

Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release

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North Carolina Farmer Danny Kornegay Named Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year for 2015

(Moultrie, Ga.)—Danny Kornegay, a diversified farmer from Princeton, North Carolina, has been selected as the overall winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award for 2015.

Kornegay was named as the overall winner during the Willie B. Withers Luncheon held during the opening day of the 2015 Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show. Kornegay was chosen as Farmer of the Year over nine other state winners who were finalists for the award.

A farmer for 45 years, Kornegay operates about 5,500 acres. His major commodities include tobacco, sweet potatoes, cotton, soybeans, wheat, peanuts and hogs. He grows crops in both North Carolina and South Carolina.

This is the 26th 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 Kornegay for his farming accomplishments. “It is an honor for our company and our Swisher Sweets cigar brand to recognize Danny and his family for their farming success,” said Ghiloni. “Danny is an outstanding representative of the farming industry.”

Ron Carroll, marketing vice president with Swisher, represented the company in presenting the cash award to Kornegay. Carroll said the farming profession has many successful producers, and that Kornegay and his hard working family are highly deserving of the award.

“I enjoyed visiting Danny’s farm and the farms of the other nine state winners,” said Carroll. “Accompanying the judges on their trip to these farms made it clear to me that our country’s agricultural industry is indeed in capable hands.”

Kornegay expressed his thanks to Swisher and the other award sponsors. “I love farming, and I am blessed that my children and grandchildren are with me on the farm,” he said. “I also want to congratulate the other state winners of this award and their families for their contributions to our farming industry.”

His farm has about 500 acres of flue-cured tobacco. Sweet potatoes have emerged as a major crop on 800 acres. Modern packing facilities help Kornegay and his family in marketing their sweet potatoes. Kornegay and other local farmers built a modern cotton gin and warehouse to help in marketing that crop. Peanuts are a fairly new crop for the farm, and this year Kornegay doubled his peanut acres. He has also explored diversification into other crops such as squash, greens and watermelons.

The farm’s swine operation specializes in finishing about 8,000 to 10,000 head per year in four hog houses. Kornegay raises the hogs on contract for Goldsboro Milling Company.

During his journey to become a successful farmer, Kornegay has overcome his own serious health challenges including long months of kidney dialysis along with surgeries for kidney transplants.

His wife Susie worked alongside her husband in the fields during the early years of their marriage. She now helps to manage the farm’s office and also spends as much time as possible with their five grandsons.

Their daughter Kim Kornegay-LeQuire was a social worker and then a homemaker who started working full time on the farm several years ago. She now handles food safety, payroll, promotion, quality control and customer service.

Their son Dan is the farm’s manager. In addition to supervising crop production practices, he also focuses on grain marketing, implementing conservation practices, maintaining application records and buying seed and other crop inputs. Dan also oversees operations on the family’s South Carolina farms.

Milo Lewis-Ferrell, area organization director with North Carolina Farm Bureau, nominated Kornegay for Farmer of the Year. Lewis-Ferrell admires Kornegay for his ability to handle obstacles in farming. “He has a passion for the land, and he does what’s right for his land,” said Lewis-Ferrell. “He has a great farming family, and they do it all together.”

The new Farmer of the Year was selected for the honor by three judges who visited his farm and the farms of the other state winners during early August of this year.

The judges this year included John Woodruff, retired University of Georgia Extension soybean specialist from Tifton, Ga., Clark Garland, longtime University of Tennessee Extension agricultural economist from Maryville, Tenn., and farmer Thomas Porter, Jr., of Concord, N.C., who was the overall winner in 2011.

Woodruff served as this year's senior judge. He said that Kornegay's farm impressed the judges with its diversity of farming enterprises. In the 26-year history of the award, Kornegay is one of the most diversified farmers to be selected as the overall Farmer of the Year winner.

"His farming operation features a wide assortment of profitable agronomic field crops," says Woodruff. "He also grows the more specialized horticultural crop of sweet potatoes. In addition, his major livestock enterprise features the production of hogs on contract."

Woodruff said that all of the state winners are outstanding farmers and selecting an overall winner was a big challenge. However, he said the judges unanimously agreed on Kornegay as this year's top Farmer of the Year.

The judges were impressed that Kornegay's two children hold key positions in the farming business and are responsible for much of the farm's overall success. The judges also admired how Kornegay's young grandsons are also enjoying growing up and working on the farm.

"Getting to see the top ten farms in the Southeast was an incredible experience," said Woodruff. "These farms are highly efficient, innovative, profitable and environmentally friendly. In visiting with these farm families, we met individuals who are kind, friendly and energetic."

Woodruff praised all of the state winners for their leadership in farm and community organizations. He said the judges admired their generosity in helping other farmers and in supporting and encouraging the activities of their loving family members.

"Many of these farmers, including our winner Danny Kornegay, have overcome great adversities to become top farmers with outstanding families," said Woodruff.

As the Southeastern Farmer of the Year, Kornegay 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 \$1,000 in cottonseed or a \$500 donation to a designated charity from PhytoGen, 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 cottonseed or a \$500 donation to a designated charity from PhytoGen, and a Columbia vest from Ivey's Outdoor and Farm Supply.

In the 26-year history of the award, Kornegay is the fourth overall Farmer of the Year winner to come from North Carolina.

The other state winners this year include Rickey Cornutt of Boaz, Ala., Nathan Reed of Marianna, Ark., Vic Story of Lake Wales, Fla., James Lyles of Ringgold, Ga., Jack Trumbo of Simpsonville, Ky., Allen Eubanks of Lucedale, Miss., Tom Trantham of Pelzer, S.C., George Clay of Pelham, Tenn., and Donald Turner of North Dinwiddie, Va.

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