

# Another Conservation Success Story...

## Newton County, Georgia

April 2011

### Newton County Farmer Uses EQIP to Improve Organic Operation

It wasn't easy or fast, but it got the job done. Whenever Nicholas Donck needed to water his crops, he and his crew would have to haul hundreds of gallons of water on each trip. "We had to haul 240 gallon containers to water what we'd planted."



Pictured are three constructed hoop houses and a new one under construction.

And that wasn't the only challenge that Donck has faced while following his passion—farming.

The 42-year-old Belgium native also wanted to farm without chemicals and grow his produce year round on his Newton County farm, Crystal Organic Farm.

Crystal Organic Farm has 52,000 square feet of cropland under hoop houses in addition to 20 acres of open fields.

Donck's operation grows 55 different kinds of vegetables and flowers including tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, okra, arugula, and baby carrots. Several restaurants in the Atlanta area rely on Donck's organic produce.

"We sell a lot of the baby carrots. They are really popular with restaurants and farmers' markets."

Even though he says business was good, he wanted to make it better. Donck's needed a way to farm the way he envisioned without sacrificing his values of farming organically. He wanted to avoid using chemicals and losing valuable top soil.

"If we use a lot of chemicals, it weakens the soil and it will be washed away faster. There's

nothing worse than seeing all your soil wash away," Donck explained.

"He is very passionate about not using chemicals. He has studied all the possible side effects of chemicals," District Conservationist Dennis Brooks said.

Brooks and Soil Conservation Technician Amy Robinson with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) began working with Nicholas Donck after he contacted them about finding a better way to conserve both water and soil on his Newton County land.

EQIP agreements helped Donck do what he says he couldn't afford to do without the cost-share assistance it provides.

The agreements have allowed the small farmer to address natural resource concerns by drilling a well and running a pipeline to improve water management.

Air quality and erosion were also a concern. Now, instead of lugging around huge tanks to water his crops, Donck has a well that's connect-



Baby carrots are big sellers for Crystal Organic Farm.

ed to a drip irrigation system that saves gallons of water a day and only requires him to turn on a faucet instead of transporting water tanks every day.

"It saves hours of labor," Donck added.

Hoop-houses can be seen spread around Donck's small farm. They house vegetables like baby carrots and various types of lettuce.

Donck is participating in an NRCS pilot project to construct a new hoop house. For the next three years, he will keep records to help deter-



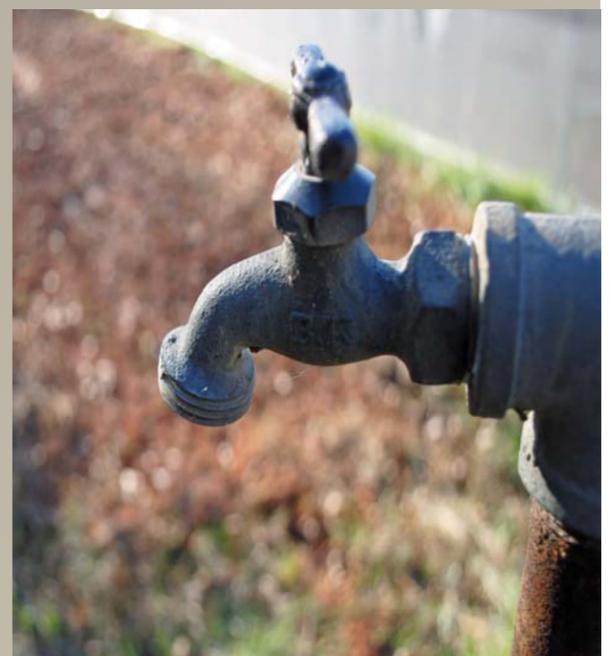
Nicholas Donck owns Crystal Organic Farm.

**"It allows you to do major expansions when you don't have the capital. NRCS provides amazing assistance."—Nicholas Donck**

mine how hoop houses provide soil and water conservation benefits.

To address air quality and erosion concerns, severely eroded sections of Crystal Organic Farm received critical area treatment. Grass has been planted on those sections.

Although Donck is an international businessman by education, his heart has led him to make conservation his business. He says what he's doing for natural resources is generational. "If you're greedy with the soil and don't save it, nothing will be left."



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