



Sunbelt Ag Expo

Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release
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For Immediate Release

WADE PURVIS NAMED 2023 FLORIDA FARMER OF THE YEAR

In early childhood Wade Purvis began helping his grandfather on his vegetable farm and tended to a small garden at home. So farming became an integral part of his youth as he continued to help family members and friends with various crop and cattle operations. In high school he was active in FFA and raised show steers for the Florida Strawberry Festival.

After high school, Purvis attended Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia. He recalled, "While there, I had part time jobs working in peanuts, soybeans, hogs, and other crops. My love for farming only increased because I was mentored by some outstanding teachers and leaders in the classroom and through work opportunities."

After completing his studies at ABAC, Purvis transferred to Florida Southern College where he earned a BS degree in Business/Citrus. He said, "Because of the multiple freezes in the late 1970s, my path after college took me to south Florida where I began growing citrus groves. That work led to developing a new farm with Collier Enterprises. I've had several additional farming adventures since. They all eventually led to the creation of my own farm in Immokalee in 2014—the ultimate dream come true."

Wade Purvis met his wife Karen in high school in their native Plant City. They started dating while in college and were married in 1987. Karen enjoyed a long, fruitful career as a Pre-K and Kindergarten teacher and is now retired. The couple has two children: Shayla Machado, 31, and Kyle Purvis, 28, who are both involved with the farm. Kyle is a member of the Collier County Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee and successfully ran the packing house for three years. Purvis said proudly, "During that time, my son made beneficial changes to the operation resulting in positive impacts to our overall production and efficiency." Last autumn Kyle transitioned to co-manager of farm operations, his real calling. His fiancé, Bailey, is also actively involved on the farm in several ways.

Daughter Shayla is the Chairman of the Collier County Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers organization and serves as a director on the board. She's also worked in the sales and marketing department and on the accounting team. Her dad said, "Shayla's always been an advocate for educating her peers about agriculture and has been instrumental in coordinating direct-to-consumer sales on the farm. Her husband Anthony works with my brother at Coastal Ag Supply and is also invested in the agriculture world." He added, "When my wife Karen



retired from teaching three years ago, she became our logistics controller, managing to keep us all focused and headed in the right direction!"

Starting off with 100 rented acres, Purvis now operates 2,350 with 1500 acres rented and 500 acres owned. His crop yields are as follows: 1500 irrigated acres of green beans yielding 200 bushels/acre; 250 acres of irrigated specialty beans (lima and edamame) yielding 200 bushels/acre; 100 irrigated acres of watermelon yielding 40,000 lbs/acre; and 500 irrigated acres of peas yielding 150 bushels/acre.

Several years ago, Purvis teamed up with two local farmers to build their own marketing company, Farmers Alliance. He said, "The partnership was created so we could offer a variety of products on a consistent, year-round basis and acquire the best outlets. We use social media to connect directly with consumers and use that venue as an educational tool for American-grown produce. Specifically we've promoted the 'Fresh from Florida' label." He added, "While the majority of our produce is allocated to retail and FOB markets, social media has broadened our platform and helped us form collaborative enterprises with farming colleagues."

In conjunction with its crop production, Purvis Farms also operates Alliance Packing, where 1.5 million packages are processed each year. He noted, "Each of these companies (Farmers Alliance and Alliance Packing) operates cohesively for overall benefits while centralizing resources and sharing marketing strategies. In today's industry, it's imperative to vertically integrate to remain in business and be successful." Purvis Farm employees ten full time people; the packing house hires seasonal help (both domestic and H2A) of up to fifty workers.

Crop refinement over the last fifteen years has been a goal of Purvis, who uses IPM (Integrated Pest Management), which has influenced more efficiency in his spray and fertilizer techniques. He commented, "Fields are scouted before spraying so that only what is absolutely necessary is applied rather than doing a blanket application. Yields have thereby increased while using less input. We also implement crop rotation to ensure we don't deplete the nutrients in our soil."

When it comes to the inherent challenges of farming, Purvis said that his main issue currently is the rising cost of fuel, labor, and supplies. "They've increased exponentially," he said. And to combat that reality, he's made changes to the overall farm operation to make it more efficient. Purvis Farms has invested in mechanical harvesting to reduce labor costs.

Another huge problem arose with NAFTA. He said, "The farming business drastically changed when NAFTA came into play. Pre-NAFTA, tomatoes were one of our main crops. Now we don't grow them at all and have moved our focus to other crops. We had to shift the way we market products by focusing on consumer education and 'Fresh from Florida' designations."

Purvis is also dedicated to promoting agriculture for the next generation. He noted, "It's essential for all of us to invest in the future of our children, to share with them our talents, knowledge, and sound financial practices to ensure a healthy future for everyone."

Purvis has plans to expand u-pick opportunities and explore the possibility of agritourism on the farm. "We'll be moving one of our farm locations to new ground this spring, and with this



transition, we're planning opportunities for alternate crops and implementing that agritourism component at the new site."

Incorporated into Purvis's farming is his activity in the community, serving on several county and advisory boards. He is involved in Cowboy Church Ministries as well and said, "In a lot of today's churches, I'm afraid it's become about the numbers or the size of the congregation. Our Cowboy Church in Felda is relatively small and is housed in a converted pole barn with a rustic, intimate feeling to it. Our spiritual approach is about personal, mutual accountability that comes from the heart."

On the county level, he is on the board of the University of Florida IFAS Foundation and a member of the Citizen's Advisory Board for the Collier County Fire District. He's a board member and serves on the budget committee of the Collier County Farm Bureau and has participated in its Inaugural Rodeo Festival and its two subsequent rodeo events in November 2022 and April 2023, as well as its Ag Under the Stars & Ag Venture program.

On the state level, in 2023 Purvis and his wife Karen took part in the Florida State Fair 'Fresh from Florida' breakfast, attended the Florida State Fair's Governor's luncheon, attended the Florida State Fair Ag Hall of Fame program and dinner, and participated in the Farm Bureau Day event in Tallahassee. On the national level, he and Karen traveled to Washington, DC for the FFBF 'Field to the Hill' event. Purvis has also been part of a round table meeting with ten congressional staff members from multiple states on behalf of the Biannual South Florida Ag Foundation in 2022 and 2023.

Over the years when the family takes a break from their busy work routines, they've enjoyed boating in the Everglades National Park and spending time at St. John Beach. They've also taken multiple trips out West to Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. Purvis said, "I've loved hunting and fishing in that part of the country where you can still find pristine wilderness. Once a year I also try to get to Alaska with an outfitter friend of mine. We board a float plane, fly out to a remote river camp for a few weeks, and hunt and fish like we're mad at it. My cell phone stays in my duffel bag."

When Purvis looks back on his farming career, the primary lesson it's taught him has been humility. He reflected, "We're not in control of anything really. Big rain and major damage is just another day at the office. What's important is how you accept those challenging times and deal with them as part of life's teachable moments." He added, "Growing crops is a lot about life itself. You can do something right and have it turn out wrong. And you can do something wrong and have it turn out right. Worrying and fretting just means you're missing out on good things. We're slow to rely on faith, but it's ultimately what gets us through the rough times."

Florida Farm Bureau Federation District 9 Field Representative Sandra "Sam" Phares, nominated Wade Purvis for Florida Farmer of the Year. She commented, "Wade Purvis has built a thriving agricultural operation, while simultaneously empowering his community and contributing to its growth. He is committed to his family, his faith, and his farm. He has also been a strong example of thriving, despite adversity, and being innovative and adaptive under changing circumstances."



She added, “When his plans for a career in the citrus industry changed course, he saw it as an opportunity to build his row crop operations from the ground up. Despite constant development pressure, high volumes of foreign imports, increasing environmental regulations, and changing weather dynamics, he has fought the good fight for viability and profitability. Wade continues to be resilient, while sharing his passion for agriculture with others.”

A distinguished panel of judges will visit Wade Purvis, 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.