2008 Farm Bill Programs.

AgAmerica Empowerment Agency, Inc.

by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist, Athens



Photo by J.M. Dangler

Gene Roney, AgAmerica Empowerment Agency, Inc

Gene Roney, AgAmerica Empowerment Agency, Inc., was the keynote speaker at the conference. He explained how producers in Dooley and Crisp Counties have promoted agriculture, the area's primary industry. The area was designated as an Empowerment Zone in 1999. Since that time, producers and agribusiness in the area have benefited from several programs sponsored by AgAmerica Empowerment Agency, Inc., Vienna.

The first project of the Agency was to provide loans for farmers to invest in new irrigation systems. However, they modified this goal soon after implementation as a result of water use restrictions.

Currently, the Agency addresses the availability of water and the continued drought by loaning conservation tillage equipment to farmers who are interested in adopting conservation tillage practices. One of the benefits of implementing a conservation tillage system with adequate residue is an increase in the storage in the soil and an increase in the efficiency of water use by plants. For example, row crops grown in a Coastal Plains soil should tolerate drought for 11 days after a 2-inch rain, rather than three days when these crops are produced with conventional tillage.

Other projects implemented by AgAmerica include sponsoring one-half the salary of a youth apprentice with area agribusinesses, an expansion of watermelon research and involvement in other educational programs.

The Agency takes particular pride in its efforts to promote the adoption of global positioning sys-

tems (GPS) and to collect and distribute data from automated weather stations in Dooley and Crisp Counties.

Additional information about AgAmerica can be found at <http://ag-america.org/>.

The Principles of Conservation Tillage

by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist, Athens

One of the major benefits of implementing a conservation tillage system in a Coastal Plains soil is the crops ability to tolerate drought for 11 days after a 2-inch rain, rather than three days in a conventional tillage system.

This benefit is due to increased infiltration of rainfall. Improved weed control and soil conservation are two other benefits of implementing a conservation tillage system compared to when these crops are produced in a conventional tillage.

Of course, producers are interested in the bottom line as they consider adopting new crop production practices.

Dr. Wayne Reeves, a USDA-ARS retiree from Watkinsville, estimated that a conservation tillage system with a rye cover crop should result in an additional \$120 or \$202 an acre when producing peanuts or cotton, respectively.

One might think that improved soil quality in conservation tillage results mainly from reducing the number of tillage operations in a field. However, the increased productivity of the system actually results from the addition of crop residue, especially to the surface of the soil.

Continued on Page 15



Photo by J.M. Dangler

Rye cover crop residue in no-till corn

There are a couple of requirements of implementing a conservation tillage system. First, producers must grow a cover crop, such as rye, that produces high yields of biomass to cover the soil.

Black oats is another cover crop that produces high yields of biomass. Black oat seed should also be available in the near future for producers using conservation tillage in Southern Georgia. This crop does not tolerate the cold weather.

Plant rye within certain windows of time in order to obtain high yields of crop biomass that will protect the soil from erosion.

The planting windows for regions of Georgia are:

- Mountain-Limestone Valleys Aug. 15-Nov. 1;
- the Piedmont Sept. 15-Dec. 1;
- and the Coastal Plains Sept. 15-Jan. 1.

The other requirement for implementing a conservation tillage system is the management of soil compaction through non-inversion tillage. "No-till" cultivation should be done yearly in many Coastal Plain soils.

The Challenges of Producing Peanuts with Conservation Tillage

by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist, Athens; Ronnie Barentine, county coordinator, Pulaski County, University of Georgia; D Rowland and W. Faircloth, research scientists, Dawson

Less than 30% of Georgia's peanut crop is produced with conservation tillage. This statistic compares with more than 70% of the state's cotton or corn acres.

Why have Georgia's peanut producers lagged behind producers of other row crops in adopting these practices? Ronnie Barentine answered this question by presenting information from the USDA-Area Research Station in Dawson that addressed ten myths associated with the reluctance of many peanut producers to adopt this practice.

One of the major myths is that the cover crop interferes with peanut production. The Dawson researchers have shown this not to be true as a result of 10-years of research. Specifically, peanut flowering and pegging are similar under both production systems.



Photo by Chris Martin, Paulaski County farmer

High peanut yields obtained with conservation tillage

Also, the number of pods produced may even be greater with conservation tillage than conventional tillage.

Other myths that Barentine busted include substantial peanut losses during harvest, little financial savings and difficulty controlling weeds.

Chris Martin, Paulaski County farmer, added that he produces high yields of peanuts with conservation tillage, but he had not adopted the use of global positioning system (GPS) to help him locate the rows. However, he plans to purchase a GPS system in the near future. The use of this technology will result in additional financial and stewardship benefits.

Weed Management Strategies in Conservation Tillage Systems for Cotton

by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist, Athens and Dr. T.M. Webster, research agronomist, USDA-ARS in Tifton

The weed species that limit the yields of Georgia's of agronomic crops have changed considerably during the last 30 years. For example, in 1974, nutsedges, cocklebur sicklepod were the most troublesome weeds in Georgia's cotton fields. By 2005, Benghal dayflower (also known as tropical spiderwort), Palmer amaranth and morningglories were the top three weeds.

The first two weeds were not even among the top 10 weeds back in 1974. Benghal dayflower was unknown and morningglories were only in 8th place. Even this list has changed significantly since 2005. For example, Palmer amaranth is now resistant to at least two herbicide modes of action. As a result of this resistance, variants of Palmer amaranth are the two most important weeds in Georgia's cotton fields today.

continued from page 15

Dr. T.R. Webster presented results of research showing that a rye cover crop reduces the number and total biomass of herbicide resistant Palmer amaranth growing in fields.

The benefits increased with an increase in the production of cover. He also described herbicide alternatives that help control herbicide resistant Palmer amaranth that may grow near a row of cotton or peanuts in a conservation



Photo by Dr. Stanley Culpepper, UGA, Tifton

Bengal dayflower in cotton field

tillage system with a rye cover crop.

Participants also obtained information relating to the survival and dispersal of Palmer amaranth and Bengal dayflower

Insects, such as fire ants, and ground beetles appeared to be more important than rodents, in reducing the amount of Palmer amaranth seed in conservation tillage systems.

Bengal dayflower has been identified in at least 42 South Georgia counties. This weed can be spread by cattle, cotton seed and gin trash, farm equipment, mourning doves and soil in pots of nursery plants.

Additional information on these important weed species can be found at www.gaweed.com.

NRCS Programs Help Conserve Energy

by J.M. Dangler, state agronomist, Athens; R. Odum, engineer Area 3 and G. Hawkins, agricultural pollution prevention specialist, UGA, Tifton

There are several ways NRCS programs can assist producers to save energy. Two ways are, adopting conservation tillage/cover crop and installing efficient irrigation systems.

A conservation tillage system should include the production of a cover crop, such as rye, that produces a large amount of biomass in order to cover the soil through much of the year. Organic matter builds up on the soil surface over time and results in a decreased runoff. The infiltration of rainfall is increased in a conservation tillage system compared to a system under conventional tillage. The frequency of application of irrigation water is reduced in fields with irrigation systems. Also, less energy is required in a conservation tillage system compared to conventional tillage as the number of tillage operations is considerably reduced.

There are several irrigation practices that can help save energy. Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) has helped pay for retrofitting 582 center pivot systems from 2006-2008 resulting a savings of enough water to supply about 50,000 homes for one year. Animal waste from lagoons can also be applied to fields efficiently through center pivot systems, as well as solid set and traveler systems.

Georgia's small farmers can also take advantage of EQIP money to apply water efficiently through solid set and micro irrigation systems. Only small and lim-

ited resource farmers can obtain assistance for installing a well.

Micro irrigation systems can be used to save money for both our large- and small-scale farmers. Water is delivered to vegetables (with or without plastic mulch) or row crops through drip tape. The tape may be placed on the soil surface or buried beneath the soil. Micro irrigation systems can be installed in orchards, vineyards and bare root nurseries.

Producers can convert a combustible engine to an electric motor to save money. There are several options available for reducing the cost of pumping water by installing efficient irrigation systems.

There are a few requirements for the land to be eligible for receiving EQIP funds to be used for installing irrigation systems:



Photo by J.M. Dangler

Randall Odum, engineer, Area 3

Two years of irrigation for converting irrigation sprinkler systems;

Sprinklers for handling animal waste must be for an existing operation;

Conversion to micro irrigation must be from a different type of system, not another micro irrigation system.

Cattle Grazing Demonstration

The staff at the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Americus is conducting a cooperative cattle grazing demonstration with NRCS State Grazing Lands specialist, Dr. Dennis Chessman.



Cattle grazing on 'Pensacola' Bahiagrass and Common Bermudagrass pasture.

The demonstration is a continuous cattle grazing system involving native and introduced grass pastures. It intends to demonstrate techniques to effectively extend grazing of cattle throughout the year in South Georgia.

In 2008 new cattle fences were constructed on the PMC with support from the grazing lands initiative. Chessman worked with local cattle producers to provide 20 to



Mixed Native Grass Pasture

25 cows with calves for the demonstration.

Pastures are being rotationally grazed to maintain grass stands and provide adequate nutrition for the animals.

Cattle weights and fecal analysis will also provide information on nutrition and health of the herd.

The following pasture types are being utilized in the project: 'Kentucky 31' tall fescue, 'Pensacola' bahiagrass and common bermudagrass, silovopasture of

'Pensacola' bahiagrass and 'Coastal' bermudagrass, fall overseeding of rye and ryegrass to the bahiagrass and bermudagrass pastures, 'Pete' eastern gamagrass, 'Americus' indiagrass, and mixed native grass (consisting of 'Americus' indiagrass, 'Earl' big bluestem, 'Cimmaron' little bluestem, 'Alamo' and 'Cave-in-Rock' switchgrass). Other pastures could be added at a later date.

A spring field day to display these pastures and techniques is being scheduled by Chessman.

Prescribed Burn Field Day

On Feb. 17, the Jimmy Carter PMC, Area 3 Area Resource Conservationist and Georgia Forestry Commission conducted a field-day to train NRCS personnel



Prescribed burn in native warm season grass

from Area 1 and Area 3 in prescribed burning.

Participants received training in burning objectives, native grass and fire, fire weather, firing techniques, smoke management, and fire safety. Training was conducted with classroom presentations and also with actual burning demonstrations conducted on PMC property.



Prescribed burn in loblolly pine stand



Prescribed burn in planted longleaf pines

Photography Contest!

"A Snapshot of Conservation Across Georgia"

Who: The Public Affairs Advisory Council is sponsoring a photography contest for all Georgia NRCS employees, Partners, and Earth Team Volunteers!

Why: To build a high quality conservation photo file for Georgia NRCS and showcase conservation!

When: Photographs must be taken within the year, in Georgia.

Theme: Conservation in Georgia!

Photos should reflect some aspect of natural resources conservation, i.e. Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals and Humans: (SWAPA plus H)

Judging: The photos will be judged by the Public Affairs Advisory Council at its May meeting!

Prizes: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes will be awarded statewide and best in each Area. Prizes are non-monetary gifts. In addition, photos will be used in our newsletter, on our web site, in PowerPoint presentations, and future publications.

How to Enter: An entry form with the rules is located on our Sharepoint site at <https://nrsc.sc.egov.usda.gov/east/ga/default.aspx> in Microsoft Word form under the Shared Documents. Please submit the form and the photo electronically. One photo per form. You may submit more than one photo.

Have Fun!

