

Another Conservation Success Story...

Oglethorpe County, Georgia

March 2008

Chantilly Farms; It's Their Life

Ted and Patsy Hughes own and operate Chantilly Farms, a small beef cattle operation located in Smithonia, Oglethorpe County. Chantilly Farm is the center of life for the Hughes; farming is their life and lifestyle. Since their first of year farming, the Hughes have been acutely aware of the need for soil and water conservation.

The current farming operation consists of a cow/calf operation. Presently the operation consists of 65 brood cows where the Hughes pre-condition and stocker their calves to market as heavy feeders. They purchased their first 93 acres in 1966; 53 additional acres were purchased last year, and they rent 30 acres adjoining the farm.

The Hughes are very grateful for the way the people from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) were willing to listen to their ideas and tried to help incorporate them into their plans. "We are grateful to the NRCS for the information, technical expertise, and opportunity they provide. Our land is our greatest asset and we want to protect it, improve it, and pass it on to our children in better shape than when we acquired it," said Ted Hughes

They have been using the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for about five years. Ted Hughes said, "We liked the opportunity it offered that allowed us to try alternative practices. We were able to try things like Heavy Use Areas and other conservation practices that we would not have considered otherwise. Also, it provided the opportunity for us to expand and improve our "Wagon Wheel"



A Wagon Wheel hub with the grazing area with crossfencing and watering facility for rotational grazing

grazing system. We also were able to set aside land that was unsuitable for grazing for wildlife conservation areas."

The rotational grazing program installed in 1979, called the "Wagon Wheel," is where the pastures are arranged around the hubs. The Hughes have installed three of these hubs that are 75' x 75' heavy use areas, and they serve 17 pastures that average four to five acres each.

A spring located on the farm was not considered to be in a desirable location to adequately rotate their animals on the pastures. To overcome this obstacle, they developed a spring development system by installing a 1,000 gallon septic tank designed especially for the spring with nine, 4 in. holes in the bottom and the tank was installed on a bed of gravel. Now they have an accessible water supply with 1,000 gallons in reserve, and 50 to 60 gallons per minute flow.

The hay produced is simply excess grass; there is not just hay fields set aside. When they get to a pasture in the rotation that they really don't need, they cut it for hay. A major part of their plan includes over-

seeding pastures with rye grass for winter grazing and hay. As much as possible, they try to maintain clover stands in their pastures that are mixed fescue/common bermuda.

To maintain their stands of grasses, they manage the timing of

their fertilization program. If the Bermuda starts gaining, they fertilize in the winter and if the fescue starts getting ahead, they fertilize in the summer. Soil testing and applying lime and poultry litter as recommended keeps the vegetation healthy. All their poultry litter comes from one source which assists with knowing the quality of material received.

Some of the additional conservation practices installed are nutrient and pest management, critical area planting, riparian buffers and upland wildlife management. Diversions and forest openings were installed to address the soil condition and erosion, and water quality issues on the farm.

The Hughes believe that their operational benefits from the application of the conservation treatments is a farm that is so much more productive, workable, easier to manage and maintain and beautiful. Hughes said, "Our working areas and feeding areas are so much more stable and user friendly, less mud and slop, and our ponds and streams are clearer and cleaner."

All of their ponds and creeks are fenced out and livestock are not allowed in them. They have also fenced out wetlands which provide additional areas for wildlife habitat. Conservation is a number one priority for the Hughes.

The success of this farm is due to their devotion to the land, hard work and their ability to run this operation with wise business decisions. Congratulations to Ted and Patsy Hughes for being the District II 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award Winner.

The Hughes are active in their church and community. They enjoy gardening, fishing in their well stocked pond, and watching wildlife from their deck at sunrise. They have so many animals and birds on their farm; they take much pleasure in seeing and listening to their singing and chatter.

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Patsy and Ted Hughes plans for the future of Chantilly Farm is to continue to operate their farm in a manner that provides them with top quality livestock for market, and continue to improve the productivity and appearance of their land.

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