

The University of Georgia Plant Sciences Farm

I. Background

This report is part of a college wide study evaluating the mission and management of various support units. In response to this request, the Department of Crop and Soil Science (CSS) prepared the following report which includes a summary of background information, a map, a list of projects, a land request form, policy statements, and a list of buildings and equipment.

The Plant Science Farm (PSF) has provided an invaluable resource to faculty in CSS and increasingly to faculty from across the University. The success of several programs, including soybean and forage cultivar improvement, can be directly related to the farming services provided by the PSF. Although the primary focus of the PSF has been applied research, many faculty also use the facility to support fundamental research, teaching, and extension activities. Although the programs in the College have continued to diversify, the need for an agronomic farm will continue to be critical to many programs. Ultimately, our ability to meet the needs of the farming community in Georgia will continue to be linked directly to our faculty's ability to easily access a well managed agronomic farm. The PSF has the potential to serve more diverse programs in the future. By broadening the mission of this resource, the College could enhance the types of programs that we support.

II. History

The (PSF) was established in Oconee County in 1970 by the Department of (Agronomy) Crop & Soil Sciences. The mission of the PSF is to provide support for field research, demonstrations, and a teaching laboratory convenient to College Station for use by research leaders and teachers from the CSS Department as well as by other departments and agencies. The predominant usage of the PSF is in field research. Project leaders from the Departments of CSS, Entomology, Plant Pathology, Genetics, Plant Biology, the cotton variety-testing program, and US Department of Agriculture conduct plant and soils research at this facility. Other units that have conducted research at the PSF include: Environmental Protection Agency, Departments of Horticulture, and Agricultural Engineering. The PSF has hosted students from local schools for tours as well as Future Farmer members training for various contests. The PSF also grows foundation seed increases for the Georgia Seed Development Commission.

III. Plant Sciences Farm Committee

The PSF committee meets as needed and makes recommendations to the Department Head of CSS regarding broad issues concerning the PSF. The Farm Committee consists of faculty and staff members from CSS, Entomology, and Plant Pathology. The day-to-day operations of the farm are managed by the Research Professional II in residence at the farm along with input from the Department Head as needed. To use the PSF, faculty must submit a land request form to the manager prior to the growing season. The faculty member and the manager discuss the project to ensure the success of the project.

IV. Land utilization

The PSF consists of 522 acres located on the corner of Ga. Hwy. 53 and Snows Mill Rd. Of the 522 acres approximately 350 acres are under cultivation during the growing season. The farm is divided into approximately 300 different plots areas that are individually numbered. These plot areas vary in size from .01 acre to 4.5 acres. The remainder of the land is taken up by ponds (7), grassed water-ways, terraces, roadways, unsuitable crop land, or grassed areas around structures. The ponds are filled mainly by surface water runoff from rainfall and are used to irrigate field research areas. The largest pond (14 acres) is fed by a spring and small stream. The Farm has more than 20,000 feet of buried irrigation line that runs over much of the PSF. Most of the land on the PSF has irrigation accessible through this underground line and riser system.

V. Structures

There are 27 structures on the PSF. These consist of: well houses, shops, grain bins, barns used for storage, a pavilion, headquarters building, and a residence. Most of these structures were already in place when the University acquired the farm. The two most recent structures added are the residence built in 1993 and the addition of a tobacco-curing barn in 2001. Four of the buildings are suitable for large equipment storage inside while two buildings provide lean-to sheds for more equipment storage. Many of the structures are in need of repair and/or painting.

VI. Personnel

Herb Yeomans, Research Professional II, 769-6578
Jason Strickland, Agriculture Specialist, 769-7921
Antonio Rooks, Farm Worker II, 769-6578

Historically, the PSF has operated with a full-time crew of six. Due to budget reductions, the PSF is now operating with three full time workers. This is a less than ideal situation in that there are many requirements for research purposes that are labor intensive.

VII. Budget

The NPS allocation from the CSS Department has increased over the last several years. Commodity sales have varied from year to year depending on weather and market prices received. The Farm income through commodity sales has averaged \$50,721 the last three years while the average PSF operation expenses have been \$123,744. This figure does not include salaries of farm personnel. The department has provided an average of \$73,000 in NPS a year. With our present irrigation system, the manpower or resources are not available to irrigate production crops. We concentrate our irrigation on research crops. Thus, all of production is dry-land farmed. The Farm has been susceptible to droughts.

VIII. Future

To provide long-term, outstanding farm service to our faculty in the future a significant increase in funding will be needed. The CSS no longer has the necessary departmental resources needed to maintain quality farm operations. The farm staff has to shift time away from research to commodity production in order to fund operations and meet maintenance needs. The PSF will be forced to continue to delay needed maintenance (building and equipment) and construction if significant increases in support are not forthcoming. The faculty have provided and will continue to provide financial support to the Farm both directly (e.g., purchasing equipment and seed) and indirectly (e.g., using their technical staff). Their support will be even more essential in the future. The PSF has been and will continue to be a valuable resource for the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and also faculty from outside our College. With appropriate changes in how the PSF is managed, this resource could continue to support traditional programs and expand its mission to meet the needs of a growing number of faculty.