

Another Conservation Success Story...

Coffee County, Georgia

March 2011

Conservation Stewardship Program Helps Farmer Preserve Land

Mark Vickers is a 4th generation farmer in Coffee County Georgia. Mark has farmed most of his life and has the calluses to show it. Like most farmers, Mark has experienced the ups and downs of a livelihood in farming. Mark said, "In the 70's commodity prices were low, cost of fuel was high and interest rates were high. I had to quit farming

My motivation is always to improve my farm, especially environmentally. CSP has rewarded me for my efforts and I am appreciative of that,"-- Mark Vickers

in order to save my farm. There was no profit to be made."

Mark began farming full time again in 1988; and today his entire family, including his wife Sharon and their children Chloe and Cahah, are all involved in the operation.

Mark Vickers Farms is a very diverse operation. Mark manages 388 acres of cropland that primarily produce peanuts, cotton, and alfalfa hay, a 10-acre pecan orchard, 42 acres of pasture and



An irrigation reservoir was built on Vickers' property a few years ago.

1030 acres of forestland, which includes 34 acres of Longleaf pines. There are also several Angus cattle and five broiler poultry houses on the farm.

Mark intensely manages every land use to maximize profits, yet continues to be a good steward by protecting and enhancing the natural resources on his farm.

In 1983, Mark began planting cover crops and practicing no-till conservation.

Mark was one of the first few farmers that started conservation tillage in Coffee County. Mark had some (HEL) Highly Erodible Land on his farm and due to provisions of the Food Security Act had to reduce the erosion rate in order to keep farming these HEL fields.

Mark began investigating his options, which were limited: plant these fields in grass, trees, or start planting a cover crop and use some type of reduced tillage planting.

At that time, Andy Page served as a District Conservationist with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Page and Coffee County Extension agent, Rick Reed provided the support and technical assistance that Mark needed to convert to conservation tillage.

Mark now plants cover crops in the fall and winter, rye or oats, and no-tills (disturbing only 4" of soil) into a soil surface

residue cover of 80 percent on all of his crop fields.

"I use to spend spring dragging soil back from the edges of my fields to fill in all the gullies, but after converting to conservation tillage, I eliminated the erosion problem. Not only did I eliminate the erosion, but also increased my soil quality & improved the water holding capacity of the soil," Mark said.

Mark has implemented many other conservation practices on his farm such as conservation crop rotation, nutrient management, pest management, and irrigation water management.

Mark Vickers' commitment to conserving natural resources on his land is how he earned a Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) con-



There are 388 acres of cropland on Mark Vickers Farms.

tract with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2010.

CSP encourages farmers like Mark Vickers to continue to improve their natural resources. CSP provides many conservation benefits including improvement of water and soil quality, wildlife habitat enhancements and adoption of conservation activities that address the effects of climate change.

"The things I have done on my farm were done to better my farm. My motivation is always to improve my farm, especially environmentally. God has provided us with all the resources we need and in return we should be appreciative enough to be good stewards to protect those resources. CSP has rewarded me for my efforts and I am appreciative of that," Mark said.



This photo shows rye that had been recently planted as cover crop on part of Vicker's land in October 2010.

Mark Vickers Farms produces a vast array of crops including alfalfa hay.



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Seven Rivers Resource Conservation & Development
912-367-7679

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912-384-4811

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