



# Sunbelt Ag Expo

## Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release  
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For Immediate Release

### **HENRY BART ("BART") DAVIS JR. NAMED 2023 GEORGIA FARMER OF THE YEAR**

Bart Davis, of Doerun, grew up on his parents' farm of around 500 acres that had a small herd of mother cows and a hog operation. He recalled, "While I was growing up, I always planned to farm alongside my father and was involved in FFA and Young Farmers organizations. Unfortunately my father and mother both passed away during my senior year of high school in 1982. That meant I had to take over the operation just before graduation."

Since 1982, when the farm consisted of 310 rented acres and 190 owned acres, it has grown to a total of 4,975 crop acres, 3,775 of which are rented and 1,416 of which are owned. Initially Davis grew cotton, peanuts, corn, beans, and wheat, alongside raising livestock. In the 1990s, when cotton largely returned to the area, he shifted his focus to cotton and peanuts.

Bart Davis's wife, Paula P. Davis, grew up near Bart and they attended the same high school. In 1984 they married, and in the early years she kept all the books for the business. Now she looks after the family, the house, the grounds, and runs errands as needed. The couple has three children who are all involved in the Davis Family Farms and Davis Cattle Farms operation. Henry Bart ("Trey") Davis, III is 35; Jedd A. Davis is 32; and Lakyn Davis Buckner is 27. Growing up, the Davis children competed in National Junior Angus Association, FFA, and 4-H. Davis recalled, "The 1997 National Junior Angus Show in Perry, Georgia was where all three competed on the state and national level, showing breeding heifers and market steers. That made us so proud of them."

Today all three are managing partners of Davis Family Farms and Davis Cattle Farms. Trey, the eldest, manages all finances, marketing, hedging, risk management, and long-term planning. He also helps in the day-to-day management of irrigation while in season. Jedd, who is married to Natalie, has three children: Emma (11), Brady (7), and Eliza (6). He's in charge of personnel, logistics, and equipment in the field. Lakyn, a Registered Nurse, works part time in her profession at Colquitt Regional Hospital and helps with the farm's daily operations.

Over time the farms have channeled their energy into the seedstock industry and eventually converted their commercial cattle operation to a breeding program. It focuses on seedstock whose genetics thrive in the warm, humid climate of the southeastern US. Today the Davis's



raise purebred Angus and Hereford stock along with elite F1 commercials. They also grow dry and irrigated cotton, irrigated corn, and dry and irrigated peanuts.

Crop yields are as follows: 2,539 acres of irrigated cotton yielding 1,325 lbs/acre; 434 acres of dry cotton yielding 1,215 lbs/acre; 1,461 acres of irrigated peanuts yielding 5,325 lbs/acre; 260 acres of dry peanuts yielding 5,150 lbs/acre; and 304 acres of irrigated corn yielding 235 bushels/acre. The cow/calf operation on Davis Cattle Farms has 325 breeding age females.

As for marketing, Davis reported, "Our operation contracts directly with OLAM Peanut to grow 100 percent of our peanuts for seed. We've been working together over ten years, and the relationship allows us to capture a significant premium for our peanuts. We also have an intricate system of forward contracting, using futures and options and the Revenue Protection aspect of Federal Crop Insurance to manage risks and market our cotton and corn."

He added, "With cotton, it's a little bit trickier. As it tends to appreciate in the months of March, April, and May and depreciate in the fall, we try to be comfortably forward sold by harvest. We don't usually hold cotton, as we feel the risk can outweigh the reward. It's interesting to note that cotton commands the largest acreage in Georgia and has the largest across-the-board economic impact in our state. Our farm staff ranges from field operators to on-farm data analysts to harvest the best crop each season."

Davis is also looking toward future retail-level cotton sales where, he said, "A customer can identify where the fiber contained in their finished product originated and know its story from start to finish (the 'dirt to shirt' concept)." To date, Davis Family Farms has accomplished this on a small scale, selling cotton directly to J. Crew for an upcoming project. This success has whetted their appetite to expand and market a large portion of their crop this way in the future.

On the beef side of the operation, Davis Cattle Farms deals largely in seedstock and has repeat customers for its females and bulls. The steers are marketed typically each August/September, and the best are kept as replacement bulls for the farm and for repeat customers. The females (25 to 150) are sold each year depending on the overall cattle market and cycle.

Davis said, "Our family has also invested in two local businesses that have a direct correlation to the local farming industry. In the mid-2000s, along with a group of other local growers, we purchased Doerun Peanut Co. We realized that being vertically integrated would offer a great deal of profitability." Today Doerun Peanut Co. buys between 25,000 and 30,000 tons annually, enabling Davis to generate additional income, adding to the bottom line.

The second business investment was made in conjunction with a group of local business people to bring a community bank back to the Moultrie area. Davis said, "The goal of this endeavor is to offer true community banking to Colquitt County and surrounding communities. While it's still in its infancy, we are excited about the opportunities it will bring to our local economy."

As for the inevitable challenges of farming, Davis said, "Over the course of my 42 years in this business, employee procurement and retention has consistently been a major issue, only increasing in severity the last ten years. To deal with this problem, our operation pays



competitive base salaries and bonuses, offers health insurance, and makes a percentage of matching IRA contributions. When employees feel appreciated, they are more productive.”

Davis currently has six to eight local full time farm employees (some of whom are family members), and six H2A employees who work from March through December. Davis and his son Trey have an office assistant who helps them manage clerical work so they can spend more time in the field. Davis added, “We never turn away a good applicant who has potential; we’d rather have several extra people than fall behind.”

In terms of environmental awareness, Davis Family Farms has implemented cover crops to minimize tillage and installed habitat for wildlife on dry corners, making better use of marginal acres. They’ve installed moisture meters to pinpoint when a crop needs water. They’ve also increased nutrient management efforts to cut costs and increase yields.

For the past fifteen years, Davis Family Farms has been implementing a unique approach to farm management known as Precision Agriculture (Precision Ag). This is done by integrating information technology into processes that constantly measure, observe, and respond to the needs of the soil and crops. Davis commented, “It ensures that our fields are receiving exactly what they need for optimum health and productivity. This method also enables us to sustain and protect the environment by optimizing returns on inputs while preserving resources.” Because of his work with precision agriculture and wildlife stewardship, Davis was recognized as Quail Forever and Pheasants Forever’s Precision Farmer of the Year in 2021.

On the county level, Davis is a board member of the County FSA Committee, a board member of Moultrie Bank & Trust, and is a past member of the Worth County Livestock Show Committee. On the state level, he serves and a board member and current chairman of the Georgia Cotton Commission and is the chairman of the Georgia Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation. On the national level, he is a voting delegate to the National Cotton Council, a member of Southern Cotton Growers, and a past member of Cotton, Inc.

Bart and Paul Davis attend Doerun Baptist Church and Evergreen Baptist Church, where Paula’s family has deep roots. While Bart stays on the farm most of the time, at least once a year he and Paula get away for a trip to Amelia Island. Paula and Lakyn also occasionally enjoy beach time. Bart and Paula’s favorite past time is being with their three grandchildren, who all love spending time on the farm. Young Brady, in fact, has helped Bart wean calves. Davis said, “I do travel some for the Cotton Growers meetings, but there’s always so much going on here that I say I don’t really have a hobby other than farming. It’s what I’ve always loved to do.”

Davis’s long experience in the agricultural industry has taught him that time stands still for no one. “The chief lesson I’ve learned is that change, even if you don’t like it—and I don’t—is always around the corner. You have to do what it takes to keep up with the times. I’m so blessed that my children help me in this area so we can stay in business and remain competitive.” He added, “It also takes faith to be in this game for the long haul. I think it’s important to make decisions based on what you know at the time and accept the consequences. You may be right or wrong, but that’s all you can do after working as hard as possible to keep moving forward.”



Jeremy M. Kichler, County Extension Coordinator in Colquitt County, nominated Bart Davis for Georgia Farmer of the Year. He said, "I've had the pleasure of working with Mr. Bart Davis over the last nine years. He's not only a leader in the local agricultural community, but is a leader on the state and national levels. He's Chairman of the Georgia Cotton Commission and the Georgia Boll Weevil Eradication program. The latter operation has taken the lead in protecting the environment by planting pollinator habitat on less productive parts of the Davis Family Farm."

He added, "Bart has always been a supporter of Extension and has cooperated on countless on-farm demonstrations and field trials. The data generated from these have impacted growers both locally and regionally. This award could not have gone to a more deserving family farm operation."

A distinguished panel of judges will visit Bart Davis, 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.