

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

THOMAS PORTER JR. NAMED 2011 NORTH CAROLINA FARMER OF THE YEAR

Largely on his own, Thomas Porter, Jr., of Concord, N.C. has built an impressive livestock farm featuring beef cattle, hogs and chickens. He also gives back to the agricultural community by serving in leadership positions in a host of farm organizations.

As a result of his success as a livestock and poultry producer, Porter has been selected as the 2011 North Carolina winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. Porter 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. Porter was also selected as state winner of the award in 2006.

His farm includes 850 acres with 270 acres of rented land and 580 acres of owned land.

He's growing Matua bromegrass. This forage produces earlier in the spring and later in the fall than tall fescue. His 110 acres of Matua yield about six tons per acre when irrigated with hog lagoon effluent. He also grows fescue-clover hay on 436 acres yielding up to five tons per acre, and his fescue-oats forage mix yields six tons per acre from 105 acres. He has fescue-clover stands on 110 pasture acres, and he planted 25 acres of Laredo, a seeded bermudagrass variety. "We wanted a warm season grass to utilize animal waste," he adds.

Last year, his swine operation had 2,200 sows that produced 23.5 pigs per sow per year. Pigs leave his farm when weaned at 21 days of age. He grows the swine under contract with Murphy-Brown. "We're paid on a per head basis for weaned pigs," he explains. "We are also a multiplication unit for Murphy-Brown. This means our gilts are grown as replacement breeding stock."

He had shipped up to 1,100 pigs weekly, but now ships 931 pigs per week. "We produced more pigs than they could handle," he explains. "Now, we're shipping fewer pigs from fewer sows, yet we're making the same money we made with more sows."

He requires showers for anyone entering or leaving the swine facilities. Porter says, "We minimize disease risks with our bio-security measures and because of our location. There are no swine farms farther west than ours in the state." His isolated location is one reason

his was chosen as a Murphy-Brown multiplier farm. Dead poultry, hogs and cattle are all composted on the farm. “No rendering trucks enter our farm, and that also helps with overall bio-security,” explains Porter.

The poultry operation consists of four pullet houses and four layer houses. The poultry is raised under contract with Tyson Foods. He built his first pullet houses in 1990, and began raising layers to produce broiler breeder eggs in 2009.

Layers remain on the farm ten months and produce about 38,000 hatching eggs per day during peak production. Pullets are brought to his farm just after hatching, and he keeps them 20 weeks before they are moved to layer houses. He’s paid on the basis of square feet in his poultry houses, and receives bonuses based on egg hatchability and feed conversion for the layers.

“Poultry has been a good fit with our cattle,” says Porter. “The poultry litter is dry, and we stack it before we apply it as fertilizer. Layer house cleanout takes place during August and September, and that is when we apply the litter to our pastures and hay fields. This has greatly reduced our need for commercial fertilizer.”

He built his beef herd from five cows. It now consists of 300 Hereford-Angus cows bred to Angus bulls. “We vaccinate, background and precondition our calves before we sell them at 700 to 800 pounds in truckload lots in a tele-auction,” he explains. “By building a reputation for top quality calves, buyers will want our cattle and hopefully pay a premium.”

His farm has received awards, as a county Farm Family of the Year and for soil and water conservation. He has received environmental stewardship awards from his poultry and pork contracting companies.

“I always wanted to farm,” says Porter. He grew up on a dairy, and raised a garden as a child. In high school, he sold greenhouse tomato plants. He worked as a welder, pipe fitter and building contractor to raise capital to invest in his farm. “I established my farm during the 1980’s, and put in our hogs during 1992,” he recalls. “That’s when I stopped building houses to farm full time.”

He hopes to establish permanent conservation easements to keep his land in agricultural production, and then use proceeds from the easements to buy additional farmland.

In Cabarrus County, he serves as Farm Bureau president, on the Planning and Zoning Board, on the Agricultural District board and chairs the Extension Advisory Committee. He’s also an associate of the Soil and Water Conservation District. He’s a former member of a watershed improvement group and served as Cattlemen’s Association president.

On the state level, he chairs the Carolina Farm Credit board, serves on the Poultry Federation board and has been a Farm Bureau convention delegate. Nationally, he

represents poultry on an American Farm Bureau committee. His farm was also selected for an environmental management pilot project.

His wife Vicky is just as active. She's a district supervisor in the Cabarrus County Soil and Water Conservation District, chairs the county's Agricultural District board and is an advisor to the Farm Service Agency County Committee. On the state level, Vicky has been a member of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission and the N.C. Ag Foundation. In Farm Bureau, she is a graduate of a leadership program and has been a state convention delegate. She has also been active in American Farm Bureau's Women's Committee.

They have three grown children, all involved with the farm. Their son Derek is a firefighter who works at the farm on his days off. Their son Jared is a police officer and works at the farm on weekends. Jared's wife Colleen manages the farm's layer operation. Their daughter Erin is a recent college graduate who handles payroll for the farm.

"All of our income comes from the farm," adds Porter. "We hope to expand our cattle herd and add two more pullet houses. We farm responsibly and have been good stewards of our natural resources. We work very hard and I feel blessed to have accomplished the goals I set out to achieve."

Ken Powell with North Carolina Farm Bureau is state coordinator of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. Karen McKnight, a Farm Bureau district field representative, nominated Porter for the award. McKnight admires his farm's efficiency and aesthetic appearance. She says he has hosted local, state, national and international visitors, and he often advises elected leaders on farm issues. "He has a rare combination of skill, knowledge, passion and heart," she adds.

As the North Carolina state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo award, Porter 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 North Carolina include John Vollmer of Bunn, 1990; Kenneth Jones of Pink Hill, 1991; John Howard, Jr. of Deep Run, 1992; Carlyle Ferguson of Waynesville, 1993; Dick Tunnell of Swan Quarter, 1994; Allan Lee Baucom of Monroe, 1995; Scott Whitford of Grantsboro, 1996; Williams Covington, Sr. of Mebane, 1997; Phil McLain of Statesville, 1998; Earl Hendrix of Raeford, 1999; Reid Gray of Statesville, 2000; Rusty Cox of Monroe, 2001; Craven Register of Clinton, 2002; Frank Howey, Jr. of Monroe, 2003; Eddie Johnson of Elkin, 2004; Danny McConnell of Hendersonville, 2005; Tommy Porter of Concord, 2006; Bill Cameron of Raeford, 2007; V. Mac Baldwin of Yanceyville, 2008; Fred Pittillo of Hendersonville, 2009; and Bo Stone of Rowland, 2010.

North Carolina has had two overall winners with Eddie Johnson of Elkin being selected as the Southeastern Farmer of the Year in 2004 and Bill Cameron of Raeford being named in 2007.

Porter'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 Georgia Extension ag economist from Athens, Ga.

###

Note to media: The Porter farm will be visited by the judges on Aug. 4 from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. The farm is located at 4455 Mt. Pleasant Road South, Concord, N.C. 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 Porter by calling 704-786-9551.