



Georgia's 2017

CLEAN WATER HEROES

Ladybug Farms

TALLULAH RIVER

Rabun County Sustainable Farm Extols Virtues of Rainwater Harvesting

INTRODUCTION:

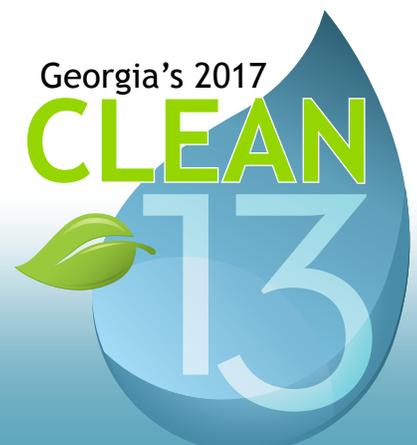
Rainwater harvesting has been around since the dawn of civilization. Cultures in dry climates went to great lengths to collect and store rainwater for use when it was needed. Today, the same low tech engineering is being employed to reduce demands on stressed rivers and streams. In the far reaches of North Georgia, farmer Terri Jagger Blincoe is employing it to keep her 14-acre farm near Persimmon Creek green and growing, even during periodic dry spells in the rain-rich Appalachian Mountains of Rabun County. At Ladybug Farms, some 1600 square-feet of roof tops are used to collect and store up to 6,000 gallons of irrigation water that help Jagger Blincoe produce between 8,000 and 10,000 pounds of sustainably grown vegetables annually.

THE WATER BODY:

Nestled in the upper reaches of the Tallulah River watershed in Rabun County, Ladybug Farms lacked a readily available and abundant supply of surface water. Without a municipal water supply or well, the farm was without a drought backup plan until it installed its rainwater catchment system. Across Georgia, however, agriculture and landscape demands on both groundwater sources and municipal water supplies can reduce flows in streams and rivers that are critical for maintaining stream health and aquatic wildlife. By harvesting rain, the farm is helping keep the mountain stream that flows past Ladybug Farms full and feeding Persimmon Creek, the Tallulah River, Lake Burton and the chain of other hydro-power reservoirs built on the Tallulah in the early 1900s. A gem of Rabun County, the Tallulah is known for its crystal clear lakes and especially for the wild and rugged, 2-mile-long, 1,000-foot deep Tallulah Gorge, one of Georgia's seven natural wonders.

THE CLEAN:

When Jagger Blincoe established her Rabun County sustainable farm in 2007, she wanted to connect local consumers with locally-grown food. But, how to grow food on a farm with limited water supplies—even in a place that gets on average 71 inches of rainfall a year? Jagger Blincoe knew there would be periodic droughts so a dependable—and cheap—supply of water was needed.





She secured it with the help of a U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service program that usually aids farmers in developing wells. With a little persuasion, Jagger Blincoc convinced the federal agency to fund a rainwater harvesting project instead. The system uses four interconnected 1,500-gallon concrete storage tanks that collect rain falling on the roof of an old chicken barn.

The collection system not only serves as crop insurance, it's a money saver. Every drop of water from the system comes to the fields without assistance from pumps or fuel. A 300-foot pipe and 14-foot elevation drop from the cisterns delivers the water through drip irrigation in each quarter acre field. It is considered the largest gravity-fed rainwater catchment system in the state.



The system has enabled Jagger Blincoc to produce upwards of 10,000 pounds of produce annually. She provides weekly produce delivery to some 20 families in Clayton and she sells directly to consumers at the Clayton Farmers Market. During the course of the growing season, she produces more than 40 different varieties of heirloom vegetables, ranging from arugula to zucchini and everything in between...all thirsty for water.



And, she's taken what she's learned from her rainwater system and shared it with other farmers and gardeners through workshops sponsored by Georgia Organics. You might call her Georgia's Johnny Appleseed of rainwater catchment, touting not only the cost-savings of her gravity fed system but also the health benefits of irrigating with mineral rich rainwater as opposed to treated water from municipal supplies.

"Fresh water is becoming less available and increasing in value," she said. "And, I personally believe that most farmers overwater or use water to push production. When you depend on rain water, you are more aware of water usage and most likely more conservative in water usage."

Top: The crops at Ladybug Farms are kept green and growing through what is considered the largest gravity-fed rainwater catchment system in Georgia. Left: Terri Jagger Blincoc produces upwards of 10,000 pounds of produce annually from her Rabun County farm with the help of her rainwater catchment system. Right: Irrigation water for Ladybug Farms, a sustainable farm in Rabun County, is collected from the roof of this and a second building. Downspouts are connected to underground tanks holding 6,000 gallons of rainwater. Bottom: These tanks hold the water that now irrigates Ladybug Farms crops. The system relies entirely on gravity with the fall from the tanks to the field generating enough water pressure to allow drip irrigation.



For More Information Contact:

Terri Jagger Blincoc, Ladybug Farms, 706-782-7244, terri@ladybugfarms.net

Jennette Gayer, Environment Georgia, 404-370-1764, jennette@environmentgeorgia.org