

# Another Conservation Success Story...

## Toombs County, Georgia

August 2010

### EQIP helps Lyons Farmer Battle Erosion

Brett McLain has battled soil erosion on his Vidalia onion farm for years. This past growing season was even worse than previous years.

“Our biggest problem was soil erosion. We got washed out this winter. The rain just killed us. It was the wettest winter,” he said. McLain

**“It was a huge help. We should have done it years and years ago. The NRCS has been a huge help.”**

**-Brett McLain**

Farms grows and harvests roughly 350 acres of onions each year.

With that much land dedicated to the crop, McLain has had to dedicate even more time and resources to fighting soil erosion and conserving precious top soil.



Vidalia onions grown on McLain Farms this past growing season.

McLain Farms is located in Toombs County just a few miles outside of Lyons. The McLains have been growing onions on their land for 24 years. Their first onion crop was planted back in 1986.

Each year the farm employs about 100 workers during harvesting, 50 during planting season, and four full-time employees year round. Before McLain Farms switched over to onions, they grew large amounts of tobacco.

After learning more about soil and erosion, Brett McLain researched different ways to fight the problem and reached out to the

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for technical and financial assistance.

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), McLain was able to get terraces installed on parts of the farm where water drainage caused the worst soil erosion.

Terraces are used to slow or prevent the rapid runoff caused by either heavy rainfall or water run-off from irrigation systems.

“It was a huge help. We should have done it years and years ago. The NRCS has been a huge help. I can’t go out there on these fields and tell you how to build terraces but they can. They’re invaluable and every little bit helps.”

Brett McLain said they also put in an underground outlet or a catch basin that gets rid of the water on the field. “It works better and it’s a lot cleaner.” District Conservationist, Sidney Lanier has been working with the McLains for ten years.

“What I’ve seen over the years is a commitment for them to maintain the land. A lot of people aren’t good about that. The McLains take care of it. That makes me want to work with them more.”

In addition to helping the McLains fight soil erosion, the EQIP funds have also assisted the family operation with energy



This is the diesel motor to electric motor conversion system.

conservation. The McLains have been able to convert their irrigation system from diesel fuel operated to electric motors. The onion operation has benefited financially from the switch over. “It’s terribly expensive to do this. You have to have a lot of equipment. The cost-



These women are hired each year through an employment partnership between Mexico and the U.S. government. They and others help harvest and plant onions on McLain’s farm.



Brett McLain has been growing onions for 24 years.

share helps.” The 41-year-old McLain, who is also a father, says it’s important that future generations know this when it comes to conserving natural resources like precious top soil: “Don’t hesitate. When you see a problem, take care of it right then. Every year you don’t address the issue, you lose more and more top soil and it’s hard to replace it.”



This is one of the center-pivot irrigation systems converted to operate using electric motors instead of diesel fuel.

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