

Another Conservation Success Story...

Seminole County, Georgia

May 2010

Conservation Tillage Helps with Erosion

Erosion was a problem for Edward Fiveash. His farm, Nickelback Farm, was losing tons of soil each year when the terraces would fill with runoff and then give way.

"These terraces were put in between '79 and '81," said Edward Fiveash. "We had some terraces that were just not suited for the land and every year we would have to fill in the washes and drag the dirt back up the hill. Then we would get a big rain and we'd do it again. I knew we had to do something, but I did not realize how bad it was until we got Anita Tabb, soil conservation technician for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Donalsonville, down here.

She told me how much soil we were losing."

"He came into the office and asked if he could take the terraces out of the field. I first had to determine if the terraces were put in the field because of Highly Erodible Land (HEL) rules in the 1985 Farm Bill and if there was a

certain type of soil erosion occurring. It was not an HEL field. It was just a very erodible field. He was losing 11.1 tons per acre with a conventional tillage system," said Tabb.

Tabb went on to say, "My greatest concern was removing the terraces as Edward requested and then not implementing a conservation tillage system. I was afraid of the erosion he would be facing after the next few heavy rains."



Conservation tillage helps reduce soil erosion.

"These terraces were basically designed as a level terrace, because they did hold the water, but they broke. Then the water just went from one terrace to the other eroding it away," said Fiveash.

To stop the erosion, the Fiveash's changed from conventional till to strip till. "We did away with some of the terraces, put in cover crops, started strip tilling and eliminated the erosion. Today we are 98 percent strip till. It's just that simple. We've been

doing this for 5 years," said Fiveash.

To help the Fiveash family make the transition from conventional till to strip till, NRCS provided financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). "Using EQIP, we cost-shared for three years on their cover crops and strip till. They had never

used cover crops with reduced tillage." said Tabb.

Fiveash is now a firm believer in strip till. "After we started strip tilling and saw how much we were able to reduce irrigation, trips across the field and the amount of equipment we were using, we were sold. We could not get it done without strip till, there is just no way! I wouldn't be without strip till now!"

Fiveash liked EQIP because, "It helped out a lot on the cost of the cover crop seeds. A lot of the land owners want to do it but they don't want to put extra money in it. EQIP helped out tremendously, but it just got me started. I'd like to see more of it. We've done a lot of the strip till on our land that wasn't enrolled in the program. They like it (pointing to his sons), but the seed cost has been pretty tough."

Located in Seminole County outside of Donalsonville, the farm is owned and operated by the Fiveash family, Edward, his sons Jarred and Ethan and his father E.D.

The farm operates on 2,500 acres. Edward owns 100 acres of the farm. The rest of the farm is either owned by his sons or is leased from someone else. He has 98 acres in row crops and the rest in volunteer pines.



Standing in one of their cotton fields is the Fiveash family. From the left is E.D., Ethan, Jared, and Edward.

By making the change to strip till, the Fiveash's farm is seeing the benefits. "We have less erosion, less tillage, less fuel use, less trips across the field; it builds the soil up; you have reduced compaction, less stand or emergence problems, no crusting problems behind your planter and the soil will hold fertilizer better. Not only are you cutting down on fuel, you irrigate less because the soil holds more moisture and you have less tractor use and labor," said Fiveash.

Tabb said, "Edward realizes that this land will be the same land that his sons will be farming for the next 30 plus years and he knows the importance of incorporating good, sound conservation practices to make the land and farming operation viable for the next generation."

She went on to say, "Since the majority of the farm is rented, it is also very important to him that the landowners see that their land is being well taken care of," she added.

Fiveash's conservation philosophy is this, "Well they're not making any more land and if we don't keep it together, it ain't a bit of good over here in the Chattahoochee River."



A cotton bloom will turn into a cotton boll.

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