



# Sunbelt Ag Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release  
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For Immediate Release

## **DARREL HAYNES NAMED 2023 ALABAMA FARMER OF THE YEAR**

In the winter quarter of his senior year at Auburn University studying Animal and Dairy Science, Darrel Haynes went home to Cullman County to plant a crop with the help of a family friend. He secured a loan from the Production Credit Association and bought a used John Deere 4030 and disc. His father, "Bud," owned a small farm and worked as a carpenter. After his initial crop, Haynes and his dad partnered full time to build up and expand their own operation.

Haynes recalled, "We worked hard and were frugal, doing all our own repair work. My wife Lydia, who also attended Auburn and graduated from the University of Alabama Medical School of Allied Health, worked as a Registered Physical Therapist to provide us with a steady income and health insurance. She always believed in me and was passionate about growing the farm with our two sons, Ben and Bart."

Haynes Farms, LLC now involves fifth (Darrel), sixth (Ben and Bart), and seventh (Ben and Whitney's six children) generations, working together to continue its agricultural heritage. Haynes Farms owns two Alabama Heritage Century Farms: Haynes Farms, LLC and the Charlie Gorham Homeplace (Lydia's grandfather) and partially owns a third Heritage Century Farm, the Lovelady Place (Lydia's ancestors). Haynes noted, "Together these farms represent 377 years of continuous farming."

Haynes began farming with 200 rented acres and now operates a total of 4,000 acres, 2,767 of which are rented and 1,233 owned. Crop yields for 2022 were as follows: 380 acres of corn yielding 195 bushels/acre; 310 acres of wheat yielding 82 bushels/acre; 800 acres of grazing wheat for feeder cattle; and 900 acres of soybeans yielding 55 bushels/acre. Haynes Farm also has a cow/calf operation with 650 brood cows. Five hundred feeder cattle are sold annually, with 60 replacement heifers kept annually.

Soybeans and wheat are sold through a local elevator. Haynes noted, "A grain storage capacity of 110,000 bushels, along with a grain drying system, allows us to delay sales and delivery of crops to await optimal pricing. The storage and drying system also helps to support a smooth, efficient harvest of grain from field to storage." Corn is stored and sold throughout the year to two local feed mills and a specialty livestock EMU business upon demand.



As for the commercial cow/calf enterprise, Haynes said, “We maintain a ‘closed herd’ that’s Certified All Natural, backgrounding all our own production. We employ a 90-day breeding season with purebred bulls, primarily Angus, and keep about 10 percent of the top-end heifers as replacements. We market all our feeder cattle on live internet auction (Superior Livestock) as heavy feeder cattle—heifers in the range of 800-900 pounds and steers 900-1000 pounds. Cull cows are grouped and sold at a local stockyard.” Another 30 to 40 finished cattle are processed and sold through the farm’s Gate-to-Plate business operated through a farm store, open at set times throughout the year.

Related farm enterprises include hay production, poultry litter, and sunflowers. Haynes commented, “We produce all the forage for our livestock herd, fertilizing, growing, cutting, harvesting, and feeding all forage ourselves. We typically bale 2000-plus rolls of haylage and 3000-plus rolls of dry hay and store all dry hay in barns.”

Located in one of the largest poultry-producing counties in the US, Haynes Farms has used poultry litter throughout its history. Haynes said, “Because of our location, we’ve been sustaining and sequestering carbon credits long before it was a buzz word. We own the equipment and hire the crew that manages the litter from over 30 poultry houses in the area and spread more than 5000 tons across our fields each year.”

Haynes has also planted about four acres of sunflowers along a busy stretch of highway adjacent to the main farm. People from all over the region use the field for family pictures (free of charge) and can cut flowers to take with them. Haynes added, “It’s not something we do for income, but it brings us great joy to see families enjoying the beautiful flowers.”

Lydia Haynes was able to retire from her physical therapy career in 2020. Having been raised on a cotton farm in east Cullman County, she’s expert at juggling farm life, motherhood, and now grandmotherhood. She shares in the raking, baling, and wrapping of hay and hay silage, does hauling and unloading of grain, participates in spraying, bush hogging, mowing, cooking, and taking meals to the fields.

Sons Ben and Bart work full time on the farm, both being graduates of Auburn University. Ben, the eldest, is heavily involved in both the cattle and row crop side of things. Ben and his wife Whitney, who works full time as a FCS teacher and high school track coach, have six children who are active in 4-H and also work on the farm at age-appropriate tasks. Ben and Whitney also manage the Haynes Heritage Meats “gate-to-plate” store at the farm. Son Bart handles all of the trucking, manages a majority of repairs to the farm equipment and infrastructure, and runs the grain marketing and poultry litter crews.

Haynes and his family have enthusiastically embraced technology and implemented new advances whenever possible. He said, “We’ve used GPS in our planting and spraying to maximize work efficiency while reducing direct input costs. We use the Ag Technology platform, AccuField, to analyze farm data including soil fertility inputs, spray applications, crop placement, and rainfall data.” He added, “We also participate in corn seed, fungicide and herbicide trials through the Alabama Extension Service and soybean field trials through the Alabama Farmers Cooperative.



The Haynes's work closely with Soil Conservation Services to terrace fields, sculpt borders, and seed drainage waterways. They've planted pines on marginal land to reduce erosion around streams and create wildlife habitats. They use rotational grazing, no-till planting, and cover crops that also help with winter grazing. On crops like corn they use split-fertilizer applications to conserve nitrogen and minimize wasteful volatilization. Darrel and Lydia also plan to expand acreage in the future, anticipating that some of the grandchildren will continue their legacy.

Because it comes with the territory, Haynes has faced serious challenges over the last five decades: weather extremes, political actions and decisions, market fluctuations, and negative consumer perceptions and trends. Multiple droughts and significant weather events resulted in significant crop losses some years. In the late 1970s, the Carter administration imposed an embargo against all sales of grain to the USSR, devastating markets domestically. Dairy buyouts in the mid-to-late 1980s and the BSE (mad cow) hysteria also hurt the beef market. Haynes recalled, "What kept the family farm going was that we were diversified, my wife continued to work full time, and we continued to reinvest any profits back into the farm."

A personally devastating setback happened in 1989 when Darrel Haynes's father, "Bud" became paralyzed after a roll of hay fell on him. Haynes recalled, "My father lived as a paraplegic for 26 years, so we had to make a lot of changes. My wife took a huge reduction in income to help with my dad's care. Our boys also had to grow up more quickly than we would've wanted and take on larger roles on the farm. My dad had always been so physically strong and active. I admired, respected, and loved him so much. His strength and faith sustained him through that terrible ordeal and, with some special adaptation, he was able to keep contributing to the farm, even driving the combine."

On the county level, Haynes is the Cullman County Farmers Federation Director and past president; supervisor of the Cullman County Soil and Water Conservation District; past president of the Cullman County Cattlemen's Association; named Cullman County Farm City Outstanding Farm Family for 1984-85; and former director of the Cullman County Chamber of Commerce Board. On the state level, he's been a four-plus decade member of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association and the Alabama Forestry Association; between 1988 and 1991 he served as Agriculture Representative to the Alabama Development Office by appointment of former Alabama Governor Guy Hunt. On the national level, Haynes has been a four decades-plus member of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the National Corn Growers Association. He has served for thirty years as a member of the National Federation of Independent Business.

On the county level, Lydia Haynes is currently serving her second stint as Chairman of the Cullman County Women's Leadership Committee and is a member of the Cullman County Farm City Committee. On the state level, she is on the Alabama Farmers Federation State Women's Leadership Committee, having been chairman of the organization in 2022. She is a former Alabama State Department of Health – State Health Coordinating Committee member (appointed by former Alabama Governor Bob Riley), and a former member of the Alabama Blue Cross Blue Shield Physical Therapy Advisory Board.

Because the Haynes's are so active with the Alabama Farmer's Federation, they've enjoyed a number of annual beef-related trips to conferences and activities in Pennsylvania, South



Dakota, Kansas, and other states over the years. As for collective vacations, Haynes noted, "It's difficult for all of us to be gone at the same time because there's always so much going on. We're blessed to have incredible beauty all around us. And we just enjoy working and playing together as a family. I tell my boys and grandchildren that we need to learn something new every day and have fun doing it!"

Darrel Haynes is a lifetime member of Concord Baptist Church where he also serves as a deacon. Faith and farming for him have always gone hand in hand. He said, "A farmer has to be faithful in everything, down to the smallest chore, to practice good stewardship. God gave me and my family a love for the land, for His creation, and a passion for watching crops and livestock grow. I've learned that life is brief and precious, so I'm always looking for ways to do and make things better. Numbers and yields aren't as important to me as being grateful for what I get to do each day."

Darrel Haynes was nominated to be Alabama's Farmer of the Year by Tyler Monday, Alabama Farmers Federation Area II Organization Director. He said, "The Haynes family has great enthusiasm for being stewards of the land and take immense pride in continuing their long-term farming legacy. Darrel and Lydia are always eager to share their knowledge and experiences with the many groups of people who have visited the farm over the past fifty years."

He added, "What makes Darrel and his family's operation stand out is their attention to detail and commitment to doing all the little things right—from the diligent maintenance of their farming equipment to the cleanliness of their facilities to the production of high-quality crops and livestock year after year. Behind all that achievement is a passion and love for farming that's evident in everything they do."

A distinguished panel of judges will visit Darrel Haynes, along with the farms of the other nine state finalists, the week of August 14–18. The judges include David Wildy, Manila, Arkansas, the overall winner of the award in 2016; Joe West, retired Assistant Dean UGA Tifton Campus; and Darren Parker, Vice President, Massey Ferguson North America.