

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

MAC PATE NAMED 2011 TENNESSEE FARMER OF THE YEAR

Dairy farmer Mac Pate of Maryville, Tenn., is 85 years young. Though he has slowed down some in recent years, he still has the drive and energy that helped him develop and maintain an outstanding dairy farm.

As a result of his long success as a dairy farmer, Pate has been selected as the 2011 Tennessee winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. Pate 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.

Milk production is excellent, now at about 27,000 pounds of milk per cow per year, down a bit from a peak of 29,000 pounds. At the peak, his 200 cows produced 5.8 million pounds per year. "For two months, our cows produced more than 100 pounds of milk per cow per day," he adds.

A farmer for 62 years, Pate farms scenic land shadowed by the Great Smokey Mountains in an urbanizing area near Knoxville. His farm has 1,365 acres, 1,100 acres of rented land and 265 acres of owned land. His forages include corn silage on 200 acres yielding 25 tons per acre and hay on 200 acres yielding three tons per acre. He also has 200 acres of pasture. In addition, he grows corn grain on 200 acres yielding 140 bushels per acre, soybeans on 200 acres yielding 35 bushels per acre and wheat on 200 acres yielding 50 bushels per acre.

"Our pastures are mostly fescue with clover. We make hay from our fescue and orchardgrass," he says. He also makes round bale silage from wheat and other small grains. His doublecropping system features no-till corn planted after rye. "We haul our soybeans to market in Guntersville, Ala., and then haul back soybean meal that we use for protein in our feed rations," he says.

Along with replacement heifers, he raises Holstein steers that he sells at 500 pounds in a dairy steer sale held at a local auction market. "Not many people know that dairy farmers produce 27% of the U.S. beef supply," he adds.

His father was a county sheriff who confiscated moonshine during the Great Depression. Pate is old enough to remember milking cows by hand. His farm didn't get electricity

until 1941. He also remembers when thousands of nearby farm families were forced off land now flooded by lakes created in the 1930's by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Yet he's young enough to have embraced modern dairy technology. He started milking three times per day six years ago. He uses embryo transfer for top-producing cows. One of these cows has produced more than 45,000 pounds of milk per year. He has used total mixed rations for his milk cows since 1980. He was also an early adopter of artificial insemination for breeding.

Recently, he evaluated a prototype milking machine, the only one of its type in the U.S., before agreeing with his employees that their existing milking system worked just as well. He says his farm has been a success because he has hired good employees. Some have worked on the farm for 30 years.

He markets his milk through the Dairy Farmers of America cooperative. He says, "A cooperative is the best way to market milk, and they work hard to get us premium milk prices."

Pate opens his farm to visiting school children. "Children need to know where food comes from," he adds. University of Tennessee veterinary medicine students also make frequent use of his farm. He has also been a frequent visitor to the dairy and equipment exhibits at the Sunbelt Expo farm show.

He started farming in partnership with his father in 1948. When Pate's dad first owned the farm, it had a large house with seven fireplaces. During the 1800's, the old house served as an inn where stagecoach passengers spent the night after leaving Knoxville on the old road to Atlanta.

Pate asked his dad to convert their beef farm into a dairy. "My father let me do that," he says, "but he said he would never milk cows. True to his word, my dad never milked cows."

He has been a Farm Bureau member since 1951. He was named Conservation Farmer of the Year in both 1960 and 1982 by the Blount County Soil Conservation District. He's on the Foothills Farmers Co-op board, a member of the Blount County Livestock Association and a 4-H dairy sponsor. He supports veterinary medicine, dairy science and other programs at the University of Tennessee.

Pate has served as a member or board member of many dairy organizations. Some of these include Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Southeast Select Sires, Dairy Farmers of America, Dairymen Incorporated, Southeast United Dairy Industry Association and Mid-America Dairymen. He's a member of the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association and served on the boards of the National Beef Board and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

His wife Barbara taught school until she retired in 1975. Despite debilitating scoliosis and arthritis, she continues to work as the chief financial officer and in keeping records for the farm. Pate says, "As a couple, we've endured many challenges. Yet Barbara has remained a strong supporter and contributor to the farm. Our farm would not have been successful without Barbara."

Mac and Barbara had one child, a son Mackie who died in 1992 at age 41. "His death was a deep personal loss," says Pate. Mackie was a college professor in Washington, D.C., and made a lasting contribution to the farm before he died. "He handled sire selection," recalls his father. Besides selecting sires for milk production, he selected some for their recessive genes for color. One cow produced from this process was red in color. "Mackie knew how to breed Holsteins so they would express the red gene," recalls Pate. "That red Holstein cow was an outstanding producer, and we sold her for \$55,000 in 1983." Today, visitors to the Pate farm can still see red Holsteins, a lasting legacy of their son's work in genetics and sire selection.

"I grew up on this farm," says Pate. "Not everyone has the opportunity to play in a creek, run across an open field, pet a cow and just become one with nature and your surroundings. We haven't made this farm. It has made us."

Robert Burns with University of Tennessee Extension is state coordinator of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year awards. Blount County Extension agent John Wilson nominated Pate for the award. "Mac is a farmer, a friend and an individual who has remained constant in his determination to be a successful farmer and leader," says Wilson. "He is a strong presence in the local agricultural community as well as a respected agricultural leader at both the state and national level. Anyone who can get up at 3:30 in the morning every day for 50 years to milk cows is tops in my book."

As the Tennessee state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo award, Pate 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 Tennessee include: James R. Graham of Newport, 1990; Burl Ottinger of Parrottsville, 1991; Dwaine Peters of Madisonville, 1992; Edward Wilson of Cleveland, 1993; Bob Willis of Hillsboro, 1994; Bobby W. Vannatta of Bell Buckle, 1995; George McDonald of Riddleton, 1996; Jimmy Gaylord of Sharon, 1997; Jimmy Tosh of Henry, 1998; Eugene Pugh, Jr. of Halls, 1999; Harris Armour of Somerville, 2000; Malcolm Burchfiel of Newbern, 2001; Ed Rollins of Pulaski, 2002; John Smith of Puryear, 2003; Austin Anderson of Manchester, 2004; John Litz of Morristown, 2005; Bob Willis of Hillsboro, 2006; Grant Norwood of Paris, 2007; Jerry Ray of Tullahoma, 2008; Richard Atkinson of Belvidere, 2009; and Brad Black of Vonore, 2010.

Tennessee has had two overall winners with Jimmy Tosh of Henry in 1998 and Bob Willis of Hillsboro in 2006.

Pate'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 Pate farm will be visited by the judges on Aug. 3 from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. The farm is located at 3204 Old Niles Ferry Rd., Maryville, Tenn. 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 Pate by calling 865-983-3728.