

# **Swisher/Sunbelt Ag Expo**

## **Southeastern Farmer of the Year**

News Release  
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For Immediate Release

### **KEVIN MATTHEWS NAME NORTH CAROLINA FARMER OF THE YEAR 2022**

Kevin and Cindy Matthews own and operate Matthews Family Farms of North Carolina, Inc., Precision Nutrient Management, Inc., and Deep Creek Grain, Inc. in East Bend and Yadkinville, North Carolina. Matthews is the fourth generation on his family's farm. He said, "With the economic crisis of the 1980s, however, my dad and his brother decided to leave farming and start a full-time grading business. But, happily for us, they kept some of the farm land."

Matthews was a high school freshman when that happened but continued to nurture his dream of farming for a living. His future wife, Cindy, grew up on a tobacco farm not far from the Matthews' place. Kevin obtained his A.S. degree in Electronic Engineering in 1993 at Forsyth Technical Community College and Cindy got her A.A. degree in Medical Technologies in 1994 from Surry Community College.

In the early years of their marriage she worked as a medical secretary, and Kevin accepted a job with Electronic Equipment Services in Winston-Salem. He said, "It was a great job with good benefits, but I was still farming on the side because it was in my blood. When I was eventually laid off from that position, I decided to farm full-time. The first five years were tough, but Cindy and I worked hard and kept our heads up."

Matthews recalled, "Starting with just two and a half dozen acres, we added more land each year. As older neighbors retired, they approached us with offers to take over their land. They saw how we maintained field borders and reduced weed populations year-round." He added, "Because of the way we treated both our own and rented land, we were able to experience a quick increase in acreage over the period of a decade."

He added, "My wife was working a full-time job that barely covered daycare expenses for our children. We decided to plant a niche crop of strawberries in 2000, and the success of that enterprise allowed Cindy to come to work full-time on the farm. That's when we felt we truly became a family farm." Their children are Danielle Matthews Venable, 24; Timothy Matthews, 21; and Megan Matthews, 15.

Thirty years ago, Kevin Matthews began farming on 30 acres of rented land. He currently operates 6000 acres, with 4000 acres rented and 1300 owned. Crop yields are as follows: 2700 acres of dryland corn yielding 180 bushels/acre; 300 acres of irrigated corn yielding 310 bushels/acre; 1960 acres of dryland soybeans yielding 70 bushels/acre; 70 acres of irrigated soybeans yielding 105 bushels/acre; 500 acres of wheat yielding 81 bushels/acre; and 100 acres of barley yielding 80 bushels/acre. Matthews employs twelve full-time and four part-time workers, including four seasonal H2A workers from South Africa.

As for marketing his crops, Matthews uses an advisory group and broker, relying heavily on hedging and forward contracts. Typically, the bulk of his crops are sold for January-through-May delivery. Because he is able to store his grain, additional bushels are spread throughout the year. This also allows his truck drivers to have steady paychecks during the winter and planting months.

Matthews is also a licensed grain dealer for corn, soybeans, wheat, and barley and operates Deep Creek Grain (DCG) in Yadkin County for his commodities and 24 farms that sell through DCG. The company annually markets 750,000 bushels of corn, 250,000 bushels of soybeans, 75,000 bushels of wheat, and 20,000 bushels of barley.

Another farm-related venture Matthews founded is Precision Nutrient Management, Inc. (PNM). Its purpose is to assist farmers with soil/tissue sampling to help decrease negative environmental impacts on land and preserve wildlife. "My daughter, Danielle Matthews Venable, is back on the farm full-time and operates PNM and provides diagnostic agronomy services on 16,000 acres."

Danielle obtained a BS degree in Agribusiness Management with minors in Economics and Crop Science from North Carolina State University. Besides her work with PNM, she controls the farm's inventory and arranges the location of test plots. She also created a system for the farm to maintain all FSA maps and simplify the crop reporting process. Danielle's husband, Garrett Venable, is a full-time firefighter out of Greensboro but works on the farm in his off time. He helps incorporate cover crops and plant soybeans and is learning how to operate equipment. Kevin and Cindy's son, Timothy Matthews, works full-time at the farm where he maintains field borders, equipment, and operates the grain cart. He also manages wildlife within fields. Youngest daughter Megan is still in high school and enjoys participating in sports like volleyball and track. She pitches in on farm chores seasonally as needed.

In 2020, Kevin Matthews co-founded XtremeAg.farm in partnership with a small group of other successful farmers. It's a website dedicated to sharing agricultural techniques, past experiences, technology innovations, and first-hand agricultural failures and successes.

Matthews commented, "We provide farm tutorials with the goal of shortening the learning curve for other farmers who might be new, just beginning their careers, or who may be isolated from a mentor. Five seasoned farmers got together to share their collective knowledge about how to overcome extreme environmental, technological, and product challenges. It's a stepping stone for the next generation to be better able to handle complex farm tasks and the inevitable challenges of market fluctuations, labor problems, and weather hazards."

On the county level, Matthews is a board member of Yadkin County Farm Bureau, serves on the Yadkin County Farm Bureau Field Crops Committee and its Bylaws Committee. He is also a Forbush volunteer first responder and firefighter as well as a trustee, treasurer, parliamentarian, and former deacon at Enon Baptist Church. On the state level Matthews serves on the North Carolina Farm Bureau Crop Advisory Committee, North Carolina State University Agronomy Teach Lab speaker, and has served on the North Carolina Department of Agriculture Seed Board, Past President of North Carolina Small Grain Growers Association and the North Carolina Soybean Association. On the national level, he is active with the Ag PhD Research Plot High Yield Corn & Soybeans, has been a guest speaker at the Commodity Classic, and contributes to the Successful Farming Blog biweekly. The Matthews were also named Monsanto Young Farmer Family of the Year in 2004.

As part of his eco-friendly approach to farming, Matthews uses exclusive no-till practices along with sub-surface drip irrigation for intensive soil and crop management. These methods have increased his nutrient management while reducing the potential for erosion. Sub-surface drip irrigation (SDI) is a permanent system by Netafim that allows irrigation and fertigation all season long. It minimizes sprayer passes in fields and allows for precision nutrients to be spoon-fed to the crops. Tissue samples are collected to determine what nutrients are necessary, thereby preventing over-fertilizing.

Matthews added, "Overall, the Netafim SDI system reduces water usage by directly targeting the crop's root zone. Precision Nutrient Management, Inc. maintains all the farm's soil and tissue samples. Fertilizer is spread using variable rate technology based on the sample reports."

Two of the challenges Matthews faced over the years are financing and weather. He said, "We farm river bottom land, so you can imagine what's it's like during hurricane season in the middle of hurricane alley. The year 2020 saw some of the worst flooding—historical flooding—ever. The other thing is financing to manage growth. Having a good ag lender can make all the difference, and we were blessed to work with the great agricultural consultant, Dr. David Kohl, and partner with Ag Carolina Farm Credit."

Each year the Matthews Family takes at least a week to spend time at the beach together in an Airbnb or hotel on Okrakoke Island or at Myrtle Beach. They also enjoy trips out West to South Dakota to get a break from the heat.

A few years ago, as part of his consulting work with Netafim Irrigation, Kevin and Cindy traveled to Israel and spent ten days touring agricultural enterprises all over the country. He recalled, "We were able to get a lot of work done in the mornings and then were freed up to visit places like Beersheba, the Dead Sea, Tel Aviv, and the Sea of Galilee. Being raised Southern Baptist, it was the most amazing traveling experience I've ever had."

Looking back on his three decades of farming, Matthews is grateful he was able to basically start from scratch and prove to himself and others that it's possible to achieve success through hard work, being open to technology and innovation, and trying to share helpful knowledge with others along the way. As to future plans, Matthews' vision is to step back from farm management within the next ten years and allow his children to take over the day-to-day operation and decision-making. He commented, "Our goal is to answer any questions Danielle, Garrett, and Timothy may have. I will stay involved with running equipment and experimental test plots."

He added, "Essentially what I've learned by being a farmer is that God is always in control. So you don't have to sweat the things you can't do anything about."

Callie Carson, North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation Field Representative and Safety Team Lead nominated Kevin Matthews as North Carolina Farmer of the Year. She said, "It was my pleasure to nominate Kevin Matthews for this honor. Kevin is goal-oriented, hardworking, and, most importantly, willing to share his knowledge with others through speaking engagements and through the XtremeAg.farm platform. His enthusiasm to see all farmers succeed truly sets him apart. Kevin and Cindy Matthews are a traditional farm family, with adult children working beside them as decision makers. They've established a clear succession plan that will ensure the farm's viability far into the future."

A distinguished panel of judges will visit Kevin Matthews, along with the other nine state winners via zoom at a later date this summer. The judges include John McKissick, long-time University of Georgia agricultural economist at Athens, Georgia; David Wildy, Manila, Arkansas, the overall winner of the award in 2016; and Joe West, Tifton, Georgia, retired dairy scientist and assistant Dean of the University of Georgia Tifton Campus.