Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo

Southeastern Farmer of the Year

*News Release*

For Release Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2014 after 1:30 p.m.

**Georgia Crop Farmer Philip Grimes Named Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year for 2014**

(Moultrie, Ga.)—Philip Grimes, a farmer from Tifton, Georgia who is known for his conservation practices and high crop yields, has been selected as the overall winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award for 2014.

Grimes was named as the overall winner during the Willie B. Withers Luncheon held during the opening day of the 2014 Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show. Grimes was chosen Farmer of the Year over nine other state winners who were finalists for the award.

This is the 25th year for the Farmer of the Year award. It recognizes excellence in agricultural production and farm management, along with leadership in farm and community organizations. The award also honors family contributions in producing safe and abundant supplies of food, fiber and shelter products.

Peter Ghiloni, president and chief executive officer of Swisher International, Inc., of Jacksonville, Fla., praised Grimes for his farming accomplishments. “Philip is an outstanding representative of the farming industry, and it is an honor for our company and our Swisher Sweets cigar brand to recognize Philip and his family for their farming success,” said Ghiloni.

Ron Carroll, marketing vice president with Swisher, represented the company in presenting the cash award to Grimes. “Philip’s farming success is a direct result of his hard work,” said Carroll. “The farming profession is blessed to have so many dedicated producers, and there is no doubt that a great farmer has been selected as the overall winner during this 25th year of our Farmer of the Year awards.”

Grimes expressed his appreciation to Swisher and the other award sponsors. “I have a great team of supporters who help me operate my farm,” he said. “I also want to congratulate the other state winners. They are excellent farmers and leaders who are fine representatives of our industry.”

His wife Jane manages the farm’s office and leads some of the farm’s initiatives in marketing produce and in maintaining food safety.

Grimes has farmed for 37 years. He grows peanuts, cotton, cantaloupes, broccoli, snap beans and corn on his 2,210-acre farm. As a result of his high peanut yields, he has been a longtime member of the Georgia Peanut Achievement Club. He also raises high-yield cotton, and his produce crops are consistently high in quality. He plants a portion of his land specifically to attract wildlife.

Brian Tankersley, county Extension coordinator in Tift County, Ga., nominated Grimes for the award. Tankersley praised Grimes and his farming skills as being among “the best of the best. ” Tankersley also worked with Grimes to implement an innovative doublecropping-interplanting crop production system that features cantaloupe and cotton plants growing together, with the cantaloupe harvested first and the cotton picked later in the year.

The new Farmer of the Year was selected for the honor by three judges who visited his farm and the farms of the other nine state winners during early August of this year. The judges included farmer Brian Kirksey of Amity, Ark., who was selected as the overall winner in 2008, John Woodruff, retired University of Georgia Extension soybean specialist from Tifton, Ga., and Clark Garland, longtime University of Tennessee Extension agricultural economist from Maryville, Tenn.

The judges were impressed with his high peanut yields of more than 7,000 pounds per acre. They were also impressed with his three-bale cotton yields produced after growing cantaloupes on the land during the same year.

Kirksey, this year’s senior judge, said, “All of the state winners are great farmers, but our judges unanimously agreed that Philip earned the honor of being named as the overall winner.”

“Philip pays close attention to all of the important details of growing high-yield crops,” says Kirksey. “We were also impressed with his diversification, his doublecropping, his food safety practices, how he brands his cantaloupes and his meticulous documentation of his farming practices. He has spent a lot of money to make sure he has enough water for irrigation. We were also impressed with his efforts to attract wildlife and his conservation practices.”

As the Southeastern Farmer of the Year, Grimes will receive a $15,000 cash award plus $2,500 as a state winner from Swisher International. He will also receive the use of a Massey Ferguson tractor for a year from Massey Ferguson North America, a $500 gift certificate from the Southern States cooperative, the choice of either $1000 in PhytoGen® cottonseed or $500 to a designated charity from PhytoGen® cottonseed and a Columbia jacket from Ivey’s Outdoor and Farm Supply.

Each state winner received a $2,500 cash award and an expense paid trip to the Sunbelt Expo from Swisher International, a $500 gift certificate from the Southern States cooperative, the choice of either $1,000 in PhytoGen® cottonseed or a $500 donation to a designated charity from PhytoGen® cottonseed, and a Columbia vest from Ivey’s Outdoor and Farm Supply.

The other state winners this year include Phillip Hunter of Birmingham, Ala., Andy Gill of McGehee, Ark., C. Dennis Carlton of Tampa, Fla., Ray Allan Mackey of Elizabethtown, Ky., Danny Murphy of Canton, Miss., Frank Howey, Jr., of Monroe, N.C., Walter Lewis Dantzler of Santee, S.C., John Keller of Maryville, Tenn., and Robert “Tom” Nixon II of Rapidan, Va.

###