

# Another Conservation Success Story...

## Lanier County, Georgia

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### CSP Makes Difference for Georgia Olive Farms

By Amelia Hines, Public Affairs Specialist, Watkinsville

What do a banker, an insurance entrepreneur and row crop farmer have in common? If you ask the Shaws, they will simply say ‘olives’.

Brothers, Jason and Sam, started farming olives with their cousin Kevin Shaw in 2009. They wanted to re-introduce the Southeastern United States to olive farming. Two years later, Georgia Olive Farms produced the first commercial harvest of olives east of the Mississippi River since the late 1800’s.

“Olives are cutting edge in the Eastern part of the United States,” Kevin said.

Their business venture into olive farming all started with a study-abroad trip to Italy. Jason Shaw remembers that trip not because of the region’s world renowned vineyards but because of the olive orchards. Although it would be years until he made his dream a reality, he found a way to bring olives to his hometown.

“Well we were just crazy enough to try it. We’re not making a living yet,” Jason added that they hope to make the business profitable in the next few seasons.

And, it seems the farm has plenty of potential. Georgia Olive Farms operation consists of 60

acres of olive trees. Most of that acreage is used to grow three varieties of trees—Arbequina, Koroneiki, and Arbosana—that produce olives used to make their signature olive oil blend. Other sections of the land are used to establish olive tree seedlings that are sold to fellow producers. The olive operation is irrigated by a drop irrigation system and the

resources and try different farming practices that are both good for business and the environment.

A 2012 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract will allow the Shaws an opportunity to continue their conservation efforts on 33 acres of the olive farm and 963 acres of row crop farmland. The Shaws will use plant tissue sampling to determine nutrient needs in the soil by studying leaves on the trees and row crops for deficiencies. By correctly determining levels of nutrients such as nitrogen, the farmers will be better at determining fertilizer needs.

Other practices covered under the contract include controlled traffic methods and retrofitting the irrigation system with drift reducing nozzles. The controlled traffic method focuses on not using farming equipment, fuel, or time if it isn’t necessary. This method cuts down on production costs, increases yield, and helps

protect the soil by limiting soil erosion. Drift reducing nozzles are important because they help limit water loss during irrigation cycles.

Kevin said, “It (CSP) opened up an avenue for getting support to continue what we were doing.” He adds, “If you can get a little bit of money doing the right thing, seems like the right thing to do.”

Jason urges other producers to become familiar with the assistance that NRCS provides. “We have really good folks down here who educate local producers,” he said.

The family, who always makes it a priority to conserve natural resources on their land, agrees it’s all part of their legacy. “Our ancestors have always done a good job of taking care of the land and we want to protect it for our future generations,” Jason explained.



Pictured are cousins, Jason (left) and Kevin (right). They own and operate Georgia Olive Farms with Jason’s brother, Sam.

*“Our ancestors have always done a good job of taking care of the land and we want to protect it for our future generations.” — Jason Shaw*

Shaws use the Super High Density (SHD) method of farming olives where over 600 trees are planted per acre in a hedgerow shape so they can be mechanically harvested.

Like any other farming operation, it takes new techniques and practices to continue making improvements. These

types of opportunities are available through government programs. Because Kevin has been farming row crops for more than 30 years, he was familiar with the programs offered by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). These programs are available to help farms like Georgia Olive Farms conserve



Olives like those shown here are used to make extra virgin olive oil.



Pictured above are a group of olive trees grown by Georgia Olive Farms.

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