

Another Conservation Success Story...

Forsyth County, Georgia

December 2008

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helps Organic Farmer Increase Productivity

Located about 12 miles west of Cumming off of Jekyll Road is a small organic farm run by Chuck and Lynn Pugh, called Cane Creek Farm. The Pugh's bought Crane Creek Farm in 1986. Since that time, subdivisions have been built on three sides of their 17 acre farm, changing the rural nature of the community.

Sustainable agricultural practices are used on the Pugh farm, where fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers and medicinal plants are grown.

Chuck Pugh heard about the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through another farmer. "I heard about the NRCS from a sheep farmer raising Katahdin hair sheep. I went over to his farm to buy our first sheep and he introduced me to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). He was actually doing the conservation practices."

The Pugh's had several concerns when they called Louise McPherson, a soil conservationist with the NRCS for help. "They called on us to help them figure out the best way to address several concerns. They wanted to improve the grazing for the sheep, but didn't have watering facilities in place to make rotational grazing work."

McPherson went on to say, "We helped them install watering facilities and heavy use areas that were the right size for the sheep and lambs. We helped with overseeding the pastures to improve forage quality and with fencing to facilitate rotational grazing."

Chuck Pugh sees two primary benefits with the new watering facilities. "The primary benefit is that the water lines provides water as we move the animals through the grazing system. A secondary benefit is that water is also there to support the vegetables. I've been amazed to see the difference that the animal grazing and byproduct makes on enriching the soil to come back behind later and grow crops" said Chuck Pugh.

Lynn Pugh was a school teacher for 20 years. In 2001 she started farming full-time. Plans were put on hold for a couple of years when her husband, a reservist in the Air Force Reserves, was sent to Scott Air Force Base, IL., for a couple of years. Lynn got back to her farm plans in 2003.

This is her sixth year selling at the farmers market and fourth year selling through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscription.

"Community Supported Agriculture is where community members pay a farmer like me to grow crops and they share in the harvest. This annual fee covers the costs of production and they share in the risk of farming as well. Currently, we have 70 members. Fifty varieties of vegetables and herbs are grown based on feedback from CSA members," said Lynn.

Typically, Cane Creek Farm grows a variety of vegetables starting in the spring with crisp cool seasonal vegetables such as peas, broccoli, lettuce, green onions, greens, straw-

"Most organic farmers are direct marketers. We sell directly to the customer, through either a Farmers Market, CSA, online, or at a farm stand. Most of us are direct sellers," said Lynn.

"I'm using chemical-free, sustainable growing practices on about 3 acres," said Lynn. "I do rotation in quarter-acre blocks with eight quarter-acre blocks so I can rotate with an eight-year-rotation."

Chuck said, "Using the irrigation system under EQIP has helped support the rotational grazing so that we've got water all the way down the field and we've got water down to the power line that has grass. A third leg down to the front field has funding but we haven't completed yet."



Chuck Pugh

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Lynn Pugh

berries, and potatoes. In the peak of the summer season, other delicious crops like tomatoes, okra, squash, and corn will have begun their harvest. Toward the end of the season, they will grow sweet potatoes, turnip greens, winter squash, and others. They also grow fresh herbs and flowers.

Lynn loves organic farming so much that she takes time out of her busy schedule of farming and working for Georgia Organics to go back to her old job of teaching. Lynn teaches organic farming on weekends. "I teach organic farming on the farm, with classroom discussion in the morning and hands-on farming in the afternoon. We even have school tours where we show the children what organic farming is," said Pugh.

What is organic farming? As stated on the Cane Creek web site, "Organic agriculture is a system of farming based on ecological principles. The goal is to produce nutritious food in such a way that the soil and environment remain healthy, not depleted or polluted."

"No chemical fertilizers or chemical pesticides are used. Fertility is provided by cover crops and compost. Pests are minimized by crop rotations, timed plantings and, as a last resort, biological pesticides."

This farm is a realization of Lynn's dream to live a more sustainable lifestyle in closer relationship to nature. Health, community, and the environment have always been important to her.

Lynn stated her belief that we should be conserving the land today for the future. "Using practices that keep the land viable is important, so my philosophy is to use practices that build soil and improve the environment," said Lynn.

"You've never seen a person grow as much food in one row as Lynn," said McPherson.

"We also hope to help them with the development of a spring so that spring water can be used for the sheep rather than their well water which they are using right now."



The Pugh's customers pick up their fresh fruits and vegetables from the cabin at the edge of the herb and flower garden.

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