

Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release

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Arkansas Farmer David Wildy Named as 2016 Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

(Moultrie, Ga.)—David Wildy, a diversified row crop farmer from Manila, Arkansas has been selected as the overall winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award for 2016.

Wildy was named as the overall winner at the Willie B. Withers Luncheon held during the opening day of the 2016 Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show. Wildy was chosen as Farmer of the Year over nine other state winners who were finalists for the award.

A full time farmer since 1975, Wildy farms more than 12,000 acres and grows cotton, corn, soybeans and wheat. He is a new grower of peanuts and potatoes. He also has a small beef cattle herd.

Wildy is known for his generosity in sharing his farm and its resources with agricultural scientists and researchers from private industry and from the University of Arkansas, Arkansas State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This is the 27th year for the Farmer of the Year award. The award 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 Wildy for his farming accomplishments. “David is an outstanding representative of our nation’s best farmers,” said Ghiloni. “It is an honor for our company and our Swisher Sweets cigar brand to recognize David and his farm.”

Ron Carroll, marketing vice president with Swisher, represented the company in presenting the cash award to Wildy. Carroll said the farming profession has many successful producers, and that Wildy and his hard working family operate one of the premier farming operations in the Southeast.

Wildy expressed his thanks to Swisher and the other award sponsors. He also paid tribute to his wife Patty and other members of his family, and how they all support the farm. "Farming is a tradition in our family," said Wildy. "And receiving this award is a humbling experience that we will all treasure."

Wildy Family Farms is a fifth generation farm that was started by David's grandfather in 1914.

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 Clark Garland, longtime University of Tennessee Extension agricultural economist from Maryville, Tenn., farmer Thomas Porter, Jr., of Concord, N.C., who was the overall winner in 2011, and Charles Snipes, retired Extension weed scientist from Greenville, Miss.

Garland served as this year's senior judge. He said that Wildy impressed the judges with his innovative farm management and crop marketing practices. "David is an outstanding manager of land, labor, production inputs and capital," said Garland. "His diversified farming operation features a wide assortment of high yielding and profitable agronomic crops."

The judges were also impressed with how members of the Wildy family have been able to strengthen agriculture in the Southeast by sharing their farming resources with the research and education communities.

"Wildy family members hold key positions in this farming business, and they are responsible for much of the farm's overall success," said Garland. "They are consistently achieving their short and long term strategic farming goals, and these goals involve the entire family."

As the Southeastern Farmer of the Year, Wildy 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, a Columbia jacket from Ivey's Outdoor and Farm Supply, and a smoker-grill from Hays LTI.

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, and a Columbia vest from Ivey's Outdoor and Farm Supply.

David Wildy also will receive the use of a Massey Ferguson tractor for a year from Massey Ferguson North America. The company has proudly sponsored the Southeastern Farmer of the Year since 1997 and has been building hard-working, reliable tractors for nearly 170 years. David Wildy will select the model of his choice from Massey Ferguson's full line of tractors which range from 20 to 360 hp.

Bill Hurley, vice president of Sales for AGCO North America represented Massey Ferguson and congratulated David Wildy.

“Massey Ferguson is proud to have sponsored the Southeastern Farmer of the Year since 1997,” said Hurley. “It is an honor to recognize the efforts of outstanding producers from throughout the Southeastern United States, and we’re excited to work with David as he chooses the Massey Ferguson tractor he’ll use in his operation for the coming year.”

Arkansas farmers became eligible for the Farmer of the Year award in 2007, and Wildy is the second overall Farmer of the Year winner to come from Arkansas.

The other state winners this year include Wendell Gibbs of Ranburne, Ala., Paul DiMare of Coral Gables, Fla., John McCormick of Sylvania, Ga., Keith Lowry of Water Valley, Ky., Paul Good of Columbus Miss., Jerry Wyant of Vale, N.C., Kerry Owens of Pickens, S.C., James Haskew of South Pittsburgh, Tenn., and Tyler Wegmeyer of Hamilton, Va.

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