

# Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

*Press Release*  
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For Immediate Release

## **TIM SUTPHIN NAMED 2008 VIRGINIA FARMER OF THE YEAR**

As a child, Timothy Dale Sutphin developed a passion for working with cattle. “When I was six, my dad gave me my first cow,” he recalls. “I’ve added more cows each year since then, and I’m now 51.” He relies on a diverse mix of forages. He’s improving herd genetics by using artificial insemination and estrous synchronization. In addition, he realizes higher returns by retaining ownership of his calves during feedlot finishing.

His Hillwinds Farm in Dublin, Va., now encompasses 2,270 acres, 1,123 acres of rented land and 1,047 acres of owned land. He runs a commercial cow-calf operation with 850 bred cows and heifers. He also raises about 480 head of stocker cattle for backgrounding. In addition, he operates a bull test station where he feeds about 230 purebred bulls each year. He and his family also raise about 120 head of commercial ewes and they have a small herd of horses.

As a result of his success as a commercial cattle producer, Sutphin has been selected as the 2008 Virginia winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. Sutphin now joins nine other state winners from the Southeast as finalists for the award. The overall winner will be announced on Tuesday, Oct. 14 at the Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show in Moultrie, Ga.

Sutphin grew up on a 40-acre farm where he kept sheep for a 4-H project. When he graduated from high school, he owned seven or eight cows and 70 ewes. “As a kid, I never saw much income from farming, and it is hard to make a living from farming, especially when you start out from scratch, but I’ve been able to do that,” he says.

After college, he took a job managing a farm, and started looking to buy land. He bought and sold several farms over the years. He bought his first one with a Farmers Home Administration guaranteed loan, and bought another with owner financing. In 1994, he helped pay for a farm by backgrounding stocker cattle. In 2000, he bought more land at an auction, and in 2004, he bought the farm where he worked 13 years as manager.

Sutphin and his wife Cathy have four children, Laura, 20; Alison, 17; Caroline, 12; and Heath, 11. The entire family helps on the farm, and the children specialize in caring for the sheep. “The ewes have allowed our four children to contribute,” says Sutphin. “Our two oldest daughters provide most of the labor for the sheep enterprise with assistance from the two younger children. Profits from the sheep enterprise are paying tuition for

our oldest daughter who will be a junior at Virginia Tech. We plan to continue this for our second daughter, Alison, a rising senior in high school.”

Sutphin says his best decision was to marry Cathy. “She has been very supportive,” he says. “Cathy was raised in a family that was poorer than mine, and she came from an area where most kids didn’t go to college. But she went to college, and later returned to earn a PhD. She has had a long career as a 4-H and Extension agent, and is currently interim director of the entire 4-H program in Virginia. Cathy works hard and has done well in her career, but we have made sacrifices to get what we have now.”

In operating the custom bull test station, Sutphin feeds consigned bulls from October through March of the following year. “This operation provided additional income which allowed me to hire a full-time employee,” he adds.

He likes the combination of Angus and Simmental breeds. Once his cattle reach the feedlot, they consistently provide top performance. “I believe the best hedge against a poor cattle market is to produce high quality cattle,” he says. He has retained ownership on his feedlot cattle since 1996.

Artificial insemination and estrous synchronization are two key technologies that have paid off by improving cowherd genetics and adding value to calves. “We get more return from AI than from anything we do,” he says. “After we went to A.I., we discovered that AI-sired steers brought \$50-70 per head more than those sired naturally by good cleanup bulls. We saw another big boost when daughters of AI-sired calves were bred with AI. AI is worth nearly \$150 per head. Through AI, we can make fast genetic progress by using the best, highly proven bulls in the country. AI also allows us to monitor heifer development, thus we can keep mature cow size under control while improving the cost of production and efficiency. Retained ownership and selling our cattle on a grid allows us to reap the full value of our genetic package.”

Estrous synchronization relies on hormones to regulate the breeding cycles of heifers and cows. “Estrous synchronization is now a reliable technology that allows us to use AI and gain an edge in the marketplace while tightening the calving season.”

“To be successful in the cattle industry, your cost of production must be lower than most producers and you must add value to your cattle,” he says. “I decided I could make a living in the mainstream of the cattle industry using practical and innovative practices.”

His long-term goals include continuing to operate a successful mainstream beef enterprise. He also hopes to become debt-free within ten years, and to plan for succession of the farm should one of his children decide to farm.

Sutphin’s forage program is focused on producing high quality, low cost feed. He’s improving forage utilization by using rotational grazing and adding improved fencing and watering systems.

He also depends on a diversity of forages. “In one 10-foot diameter, I once counted four species of grasses, three species of legumes, and other plant species you could call nutritious weeds,” he says. “I measure efficiency by being able to increase the cow numbers per area. We had 2.06 acres per animal unit last year.”

He also cuts and bales hay, but feeds hay for only about 60 days during the winter. This year, he planted 45 acres of corn for silage. He hopes this new source of nutrition will allow him to feed his calves longer in Virginia while reducing the days the calves spend on feed during feedlot finishing.

Sutphin is active in a number of beef organizations. In addition, he supports the New River Valley Fair, FFA Alumni, is a 4-H volunteer and is a member of Pulaski County Farm Bureau. The Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Association twice named him as Commercial Cattleman of the Year.

“The 4-H program changed my life,” says Sutphin. Local Extension agent Matthew Miller nominated Sutphin for the Farmer of the Year award. Miller’s father was Sutphin’s 4-H Extension agent when he was a youth. The award is coordinated in Virginia by James Riddell with Virginia Tech University Extension Service.

“I’ve told one of my daughters who is a good student to do what makes you happy, and that’s what I’m doing in raising my cattle,” he says.

As the Virginia state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo award, Sutphin will now receive a \$2,500 cash award and an expense paid trip to the Sunbelt Expo from Swisher International of Jacksonville, FL, a jacket and a \$200 gift certificate from the Williamson-Dickie Company, and a \$500 gift certificate from Southern States.

He is also now eligible for the \$14,000 that will go to the overall winner. Other prizes for the overall winner include the use of a Massey Ferguson tractor for a year from Massey Ferguson North America, a custom made Canvasback gun safe from Misty Morn Safe Co., and another \$500 gift certificate from the Southern States cooperative. Also, Williamson-Dickie will provide another jacket, a \$500 gift certificate and \$500 in cash to the overall winner.

Swisher International, through its Swisher Sweets cigar brand, and the Sunbelt Expo are sponsoring the Southeastern Farmer of the Year Award for the 19<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Swisher has contributed some \$724,000 in cash awards and other honors since the award was initiated in 1990.

Previous state winners from Virginia include: Nelson Gardner of Bridgewater, 1990; Russell Inskip of Culpepper, 1991; Harry Bennett of Covington, 1992; Hilton Hudson of Alton, 1993; Buck McCann of Carson, 1994; George M. Ashman, Jr. of Amelia, 1995; Bill Blalock of Baskerville, 1996; G. H. Peery III of Ceres, 1997; James Bennett of Red House, 1998; Ernest Copenhaver of Meadowview, 1999; John Davis of Port Royal, 2000; James Huffard III of Crockett, 2001; J. Hudson Reese of Scottsburg, 2002; Charles

Parkerson of Suffolk, 2003; Lance Everett of Stony Creek, 2004; Monk Sanford of Orange, 2005; Paul House of Nokesville, 2006; and Steve Berryman of Surry, 2007.

Virginia has had two overall winners with Nelson Gardner of Bridgewater in 1990 and Charles Parkerson of Suffolk, 2003.

Sutphin's farm, along with the farms of the other nine state finalists, will be visited by a distinguished panel of judges during the week of August 4-8. The judges for this year include Jim Butler, a retired USDA agricultural engineer and research leader; Elwyn Deal, a retired Clemson University Extension leader; and James Lee Adams, a farmer from Camilla, Ga., and the overall winner of the award in 2000.

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**Note to media:** The farm of Tim Sutphin will be visited by the judges on Thursday, Aug. 7 from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. The Sutphin home is located at 5429 Thornspring Church Rd., Dublin, VA 24084. If you would like to visit the farm during the judging, please call Janie Batson at 704-788-7026, or contact her by e-mail at [jbbatson@ctc.net](mailto:jbbatson@ctc.net), or contact the Sutphins by calling 540-980-5848.