

# CONSERVATION Showcase

## Progressive Outreach Services Through Growing Partnerships and Networks

By Alice Love, Agricultural Outreach Liaison, NRCS, Auburn, AL

Coosa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council works closely with local producers to enhance the farming industry in various counties. This is achieved through a outreach partnership between Coosa Valley RC&D and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This partnership nurtures networks with local producers in the promotion and demonstration of conservation practices installed on their farms through NRCS programs.

Mr. Gene Thornton and his wife, Rosie, of “Sneaky Crow Farm” in Randolph County, is active participants of this partnership network. Recently, they hosted an Outreach Workshop on their farm in partnership with NRCS and Coosa Valley RC&D.



Mr. Gene Thornton welcomes participants to “Sneaky Crow Farm” which included a brief overview of the farm’s history, operation, and services received through USDA programs.

Sneaky Crow Farm consists of timber, fruits, and vegetable crops. Mr. Thornton is a USDA Certified Organic producer and has a year-round vegetable operation which services various farmers markets and on-site sales.

As active USDA participants, the Thornton’s have implemented conservation practices such as Organic Farming, Micro-Irrigation, and a Seasonal High Tunnel (Hoop-House) through USDA-NRCS’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Farm Service County (FSA) Executive Director Ms. Carol Gay informed participants of FSA agency programs. She highlighted programs such as the Farm Loan and Crop Insurance Programs.



Sneaky Crow Farm Entrance Sign – USDA Certified Organic

NRCS Randolph/Clay Counties District Conservationist Mr. Brandon McCray was also on the program. He informed participants of necessary documents that needed to be on file with FSA in order to participant in NRCS programs. He gave a brief overview of the EQIP application process, incentives payments targeted for specific conservation practices, and producer’s eligibility categories. As an enhanced outreach service, Mr. McCray

distributed program information handouts and applications on-site to participants. After the workshop, he conducted one-on-one information sharing/guidance to participants as needed. Also, Mr. McCray assured participants that NRCS services are available with or without a request for technical funding assistance. He stated the agency mission is to provide conservation technical and financial assistance per client request.



Standing Right: Randolph County NRCS District Conservationist Brandon McCray.

Tuskegee University Plant Breeder/Horticulturist Mr. Victor Khan informed participants of the impacts of colored plastics used in conjunction with micro-irrigation. These plastic colors consists of clear – heats up soil fast, black – gradually heats up soil, and white – reflects heat away from the plants. He recommended using white plastic for planting in May-June. Fall plantings use black plastic because of its ability to trap heat.



Standing: Mr. Victor Khan, Tuskegee University Plant Breeder/Horticulturist, demonstrates recycled materials used to create micro-irrigation equipment to transplant seedlings

Mr. Khan presented recommendations regarding planting in Seasonal High Tunnels. Recommended plant spacing in tunnels is one foot apart except for tomatoes. He recommended a spacing of two foot apart along with pruning of plants to promote straight plant growth and improve sunlight to plants.

The Thorntons of “Sneaky Crow Farm” hosted an outstanding workshop which

displayed the impacts of effective outreach, partnerships, and networks.



Left: Alabama NRCS State Conservationist William Puckett visits with a local producer (center) and (right) Coosa Valley RC&D Representative Eddie May.