

Southern Plantations Group

2410 Westgate Blvd.  
Suite 101  
P.O. Box 70967  
Albany, Georgia 31708  
229-439-0012

# GEORGIA Landowners NEWS

A Newsletter from Southern Plantations Group, Inc.

Summer 2006

Inside this  
Issue:

Water,  
Who Really  
Owns It?

Recent Sales

Current  
Listings

Commodity  
Prices

## Meet Our New Neighbors from Florida

Sixth generation Florida cattle ranchers Layne and Cary Lightsey have found a new home in south Georgia. Like many Florida ranchers, farmers and sportsmen, they have taken advantage of the higher prices offered for their Florida land and expanded their operations into Georgia, where they find cheaper prices and less congestion. It is only natural that they would feel comfortable here. Georgia is in their blood. "Our ancestors left south Georgia in 1858 and moved to Florida. We're just moving back," said Cary.

SPG has had the pleasure of meeting and assisting a number of Florida families in their Georgia acquisitions. In the past three years the demand for land in Florida has fueled a boom in Georgia farmland, mostly through Section 1031 tax-deferred exchanges. We would like to introduce our readers to two Florida families who have become our new neighbors - the Lightseys and the Sullivans.

The Lightsey family, headed by brothers Layne and Cary Lightsey, has acquired 3,500 acres of south Georgia irrigated cropland, pastureland and woodland as a base of operations in Georgia. Layne explains, "We wanted a place to background our heifers in winter, and frankly we wanted to find a place with fewer people, and we like the people of south Georgia." Both brothers cited southwest Georgia's water resources and the ability to rent out the pivots for summer crops as additional attractions to the area.

While the Lightseys plan to maintain their Florida operations where they have sold development rights on some of their property, they look forward to their expansion in Georgia. Their new farm gives them growing space for future generations. The

family proudly counts twelve generations of cattle ranching in America.

The Lightseys were recognized in 2006 as the national winner of the Environmental



Cary and Layne Lightsey

Stewardship Award, a prestigious award sponsored by the USDA and other national organizations, recognizing their stewardship of their ranchland.

Another Florida ranching family establishing a south Georgia base is the Earli Sullivan family. Mr. Sullivan is a retired Florida wildlife ranger and lifelong cattle rancher. He sold his Florida property and purchased 400 acres of south Georgia irrigated cropland and hunting land.

Mr. Sullivan is renting out his irrigated cropland and enjoys hunting and fishing on the property. At some point in the future he may move part of his cattle herd to Georgia.

*Continued on page 3*

visit our website at [www.splantations.com](http://www.splantations.com)

# Water, Who Really Owns It?

Southwest Georgia farmers are fortunate to farm on top of a large pool of underground water in the three main aquifers that supply irrigation water to the area. The abundance of water is perhaps the most valuable resource available to southwest Georgia farmers. But whose water is it? Is water a part of the bundle of rights that farmers purchased when they acquired the land - mineral rights, surface water rights, air rights, ground water rights, etc? And, how much control can the state exert over the water found on the land?



**Economic Benefits from Water Rights:** In recent years these questions have become increasingly important to Georgia farmers as the state has placed restrictions on the farmers' use of water. Excessive regulation could have a major economic impact - both on the farmers' ability to grow crops and on land prices. Irrigated cropland can have a value 50% higher than non-irrigated cropland, even excluding the cost of the irrigation equipment.

**Southwest Georgia Aquifers:** Three main aquifers supply irrigation water to the area. The Clayton aquifer is the deepest, has the purest water and is used by most cities. The Claiborne is primarily a shallow sand aquifer. The largest aquifer in the region, the Floridan, is considered one of the best in the nation. This limestone aquifer produces an excellent quality and quantity of water. The Floridan runs near the Flint River from Dooley County southwest to the Florida state line in the area called the middle and lower Flint River Basin. When rainfall is normal, the Floridan and Claiborne recharge each year.

**History of State Water Regulation:** The state did not regulate agricultural water use in south and central Georgia other than preventing pollution of surface and ground water until the early 1980's. In 1989, after droughts led to massive increases in irrigation, the state required all landowners using more than 500 gallons of irrigation water per minute to obtain a water use permit. The State of Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) issued all permits without restriction until the mid 1990's when restrictions were placed on surface water to protect

prior permitted downstream water users. Most new permits for the Clayton aquifer are denied because the Clayton aquifer is not recharging each year.

In the late 1990's the States of Florida and Alabama sued the State of Georgia for overusing the water in rivers flowing into their states. Because of the lawsuit, the State of Georgia placed a moratorium on new surface water permits in the Flint River Basin and well permits in the Floridan aquifer. In response to the lawsuits and the need to deal with a limited supply of water, in 2003 the State of Georgia enacted the "Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Planning Act". This act required a water management plan for each region of the state to manage the water resources in a sustainable manner to support the state's economy, to protect public health and natural systems and to enhance the quality of life for all citizens. Under the planning act, the "Flint River Basin Regional Water Development and Conservation Plan" was presented in April of this year.

**Flint River Basin Regional Water Development and Conservation Plan:** A complete copy of the plan can be obtained at [www.gadnr.org/frbp](http://www.gadnr.org/frbp). The plan is 242 pages long, but pages 14 to 36 contain the most information for irrigators. The primary groups who contributed to the plan were Georgia EPD, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC consisted of 19 members, including 11 irrigated crop farmers in the region. The SAC was the landowners' advocate in formulating the plan and protecting real property rights. The plan lifted the moratorium on issuing new irrigation use permits with certain restrictions. Even in times of severe droughts, usage on newly issued groundwater permits will not be restricted under the plan. The EPD will have the right to restrict use on any newly issued surface water use permits. The restricted use will be controlled by pre-determined stream flows and prior permitted down stream users.

Irrigated cropland can have a value 50% higher than non-irrigated cropland, even excluding the cost of the irrigation equipment.

## **Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC):**

Considering the political situation of the state and the nation, the new plan is the very best property owners could have hoped for. I encourage each of you to especially thank the following farmer members: James Lee Adams, Lucius Adkins, John Bridges, Chop Evans, Hal Haddock, Bubba Johnson, Mike Newberry, Kim Rentz, Steve Singletary, Jimmy Webb, and Joe Williams.

Continued from page 1 Florida

**State Regulation - Live with It or Fight It?** Many property owners feel the water on their property belongs to them and the state should mind its own business. To definitively answer the question of who really owns the water a property owner would have to enter into a protracted, perilous and expensive lawsuit against the state. For now, living with the regulation may be best, but all property owners should be active and diligent in protecting all of their property rights for it is an unending battle with major economic implications.

By Jeff Peterson

Continued from page 1 Florida

His family was among the earliest settlers in Florida, arriving there in the early 1800's. He commented, "I'm really buying this for my children and grandchildren. Florida is getting too crowded for the lifestyle my family and I like, and I like the people of south Georgia."

Make sure you extend some Southern hospitality to the new neighbors in your area.

By: Joe Marshall



Fishing, hunting, and irrigated cropland on the Sullivan property.

## Recent Sales

### Marion Co, Ga - May 2006

**898 acres** sold for **\$3,011 per acre**. Very nice cattle ranch consisted of 70 acres of dry cropland, 258 acres of pasture, 199 acres of planted pines, 355 acres of natural pines/hardwoods, 9 acres in ponds and 7 acres in building area. Improvements are in good condition and consist of a brick home, small hunting lodge, horse barn and metal shop-shed. Timber value was estimated at \$530,000. Property had an abundant deer and turkey population.

### Calhoun Co, Ga - June 2006

**1,048 acres** sold for **\$3,000 per acre**. Good quality property containing 456 acres of center pivot irrigated cropland, 245 acres of dry cropland, 75 acres of planted pines, 47 acres of upland woodland, 200 acres of wet woodland, 20 acres in ponds and 5 acres in building area. Timber value was estimated at \$150,000. Property had a 6,600 sq. ft. metal equipment shop.

### Calhoun Co, Ga - June 2006

**505 acres** sold for **\$1,840 per acre**. The property consisted of 186 acres of dry cropland, 86 acres of young planted pines, 124 acres of upland woodland and 109 acres of wet woodland. Property had good soils, but the fields did not lend themselves to irrigation. Timber value was estimated at \$65,000.

### Early Co, Ga - March 2006

**517 acres** sold for **\$2,814 per acre**. The property consisted of 155 acres of center pivot irrigated cropland, 45 acres of dry cropland, 135 acres of planted pines and 182 acres of natural woodland. The timber cruise indicated a value of \$500,000. Good quality property with excellent deer and turkey populations.

### Terrell-Calhoun Co, Ga - May 2006

**2,605 acres** sold at public auction for **\$3,110 per acre**. The property consisted of 12 tracts ranging in size from 20 acres to 563 acres. In total, the properties consisted of approximately 870 acres of center pivot irrigated cropland, 511 acres of dry cropland, 704 acres of mostly young CRP planted pines, 455 acres of natural woodland, 55 acres in ponds and 10 acres in building area. Main building improvement was nice cabin on a lake.

### Miller Co, Ga - January 2006

**238 acres** sold for **\$3,000 per acre**. Good quality property consisting of 180 acres of center pivot irrigated cropland, 32 acres of young planted pines, and 26 acres of wet woodland/other. Property had excellent peanut and cotton bases.

### Early Co, Ga - March 2006

**150 acres** sold for **\$1,848 per acre**. Fair quality property consisting of 125 acres of dry cropland and 25 acres of wet woodland with an estimated timber value of \$25,000.

Southern Plantations Group, Inc.  
 2410 Westgate Blvd.  
 Suite 101  
 P.O. Box 70967  
 Albany, Georgia 31708

Phone: 229-439-0012  
 Fax: 229-883-8881  
 E-mail: jmarshall@splantations.com  
 jpeterson@splantations.com  
 cbishop@splantations.com  
 www.splantations.com

Southern Plantations Group, Inc. (SPG) is a professional agricultural consulting firm specializing in real estate sales, farm management, farm and timberland appraisals, long term fixed interest rate lending, and farm accounting. For more than 25 years SPG has provided services to farm and timberland owners, lenders, and operators.

## Current Listings

### Herod Lake Farm

1,573 acres - Terrell County

Listing Price: \$3,500 per acre or \$5,505,500

**First quality center pivot irrigated cropland** adjoined by planted pine and natural woodland generating possible yearly cash rental **income and timber growth** of over \$200,000. Great fishing in the beautiful 70 acre lake. The 300 acres of planted pines, 389 acres of natural hardwoods and extensive Herod and Chickasawhatchee Creek frontage support **excellent deer and quail hunting**. Over the past 25 years an average of 35 deer have been harvested each year. The property has produced Boone and Crockett bucks of 155, 153, and 150 points. Property improvements include **a very nice brick home** and two equipment shops/sheds. Located approximately 15 miles west of Albany with good road frontage on GA Hwy 55 but secluded with no internal public roads.



**We have investors** who want to purchase recreational timber tracts and center pivot irrigated cropland with or without a lease back from the owner. If you are thinking about selling your property within the next few years, this may be the best time with such an active market.

**Please call for a confidential consultation.**

## COMMODITY PRICES

Futures	July 06	July 05
Corn	2.36	2.46
Wheat	3.82	3.50
Soybeans	5.90	6.10
Cotton	0.53	0.54

Commodity prices are stable and in the low end of the range for the past 5 years.

## Long Term Interest Rates

SPG offers low-interest fixed rate loans up to 30 years amortization to landowners. Lower rates with excellent credit. Rates change daily. Call for more information on our long term loans.

5 Year 7.0 %  
 7 Year 7.2 %  
 10 Year 7.3 %  
 15 Year 7.5 %

## LOCAL TIMBER PRICES

Pine Pulpwood	\$7.50/ton
Pine Chip-N-Saw	\$23/ton
Pine Sawtimber	\$48/ton
Hardwood Pulpwood	\$7/ton
Hardwood Sawtimber	\$30/ton

Timber prices are decreasing but are in the upper end of the range for the past 5 years.