



AFC COOPERATIVE FARMING NEWS

SERVING SOUTHERN GROWERS SINCE 1939

Growing a Farm and Passing on a Heritage

by Julie A. Best
August 2005

Growing a farming operation—that's the term that Crawford and Cooper Jones use for their cow/calf operation in Autauga County. They should know what they are talking about since they have been involved with agriculture all their lives.

Their grandfather, Edward Wadsworth, was one of three brothers who operated the Wadsworth Brothers Farm, which, in 1979, was designated as an Alabama Century Farm (a farm that has at least forty acres of land owned by a family continuously for at least 100 years and currently has some agricultural activities) and as a Heritage Farm (a farm with one or more structures that are over forty years old and has been operated continuously as a family farm for at least 100 years).



Crawford Jones, along with his brother Cooper, is carrying on a heritage. "We enjoy the cattle operation—we just need more calves," says Crawford.



Cooper (L) and Crawford Jones review their conservation plan with John Harris (C), USDA-NRCS District Conservationist in Autauga County. The plan, which provides timeframes for installing conservation practices, has been extremely helpful in the operation of Jones Brothers Farm.

"Growing up, Cooper and I did everything you could possibly imagine on the farm. That's where we cut our teeth, so to speak," says Crawford. Today, Crawford and his younger brother, Cooper, operate Jones Brothers Farm. "We are strictly a cow/calf producer. We have the cows, we birth the calves on the farm, and raise them up to 600-700 pounds, and then sell them. Our philosophy is to maximize the grass," says Crawford. It's an operation that started small, but is growing.

Both Crawford and Cooper are Auburn graduates; Crawford majored in Animal and Dairy Science, and Cooper's major was Ag Economics. After graduation, both worked for a time for someone else. When the opportunity came along to begin their own farming operation, they were eager to face the challenge.

In 2000, they began building their herd. “We bought a few open heifers at a Beef Cattle Improvement Association (BCIA) sale in Clanton, and have just been growing it ever since,” says Crawford. “Our intention was to start with what we could manage ourselves, and stay with that until the time came when we could bring on someone else. Cooper and I are the only people in the show.”

Each year, the herd has expanded. “Since we started in 2000, our herd size has grown at a steady pace of 45-50 percent per year. Our greatest need is land,” says Crawford. Most of Jones Brothers Farm is on family-owned land, being land that their mother, Carol Wadsworth Jones, inherited from her father. They also rent land, and last year purchased a tract of land that will enable their operation to grow more than the 50 percent in 2005.



Rye grass is planted for winter pasture. The pasture is strip grazed and the cattle have limited access to the pasture. The grazing system helps maximize the pasture.

John Harris, District Conservationist with USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Autauga County, says, “Cooper and Crawford are trying to use all the tools available to them to increase the herd size and to protect the resources. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) happened to be a very good match for both the landowners and their land use in this case.”

EQIP is a cost-share program administered by USDA-NRCS. EQIP contracts provide incentive payments and cost-shares to implement conservation practices. EQIP may cost-share up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices. Incentive payments for carrying out conservation practices may be provided for three to ten years, depending upon the life of the contract.

Jones Brothers Farm has used the EQIP program to help cost-share in planting grass, drilling a well needed to water livestock, and installing fences to establish a grazing system and to fence cattle out of streams. Crawford says, “We are a low input operation. We believe in grass.” Establishing a rotational grazing system has enabled them to maximize their pastures. Crawford indicated, “During summer months, we have Bahia and Bermuda grass. In the winter, we overseed with rye grass, strip graze the pasture, and limit the access cattle have to the pasture to only a certain number of hours each day. We can’t exactly have grass available year round, but we are in a part of the world where we can maximize it.”

“The EQIP program was a magnificent fit for us, especially where we are in our growth and operation,” says Crawford. According to Crawford, the beauty of the EQIP program is the contract period. “NRCS helped us map out the plan—when we thought we could realistically put each piece of the practice in place. That has been extraordinarily helpful to us. For an operation like ours, labor is not something that we have a lot of. In fact, there are just the two of us. Having an extended period, or at least a timeframe, to complete the practices has been very good,” says Crawford.

Jones Brothers sell their cattle through the Alabama BCIA. The Alabama BCIA is a

cooperative effort between the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the Alabama Beef Improvement Association, Inc.

According to Crawford, his grandfather was instrumental in establishing the Autauga County BCIA board. Crawford indicates that BCIA is a core group of cow/calf producers that generally have consistently better genetics than the average cow operation. The Alabama BCIA promotes the use of performance records to improve herd production, efficiency, and quality. "Our calves come off the cow very similar and uniform, which is what the buyers are looking for. Ultimately, the buyer is looking for a better yielding beef product." Most of the calves on the Jones Brothers Farm are sold in these BCIA board sales and the calves go directly to the mid-west as opposed to landing at stockyards in between.

Jones Brothers Farm of Autauga County has a wonderful heritage. They are working land that once belonged to their grandfather, was passed on to their mother, and today is still productive agricultural land. The stories of farms such as these weave a tapestry of courage, determination, stewardship, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, patriotism and enduring family ties.

"We learned from a well established Wadsworth Brothers Farm, which was highly successful. Our grandfathers, Ed Wadsworth and J. Raymond Jones, and our late father LeRoy Jones taught us so much. They taught us how to do the smallest, most minute chores, and eventually we learned to see the larger picture and began to get a feel for what to do next. Sometimes it's just a gut feeling," says Crawford. By setting strict short-term goals, the Jones brothers are able to produce a quality, well-managed cow/calf operation that will keep the farm running to fulfill the long-range goal of keeping that Century Farm in production agriculture. Farms such as these are more than monuments to the past; they are vital and living contributors to Alabama's history, culture, and economy.

Julie A. Best is the Public Affairs Specialist for USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service in Auburn, AL.
