



# Sunbelt Ag Expo

## Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release  
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For Immediate Release

### **KENDALL GARRAWAY NAMED 2023 MISSISSIPPI FARMER OF THE YEAR**

Gaddis Farms, in Bolton, Mississippi, is a multi-faceted agricultural operation that includes Gaddis Farms, Gaddis & McLaurin Hardware Feed & Seed, and Gaddis & McLaurin Cotton Gin. Kendall Garraway, of Jackson, Mississippi, is Vice President of Gaddis Farms, and runs the multi-layered enterprise of row crops, timber, cattle, and wildlife leasing and management, and a cotton gin, in partnership with his uncle, "Big Ted" Kendal III, and his cousin, Ted Kendall IV. The family business was incorporated in the 1930s and now includes several dozen shareholders.

Garraway said, "My mother's family—the Gaddis line—had owned and farmed land in this area of central Mississippi since the late 1800s. Growing up mostly in nearby Jackson, I was able to spend a lot of time on the farm, where I developed a deep love of the outdoors, growing things, and hunting. From an early age I was interested in gardening and planting crops and worked on the farm through high school and college summers."

Obtaining a BS degree in Banking and Finance from the University of Mississippi in 1983, Garraway recalled, "After graduating, I almost went to work for a bank. But when my uncle offered me a farm job, I took it and never looked back." His wife Danelle is also an alumna of Ole Miss with a degree in Accounting. Early on she worked for Merrill Lynch and now does farm payroll and accounting work. The couple has three children: Kendall Marie Moore, 30, lives in Alexandria and works for United States Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi. Caroline Phillips Haas, 28, is a second year dermatology resident at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, and John D. Garraway, 20, is attending Hinds Community College, taking ag and welding classes, and works part-time on the farms.

Garraway began farming with 900 acres and now operates a total of 35,000 acres, 1500 of which are rented and 33,500 of which are owned. Yields are as follows: 2500 acres of cotton (all dry land) yielding 900 lbs/acre; 2500 acres of corn yielding 140 bushels/acre; 500 acres of soybeans yielding 40 bushels/acre. His cotton is marketed through Staple Cotton, using both call and seasonal pool methods. The grains are priced throughout the year, with the bulk of corn being sold to a local egg producer for feed. The soybeans are sold on the Mississippi River in Vicksburg.



Gaddis Farms also has a cow calf operation with 1200 cows as well as 15,000 acres of timber consisting of pine and hardwood trees that accommodate a number of wildlife leases and memberships in a hunting club named Halifax Hunting Camp. In an effort to further diversify and provide cash flow to Gaddis Farms, Garraway has invested in retail and commercial real estate as well.

The Gaddis & McLaurin Cotton Gin is managed by Garraway's uncle, Ted Kendall III. It's the only gin in Mississippi south of Interstate 20 and operates two 158 Lummus gin stands that gin 30 bales an hour.

Garraway also manages Gaddis & McLaurin Hardware Feed and Seed, an enterprise that's been around for 150 years. The store has an impressively diverse inventory, supplying everything from seed and feed to hardware, lumber, tools, and clothing. Founded in 1871, "The Store," as it is known to locals, acts as a town hub and even features musicians in a "Bolton After Dark" series of musical performances. Garraway commented, "It's one way we've found to help keep the small town of Bolton vibrant and the community connected."

The three farming principals have long been aware that diversification has helped them avoid the pitfalls of economic peaks and valleys so endemic to farming and ranching. By working closely together every day, they are flexible and knowledgeable enough to work on problems together when they arise, brainstorming their way into workable solutions.

Early in his farming career, Garraway didn't have a lot of good row crop land, but over the years he has increased that type of acreage through purchases and leases. He said, "We've put into practice several programs to take highly erodible land out of row crop production and into timber to better use and protect the soil. We have been using no till and minimum till in our row crop operation to mitigate soil erosion and to use less fuel, which is good for the environment and reduces costs. Hunting and wildlife have always been important to me as recreation and to provide income for the farm. So habitat management is also critical in this area."

Increasingly serious deer depredation has been an ongoing challenge. "When I first started farming nearly forty years ago," Garraway noted, "we didn't see this type of problem, but it's gotten exponentially worse on exponentially more acres over the last few decades. It means we've had to use electric fencing along with depredation permits and hunter education to keep the deer in check. We've also put some land in the Conservation Reserve Program and planted timber in places even when there's been no government incentive to do so. It was a collective decision we made that was just best for the land."

When dealing with farming's pervasive weather challenges, Garraway said, "Since we don't irrigate, our crops are 100 percent dependent on rainfall. There's always the possibility of too little or too much at the wrong time, especially with cotton. He added, "As to the unpredictability of available labor, we simply endeavor to do more with less and use bigger equipment that's more efficient."

Garraway plans to continue diversifying his land holding and income stream through acquisition of land, as well as various real estate investments, timber, and wildlife management



operations. He also intends to enhance his land's productivity by continuing to plant cover crops, do grid sampling, convert highly erodible land to timber, and employ burning and habitat management practices.

"The idea is to increase productivity and production at our store, at the gin, in the row crops, and with the cattle and wildlife so that we can produce a good return on investment for our shareholders. We also have several acres under solar options and are looking at opportunities with solar and other alternative energy sources. Working with Extension Service has helped us to best utilize our resources."

As to professional affiliations, on the county level, Garraway serves as president and director of Gaddis & McLaurin, Inc.; vice president and director of Gaddis Farms; board member of Merchant & Planters Bank; board member and past president of Hinds County Farm Bureau; member of the Advisory Board of Brown Loan Experiment Station; advisory member of the Central Mississippi Research and Extension; past chair of the Southwest Hinds Ducks Unlimited; and serves as district chairman of Four Rivers for Andrew Jackson Council. On the state level, he is a past president of the Mississippi Soybean Association and a member of the board of directors of Cotton, Inc. Garraway is also president of Bolton Methodist Men's Club and regularly attends St. Richard's and St. Peter's Catholic churches in Jackson.

When Kendall and Danelle Garraway have some leisure time, they love to entertain at home. He said, "We live in a great neighborhood where we have good friends. My wife is a wonderful cook, so getting together to enjoy informal meals with our friends and family is what we like to do. We also enjoy trips to the beach at Fort Morgan, Alabama. My favorite outdoor hobbies are hunting and inshore salt water fishing. With me, it's quantity of opportunities and not duration of time with fishing. If they aren't biting after 45 minutes, I pack it up and try another day."

As to the rewarding aspects of farming, Garraway said, "I love watching things grow and the seasonality of agriculture. You get one chance a year to produce a crop and then the next year, a chance to do it better. It's also been a huge pleasure to work with such great employees and see them fulfill their potential over the years. We have a great team of dedicated people who see the big picture and share a common goal at Gaddis Farms."

Garraway has learned several important lessons throughout his career. He commented, "I appreciate Nature in all her splendor and love dealing with all the physical components that go into farming. I've also become more patient over the years. It's the one thing that's helped me avoid hasty and possibly poor decisions. And I've been blessed with my family and extended partnerships and with the people who've helped grow Gaddis Farms by demonstrating loyalty and giving their individual skills and talents to a common goal."

Kyle Lewis, Mississippi State University Extension Agent for Hinds County, said, "It's an honor for me to nominate Mr. Garraway. He has a diverse farming operation and has incorporated soil health and stabilization practices in his row crop. He's been a friend of MSU Extension Service by cooperating with on-farm demo tests in soybean and cotton, where he uses the data to choose variety selection and make intelligent management decisions. He has also made great strides in timber land and wildlife management and prescribed fire management." Lewis added, "Mr. Garraway allows MS Extension Service to use the family's hardware store in Bolton



for programs and demonstrations and is active on Extension and MAFES advisory boards, where his input is greatly valued.”

A distinguished panel of judges will visit Kendall Garraway, 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.