

Another Conservation Success Story...

Jeff Davis County, Georgia

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Retired Veteran Conserves on Family Farm

Thomas McDew has never forgotten his commitment to farming and resource conservation.

Even after spending decades serving in the United States Air Force, McDew came right

“Conserve now so you’ll have it in the future.”—Thomas McDew

back to his roots in Hazlehurst to work his family’s land on McDew Farms.

McDew has been farming the 160 acre farm since he retired from the Air Force in 1986. The farm specializes in growing corn, soybeans, and cotton.

About three years ago, McDew began to experience an irrigation problem.

“I wanted to expand my capacity to irrigate. I remember reading about the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in an FSA newsletter that’s sent to farmers like me.”



This is the pond now, three years after the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service assisted McDew construct it on his Hazlehurst land.

McDew said that’s where he also learned about a congressional earmark program that helped farmers build ponds.

That earmark funding is called the Georgia Agricultural Water Conservation Initiative Reservoir Construction/Renovation Program.

The Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC) program is intended to help land owners like McDew build these reservoirs or ponds as catchments that retain surface water for agricultural irrigation.

To participate in the program, landowners must provide at least 25% of the cost.

The GSWCC provides 75% of the cost share of the NRCS estimate up to a maximum of \$50,000.

This cost share agreement was attractive to McDew as a businessman.

“It’s a program that requires a farmer’s input. It’s not just a farmer giveaway. The farmer has collateral in the program also.”

When McDew applied for the program and received approval for his conservation plan, Soil Conservation Technician Janice Aldridge with the Hazlehurst NRCS visited McDew’s farm to give technical assistance for the pond project.

“Finally, when we got through with building the pond, we got a big rain and that filled it up in a day. We had about 7 inches of rain.”

An underground pipe system connects the pond to a 200-acre watershed which provides a stable water source in drier weather.

As a result McDew said, “I have more capacity to irrigate.”

Aldridge said that throughout the process, “Thomas McDew was an excellent person to work with.

He did what he said he was going to do. He’s the one out here on the land doing the work. Many landowners hire people to do the work. He knows what he needs so we can assist him the

right way.”

Now, three years after the pond was first constructed, McDew is happy with the end result and is thankful for the continued assis-



Soil Conservation Technician, Janice Aldridge (left) and Thomas McDew (right) worked together for roughly a year to build the irrigation pond on 4 acres of McDew’s property.



Irrigation hose carries water from pond to crops.

tance the USDA agency still provides.

While farming McDew inspects equipment used to control pond’s water level. growing crops on his land is a big priority, McDew is also a conservationist in practice.

He believes that conserving natural resources should be an important goal. “Conserve now so you’ll have it in the future.”



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Altamaha Soil And Water Conservation District

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