

Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

Press Release

Contact: Janie Batson

704-788-7026

e-mail: jbbatson@ctc.net

For Immediate Release

SCOTT CANNADA NAMED 2011 MISSISSIPPI FARMER OF THE YEAR

Scott Cannada of Edwards, Miss., is the eighth generation of his family to farm in west central Mississippi. A full time farmer for 11 years, Cannada says members of his family farmed in the area as early as 1827. His main enterprises are corn, soybeans and beef cattle.

As a result of his success as a crop and cattle farmer, Cannada has been selected as the 2011 Mississippi winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. Cannada now joins eight other state winners from the Southeast as finalists for the award. The overall winner will be announced on Tuesday, Oct. 18 at the Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show in Moultrie, Ga.

Cannada farms in partnership with his mother and father. The farm includes about 2,500 acres of which 1,750 acres are owned and 750 acres are rented. His crops last year included corn on 552 acres yielding 112 bushels per acre, soybeans on 546 acres yielding 40.4 bushels per acre and hay on 150 acres yielding 3.4 tons per acre.

“Our yields last year were down due to dry weather,” he recalls. “I was blessed to produce the yields I did.” His five-year per acre yields are better, 128 bushels for corn and 45 bushels for soybeans.

His yields are impressive considering he doesn’t irrigate. “Irrigation isn’t feasible because the water is too deep in the soil,” he explains. Crop insurance paid off in 2009 when he harvested only a small portion of his soybeans.

He stopped growing cotton several years ago. “I sold my picker and I’m not ready to get back into cotton, even with high prices,” he adds. Though his family grew cotton for many years, plant bugs hurt yields during the final years he grew the crop.

Cannada has about 700 acres in pasture that support 200 cows. His pastures include Coastal bermudagrass, tall fescue, bahiagrass and native grasses. He also grows Sumrall 007 bermudagrass, a variety developed in Mississippi, along with Alicia bermudagrass.

The beef herd consists of crossbred cows bred to Charolais bulls. He uses a six- to seven-month breeding season, and calving takes place from December until early May.

Last year, he sold 175 calves at weights of 500 to 600 pounds. He sells calves to a nearby farm that carries the animals to heavier weights through a backgrounding operation. Cannada has a longstanding business relationship with the buyer and has been pleased with the prices he receives for his calves. He has built fences, a loading chute and designed and built a 75- by 100-foot steel working pen for treating his cattle.

“We’re fortunate to have two end users of corn within 40 miles of our farm,” says Cannada. He prices 60% of his anticipated corn production in March prior to harvest. He sells a portion to the Cal-Maine poultry operation and some to a Bunge-Ergon ethanol plant. “I store the remaining 40% of my corn for a few months after harvesting and sell it to Cal-Maine. This historically brings me higher prices,” he adds.

He prices about half of his soybeans before delivery to a grain elevator in Louisiana, and delivers the rest to the same buyer after harvesting at the prevailing market prices.

He hopes to start using chicken litter as fertilizer for his pasture and hay land. Most of his hay is used in his cow-calf operation, but he also sells about 75 to 100 bales each year to local producers.

Cannada also owns timberland. His tree farm includes 300 acres of hardwoods and 150 acres of pine trees. Some of the trees are in the Conservation Reserve Program. “The CRP gives us annual income from marginal land while providing wildlife habitat and helping to control erosion,” he says. Select cutting of hardwoods has provided money during years when farm income has been low. “I also help manage 2,500 acres of timber and CRP land for family members,” he adds. “In return, I get to use this land for recreation.”

He doesn’t remember, but his former kindergarten teacher told him that he once missed school as a four-year-old to work on the farm. His grandfather later confirmed this incident. Cannada does remember riding with his grandfather to check on cattle when he was eight years old. In 1998 while he was still in college, his grandfather retired and gave him 230 head of beef cattle along with two tractors and hay equipment. After graduating from Mississippi State University in 2000, he returned to the family business to farm full time.

He protects the environment by using conservation tillage and planting trees in buffer strips along a creek. The buffer cost-share funds allowed him build new fencing to keep cattle away from the creek.

One big challenge is finding land to farm. He has lost land to utility easements and to other renters who outbid him. He lost more than a thousand acres of rented land planted to trees during the past ten years. “Urban sprawl is a problem where I farm 25 miles from Jackson and 15 miles from Vicksburg,” he explains. “We’ve lost land to urban development, recreation, hunting and tree planting. We’re trying to become less dependent on rented land. We’re looking to buy land because long term leases are hard to come by.”

Cannada is a member of farm and community organizations. He's active in Edwards Presbyterian Church and both Hinds County and Mississippi Farm Bureau. He serves on the Farm Services Agency County Committee. As a cotton grower, he was active in boll weevil eradication and sat on the board of a local cotton gin. He has been president of the Hinds County Cattlemen's Association and is active in the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association.

He and his wife Lesley have two young daughters, Haley and Hayden. Lesley is a long distance runner. She worked in a medical clinic until their children were born. She has been active in Farm Bureau with the Women's Committee and the Young Farmer and Rancher program. She also is active in Junior League of Jackson and the Down Syndrome Society. "Now she works at home raising our children," says Cannada. "At some point, Lesley will relieve my mom in keeping books and handling accounting for the farm."

"I've been fortunate to be a farmer," he says. "All my income is from farming. My goal is to own more land and become less dependent on leased property. As I increase acreage, I also hope to increase grain storage capacity on the farm."

Joe Street with the Mississippi State University Cooperative Extension Service is state coordinator for the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year awards. Theresa Hand, Extension director in Hinds County, nominated Cannada for the award. Hand says, "Scott is an outstanding producer and leader, an excellent steward of natural resources. He's active in Extension programs. He has done television commercials on behalf of Mississippi farm families, and he goes above and beyond what is normally expected."

As Mississippi winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo award, Cannada will now receive a \$2,500 cash award and an expense paid trip to the Sunbelt Expo from Swisher International of Jacksonville, Fla., 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 \$15,000 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 awards for the 22nd consecutive year. Swisher has contributed some \$844,000 in cash awards and other honors to southeastern farmers since the award was initiated in 1990.

Previous state winners from Mississippi include: Hugh Arant, Sr. of Ruleville, 1990; Bill Hawks of Hernando, 1991; Kenneth Hood of Gunnison, 1992; Tol Thomas of Cruger, 1993; Rick Parsons of Vance, 1994; Ed Hester of Benoit, 1995; Bill Harris of Benton, 1996; Robert Miller of Greenwood, 1997; Ted Kendall, III of Bolton, 1998; Wayne Bush of Schlater, 1999; William Tackett of Schlater, 2000; Willard Jack of Belzoni, 2001; Hugh Arant, Jr. of Ruleville, 2002; Rick Parsons of Vance, 2003; Sledge Taylor of Como, 2004; Laurance Carter of Rollins Fork, 2005; Brooks Aycock of Belzoni, 2006; Tom Robertson of Indianola, 2007; Gibb Steele III of Hollandale, 2008; Donald Gant of Merigold, 2009; and Dan Batson of Perkinston in 2010.

Mississippi has had three overall winners with Kenneth Hood of Gunnison in 1993, Ed Hester of Benoit in 1995 and Willard Jack of Belzoni in 2001.

Cannada's farm, along with the farms of the other eight state finalists, will be visited by a distinguished panel of judges during the week of Aug. 1-5. The judges for this year include Jim Bone, a retired manager of field development for DuPont Crop Protection from Valdosta, Ga.; Charles Snipes, a retired Mississippi Extension weed scientist who is president and research scientist with Stoneville R&D, Inc., from Greenville, Miss.; and John McKissick, longtime University of Extension Georgia ag economist from Athens, Ga.

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Note to media: Cannada's farm will be visited by the judges on Aug. 2 from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. The farm is located on Middle Road, about five miles south of Edwards, Miss. If you would like to visit the farm during the final two hours of judging, please call Janie Batson at 704-788-7026, or contact her by e-mail at jbbatson@ctc.net, or contact Cannada by calling 601-852-9933.