

Another Conservation Success Story...

Paulding County, Georgia

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EQIP Helps First-Time CSA Farmers in Paulding County

By Karen Buckley Washington, Lawrenceville

Kenneth Cook and his wife Patty have always considered themselves to be hobby farmers, managing a garden and livestock on their property for over 30 years. With a desire to establish more sustainable practices and some assistance from USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Cooks are leaders in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

Spreading Oaks Farm is a 17-acre, family-owned farm, located 20 minutes west of

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Cooks installed a heavy use area and watering troughs to give their cattle a place to drink water without using the lake.

They also plan to install a high tunnel house to extend the growing season of their crops. With the help of these practices, the Cooks are better able to control their livestock and maintenance cost, while also preserving the lake.

The Cooks also worked closely with NRCS to enter the world of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). They attended the Urban Small and Beginning Farmers workshop in Cobb County where they spoke on the practices they have installed under EQIP and how CSA has changed their operation.



Kenneth Cook and his wife Patty, owners and operators of Spreading Oaks Farm.



Free-range laying hens at Spreading Oaks Farm.

Atlanta in the Paulding County town of Dallas. Occupying 10-acres of the farm are a small herd of Belted Galloway beef cattle, free-range laying hens and a variety of fresh vegetables and herbs.

When the Cooks' became concerned about contamination of a lake from runoff where their cattle were drinking water, a friend advised them to contact their local NRCS office for assistance.

"Farmers learn that compacted soil in areas where animals concentrate not only causes severe damage to vegetation, but it can lead to erosion and runoff," said Valerie Pickard, District Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Marietta. "Installing a heavy use area is an effective and economical solution."

This past summer, they provided fresh produce to 25

"We love the ease of the whole process," said Patty. "Everything was done in stages, which made the experience so manageable, so useful."

"Keeping the process simple is important to us and NRCS made that happened," — Kenneth Cook said.

CSA members, in addition to their local farmers market. They also offered assistance to local residents on cover crop design and soil management for small farmers, as well as classes on canning and preserving. The Cooks expect their number of crops and CSA memberships to double.

Shifting from what was once a hobby farm to an expanding business, Kenneth expressed the importance of simplicity and taking care of the land. "Keeping the process simple is important to us and NRCS made that happened," Kenneth said. "We understand that it's up to us to take care of what we have and if you use it and abuse it, then it's going to take a long time to recover. We are striving to produce healthy alternatives to our local community."



Cows spend less time at the lake with the installation of watering troughs.

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