



Georgia's 2018

CLEAN WATER HEROES

Riverview Farms

COOSAWATTEE RIVER

Organic Family Farm Leaves Clean Water Legacy

INTRODUCTION:

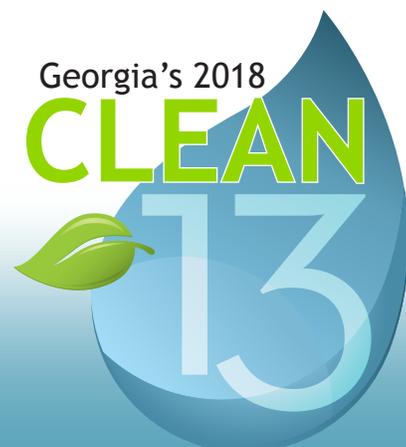
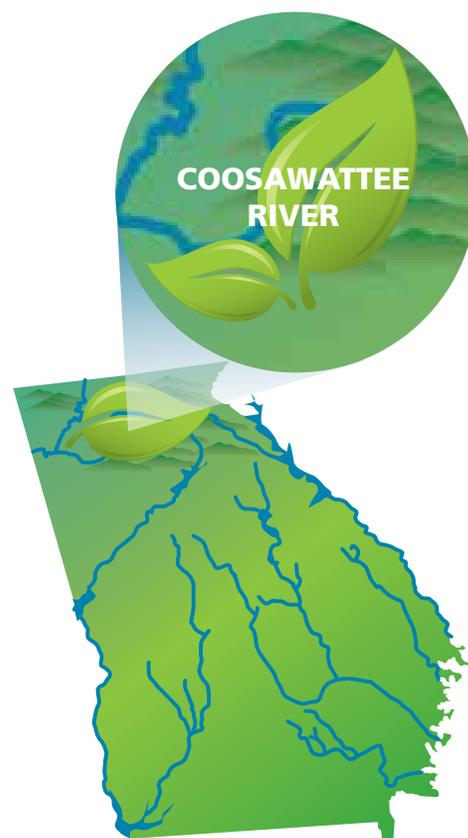
On the Coosawattee River in north Georgia, it's not uncommon to see livestock crowded along the banks drinking from (and defecating in) the river. For river users looking for a cool, refreshing swim in those same waters, the question often arises; "Isn't there a law against that?" The answer is "No." When it comes to Georgia lawmakers, agriculture is, pardon the pun, a sacred cow, exempt from many fundamental clean water regulations. But at least for one mile along the Coosawattee in rural Gordon County, you'll never see a cow in the river. That's because the Swancy family at Riverview Farms, one of the state's largest certified organic farms, serve as stewards of the river by observing state buffer laws (from which farmers are exempt), and excluding livestock from water bodies on the farm. As proprietor Charlotte Swancy said: "We don't want our animals in the water. That just doesn't seem right. People drink that water."

THE WATER BODY:

The Coosawattee River does, in fact, serve as the drinking water source for Gordon County and Calhoun just downstream from Riverview Farms. Formed by the gathering of the Ellijay and Cartecay rivers near Ellijay, the Coosawattee flows out of the north Georgia mountains and some 50 miles to join the Conasauga River near Calhoun and form the Oostanaula. Along the way, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operates Carters Lake and Dam, which at 445 feet in height, is considered the tallest earthen dam east of the Mississippi River. Upstream of Carters Dam, the river is home to federally-threatened goldline darters; downstream the river harbors rare species like freckled and trispot darters as well as the federally-endangered amber darter, all of which require clean, sediment-free water to feed and reproduce.

THE CLEAN:

For the Swancy family keeping their cattle and hogs out of the Coosawattee River, leaving a natural buffer of trees and plants along the river and farming without chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides is just common sense.





All of these practices work to keep dirt, manure and other pollutants on the farm and out of the Coosawattee, and as it turns out, those same measures are just good business practice.

Since converting their 500-acre family farm into a certified organic operation in 2000, the Swancys have steadily expanded their business. During the growing season, they now provide meat and vegetables to some 300 families each week, supply some 30 Atlanta-area restaurants and sell their produce at four local farmers markets each week. Later this year, they will open a butcher shop in Atlanta so that customers can access their fresh beef and pork.

Those customers are seeking more than just food, according to Charlotte Swancy, they are seeking a connection with stewards of the land and want to connect a face with their food.

“Food is a sacred thing. You’re not just putting food in your mouth to meet hunger,” she said. “We’re trying to put meaning behind it. We’re trying to build community around food and farm.”

The Swancys have also been leaders in metro Atlanta’s growing organic and local food movement, serving on the board of Georgia Organics and helping to start the Grant Park and Freedom farmers markets while also mentoring young farmers seeking to start their own organic operations.

After 18 years on the farm, she offers this advice for up and coming farmers: “You’re going to fail, but all the hard work is worth it. It’s rewarding seeing people enjoy our food and seeing children growing up on your food, knowing that you fed them.”

The rewards also accrue to those downstream thankful that at Riverview Farms the livestock are kept out of the Coosawattee.



Top: Garlic grows in the bottomland along the Coosawattee River at Riverview Farms. The Swancy family maintains a natural buffer between their cultivated fields and the river to help protect the river. Left: Riverview Farms, situated on the banks of the Coosawattee River in Gordon County, is one of the largest certified organic farms in the state. The Swancy family farms some 500 acres along the river. Above: Wes and Charlotte Swancy turned their family farm into a certified organic operation in 2000. Since then, they’ve grown into one of the largest organic farms in Georgia, supplying meat and vegetables to some 300 families each week. (Photo by Anthony-Masterson)



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