

Another StrikeForce Conservation Success Story...

Coffee County, Georgia

April 2012

EQIP Assistance Helps Douglas Farmer Conserve

Nearly 30 years ago, Kenneth Shoats had a vision. He wanted to turn a pine plantation into a row crop farm.

"I had to start from zero. You have to love it to stay out here," Shoats said.

Shoats developed an interest in agriculture at an early age while working on his grandparents' tobacco and hog farm. His childhood memories of helping out on the family farm led him to make a big leap in 1984.

Shoats said, "I sold my boat in order to have a down payment on my farm." That down payment helped purchase 50 acres of land.

Over the years, Shoats has grown a variety of vegetables including squash, green beans, onions, watermelons, mustards, turnips, collards and kale.

"When I first bought my farm, I decided that growing produce would offer the highest profits and allow me the best opportunity to get my farm paid for," Shoats explained.

Currently, Shoats has a contract with Kroger for his seedless watermelons, mustards, turnips, collards and kale for the chain's stores in Southeast Georgia.



Kenneth Shoats grew up on a farm and has operated his own farm since 1984.

"In recent years, I have noticed more programs focused on helping the small farmer. I appreciate the program assistance and cooperation I have received from the NRCS."—Kenneth Shoats

Shoats is always looking for ways to make his operation more efficient, environmentally friendly and profitable. He plants a winter cover crop of wheat. This cover crop helps reduce erosion, improve soil nutrients and provides food and cover for wildlife.

Shoats also follows a nutrient and pest management program. By applying nutrients and pesticides only when necessary, water quality of surrounding ponds and streams is protected.

But, even from the beginning it was a challenge to get his farm up and running. "I had to borrow a tractor and implements my first year of farming," Shoats explained.



The electric pumping unit pictured above is more energy efficient than the diesel water pumping system that Shoats had before receiving EQIP assistance.

In 2008, Shoats visited his local Douglas USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in hopes of getting technical and financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

District Conservationist Zack Railey said, "Kenneth was interested in planting some slash pine trees on some woodland he had recently cut. Before leaving, he completed an EQIP application to convert his diesel

irrigation pumping unit to a more energy efficient electric pumping unit."

Shoats also submitted a WHIP application for re-planting cutover woodland back into slash pine trees and an application for converting a mobile high pressure irrigation gun to a more efficient low pressure center pivot.

Fortunately, Shoats was approved for EQIP assistance.

"It's been good. You have to have plenty of patience. I was surprised when he (Zack Railey) called me about my application approval," Shoats explained. "I was really shocked that I received financing," he added.

Shoats received an EQIP contract to convert his diesel pumping unit to electric and he completed the installation in 2010.

"The electric pumping unit has decreased my costs of irrigating; saving me significant dollars with the constant irrigating I have done this year," said Shoats. He went on to say, "In recent years, I have noticed more programs focused on helping the small farmer. I appreciate the program assistance and cooperation I have received from the NRCS."

Coffee County is a designated StrikeForce county in Georgia. The USDA StrikeForce Initiative is designated to help relieve persistent poverty in historically high-poverty counties.

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and Development Council
912-367-7679

 NRCS Natural Resources
Conservation Service
912-384-4811

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912-681-5241

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