

## Planted Pines Were a Profitable Decision

By **TILDA MIMS**, Education Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

**F**IFTEEN YEARS AGO, Wayne and Kathleen Baines had a very important decision to make about managing their 97-acre farm in Lamar County. For years, they had juggled busy careers and family responsibilities while putting in long hours raising cattle. Now, they were about to lose half of their work force, since their son Heath was preparing for college and Wayne's father was in his early nineties.

They were evaluating options when young Heath recommended forgoing the cattle operation for planted pine. Wayne followed up on the idea with a visit to the Alabama Forestry Commission office in Vernon, and was soon sold on the idea.

Wayne and Heath converted 70 acres of pasture and hay fields into pine in 1985 with CRP cost-share assistance, and the results have been very profitable. The land had been limed and fertilized for hay fields so the trees grew well. Twelve years later, a thinning generated \$375 per acre or about \$20,000.

"That's about 75 percent more profit from trees than I would have seen with hay and cows in the same 12 years," Wayne said. They will thin again at 18 years according to the weather and the market. "I want someone to keep growing cattle because I want to keep eating steak," laughs Wayne, but his family has never regretted the change.

The deer, turkey and quail in the area are clearly enjoying the change in land management style, too. Wayne and Kathleen say there were absolutely no deer on property in the early 1980s, while today it is not uncommon to see 12-20 deer at a time. In 1999, 16 deer were harvested on the property.

Strips of clover around the four-acre pond have attracted bobwhite quail and, for the first time, they have nesting turkeys. Wayne started the pond about 30 years ago despite advice that the area would not support a pond. He has

enlarged it twice and it is now stocked with catfish, bream and bass.

The Baines have also established wildflower gardens and planted wheat. A spring prescribed burn by the Alabama Forestry Commission reduced wildfire fuels and provided a needed boost to wildlife.

Across the pond is a lovely brick home complete with a brick patio and brick walkway. If you look closely, you will see that most of the bricks are not just run-of-the-mill. They are different shapes and sizes, and some have detailed lettering.

Wayne started collecting bricks long before he had a house to put them on. "In May 1995, they were tearing down the old Brown Motel across from the ALFA office in Vernon and I decided to get a few as keepsakes," Wayne recalls. "Before long I started collecting brick from all around." Policyholders, friends and family have helped Wayne amass a collection more than 17,000 bricks from locations as diverse as Fort Morgan and the Ohio State Correction Center. The lake house, which is home to their son Heath, features bricks from 900 different places.

Wayne and Kathleen Baines were certified as TREASURE Forest landowners in May 1995 and were recertified this year.

Wayne is president of the award-winning Lamar County Forestry Planning Committee and is a member of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association. "Being active in forestry organizations is very important to us. The opportunity for continuing education through the planning committee or the landowner conference has helped me to pick up ideas for things to try. It may be something as simple as a flower or a tree, but I always learn something."

"Wayne is a landowner who is always receptive to new ideas," says Dan Lassetter, county manager for the

Forestry Commission in Lamar County. Dan and Harold Jordan, forestry specialist, have worked with the Baines family for several years, helping them make sound decisions and to manage their property for optimum productivity. Some future ventures they are exploring include planting more wildlife foods, limbing pines to 16 feet along roadways, installing a culvert below the pond and developing a road around the property to serve as a firebreak.

Wayne is an ALFA insurance agent with an office in Vernon and Kathleen works in the office of the Mississippi School of Mathematics and Science. Their daughter Felicia is a graduate of the University of Alabama and lives in Texas. Their son Heath is a graduate of Mississippi State University and is a registered forester working in private industry in Pickens County. 🏡



Wayne and Kathleen Baines