

Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release

For Release Tuesday, Oct. 16, 2018 after 1:30 p.m.

South Carolina Farmer Kevin Yon Named 2018 Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

(Moultrie, Ga.)—Kevin Yon, a highly successful purebred Angus beef cattle producer and a leader in beef cattle and Angus breed organizations, has been selected as the overall winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award for 2018.

Yon is from Ridge Spring, S.C. He is a son and grandson of sharecroppers and a first-generation Angus breeder.

Yon was named as the overall winner at the Willie B. Withers Luncheon held during the opening day of the 2018 Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show. Yon was chosen as Farmer of the Year over nine other state winners who were finalists for the award.

His farm encompasses 4,258 acres with 2,515 acres of rented land and 1,743 acres of family owned land.

Each year, the Yons sell about 375 bulls and 150 females in two on-farm sales. They also sell cattle in private treaty sales. Their herd includes about 1,200 registered breeding age females, 590 commercial breeding age females and 90 steers and heifers that are fed out.

The Yons retain ownership on calves not sold for breeding, and feed most of them in a Kansas feedlot. They also feed out calves on their farm that are marketed through an Augusta, Ga., processing facility.

Forages are among the most extensive plantings on Yon's farm. He has successfully grown alfalfa, and has become a new grower of soybeans and pecans.

His farm is named Yon Family Farms, and family involvement is a key to this farm's success. His wife Lydia is a full partner with Kevin. Their three children grew up on the farm. All three have returned to work on the farm as young adults along with two of their spouses.

The Yons own a retail store in Ridge Spring where they sell pecans and beef from their farm, along with other South Carolina-grown products.

This is the 29th 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.

John Miller, president and chief executive officer of Swisher International, Inc., of Jacksonville, Fla., praised Yon for his farming accomplishments. “Kevin is an outstanding farmer who has become a role model for others who want to farm,” said Miller. “It is an honor for our company and our Swisher Sweets cigar brand to recognize Kevin for his farming accomplishments.”

Ron Carroll, marketing vice president with Swisher, represented the company in presenting the cash award to Yon. Carroll visited Yon and his farm along with the farms of the other nine state winners during the judging tour. “Kevin is an inspiration,” said Carroll. “It is a great tribute to his success as a farmer and as a parent that each of his adult children have returned to work on the farm and have become major contributors to the farm’s success.”

Yon expressed his thanks to Swisher and the other sponsors of the award. He said his family and his employees deserve credit for the award. “We are humbled to receive this recognition,” he said. “Our family goal is to leave a legacy, by taking care of the land, our cattle and our people. Our farm supports our two sons and our daughter and their families, and our ten employees and their families.”

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

The judges this year included Charles Snipes, a retired Extension weed scientist from Greenville, Miss.; beef cattle rancher Cary Lightsey of Lake Wales, Fla., who was the overall winner of the award in 2009; and John McKissick, longtime University of Georgia agricultural economist from Athens, Ga.

Snipes, who served as this year’s senior judge, called Yon “a remarkable agricultural professional with a family that is fully engaged in the operation.”

Yon’s family especially impressed the judges. “He and his family are a credit to agriculture,” said Snipes. “They are the epitome of what the Southeastern Farmer of the Year program represents.”

In addition, Snipes said, “Kevin Yon has become an incredible example of success after years of hard work.” Snipes said while Yon started with very little in the way of beginning resources, he used those resources and built upon them to develop an impressive and diverse agricultural enterprise.

“His integrity and obligation to the profession of farming and ranching was most recognizable,” added Snipes. “It is evident that he contributes a great deal to his profession beyond his local operation.”

As the Southeastern Farmer of the Year, Yon 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, a smoker-grill from Hays LTI, and a Henry Golden Boy "American Farmer" Tribute Edition rifle from Reinke Irrigation.

Massey Ferguson North America and its parent firm AGCO have been longtime sponsors of the award. "It is an honor for AGCO to sponsor the Farmer of the Year award," said Ash Alt, field marketing manager with AGCO. "This award recognizes outstanding farmers. Their dedication to their farms, their families and their communities illustrates the importance of the American farmer. We are pleased to provide one year's use of a Massey Ferguson tractor to Kevin Yon, and we look forward to working with Kevin and his family in selecting a model that fits their farming needs."

Each state winner receives a \$2,500 cash award and an expense paid trip to the Sunbelt Expo from Swisher International, a \$500 gift certificate from Southern States cooperative and a Columbia vest from Ivey's Outdoor and Farm Supply.

The other state winners this year include John DeLoach of Vincent, Ala., Luke Alston of Mena, Ark., Lynetta Usher Griner of Chiefland, Fla., James Vaughn of Forsyth, Ga., Darren Luttrell of Beaver Dam, Ky., Lonnie Fortner of Port Gibson, Miss., Howard Brown of Andrews, N.C., John Verell of Jackson, Tenn., and Paul Rogers, Jr., of Wakefield, Va.

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