

Sunbelt Ag Expo

Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release
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For Immediate Release

PETE GELBER NAMED 2026 GEORGIA FARMER OF THE YEAR

Pete Gelber grew up in the Bronx, a part of New York City. His parents purchased a cabin three hours north of the city to keep the five children out of trouble in the summer. After his brother obtained a job at the neighboring 30 cow dairy, Pete started trailing behind his brother when he was twelve. This childhood experience turned into a lifelong career in the dairy industry, as it inspired Pete to pursue a degree in Animal Science at Cornell University. Today, Pete owns one of the largest dairy operations in the Southeastern United States where he integrates progress, sustainability, and productivity.

After struggling mightily on a small rented hillside dairy Pete went to work for Ron St. John, who at the time was milking 700 cows in western New York. St. John moved to Florida in 1986 and Pete followed four years later. St. John became both a mentor and friend to Pete. When St. John purchased a couple of bankrupt dairies in Montezuma, Georgia, Pete was made a partner in the newly attained entities.

Pete quickly recognized the opportunities the Georgia dairies offered. A great aquifer, large productive fields and a strong milk market were all conducive to dairying. All of these benefits positioned the dairies for long-term growth and profitability. In 2007, Pete moved to Montezuma, Georgia to manage the dairies full-time. Five years later, he purchased the dairies and assumed full ownership with his son, Richard Gelber.

“I have been extremely fortunate throughout my career to work with exceptional and generous partners,” said Pete.

Today, Pete’s 10,000+ acre operation is structured into four distinct business units. The farm headquarters, Barrington LLC, is located on the northern end of the property and houses half of the milking herd and all of the dry cows. Highbriarton Maco, on the south end of the property, houses the highest-producing cows and features a state-of-the-art 120-head rotary milking parlor. Pete milks 13,500 cows between the two facilities, producing around 1.3 million pounds of milk per day. Highbriarton Aglands and Barrington Aglands both function as cropping operations, producing corn, wheat, and millet silage that is supplied directly back to the dairies for feed. The four entities work in supporting the productivity, efficiency, and long-term success of the dairy farm.

Each cow at Barrington LLC contributes economically through fluid milk production or by sale to third-party markets. Fluid milk is marketed through Dairy Farmers of America and sent into grocery stores in Georgia and the Southeast.

The breeding program at Barrington LLC uses sexed semen along with the top genetic females to produce desirable replacement heifers that support future expansion. All the cows are genomically tested to select the top 50% of genetic superior females. All other females are bred to Angus bulls. These calves are sold to feedlots and finished for beef production. Cull cows are bid out weekly. An average of 95 head per week are sold. This process ensures that the most productive cows remain in the milking herd and supports the overall efficiency and profitability of the operation. Revenue generated from the sale of beef calves and cull cows represents an important component of Gelber's business model, accounting for approximately 15% of annual income.

Environmental stewardship is crucial on a large operation like Barrington Dairy LLC. Pete follows the old saying, "Leave it better than you found it," with each environmental decision he makes. Richard Gelber, Pete's son, has developed an extensive lagoon system and land base that plays a critical role in efficiency for the operation. Its large storage capacity allows for significant volumes of manure, which is then applied directly to crops during key vegetative growth stages to provide nutrients, reduce fertilizer input costs, and improve crop yields. Pete has also installed additional pumps with electric motors to increase pumping capacity while reducing emissions compared to traditional diesel-powered systems. Through improved productivity in both the herd and crop production, Barrington LLC has reduced the farm's overall carbon footprint.

Pete's three children and five grandchildren have all worked, or will work, on the dairy. His son, Richard, currently serves as the dairy's Operations Manager, overseeing crop production, irrigation systems, and lagoon management. Pete values raising his family on the farm and teaching the importance of hard work, a positive attitude, and understanding the true value of a dollar. He knows his operation wouldn't be possible without his employees, and he is committed to providing a supportive work environment for them. He has given three longtime employees phantom stock in the business.

"I hope to help educate future generations about the importance of agriculture, the value of maintaining a positive attitude and caring for both animals and employees," said Pete.

Along with his operation, he also values supporting the community and growing the dairy industry as a whole. He currently provides calves for the Baby Barn exhibit at the Georgia National Fair which allows consumers to see where their milk comes from and learn about modern dairy farming practices. Pete opens his farm up for tours and field trips, allowing students, veterinary students, and industry professionals to learn about a modern dairy operation firsthand. He also provides internships on the farm for students from multiple states interested in veterinary science or dairy science.

Locally, Pete supports the 4-H and FFA programs in numerous Georgia counties. The dairy participates in the Macon County Elementary Farm Day which teaches students about

agriculture. On the state level, he is a member of Georgia Milk Producers and serves on the Board of Directors for the Agriculture Commodity Commission for Milk. In 2022, Pete was named the Distinguished Agricultural Steward Award Winner.

“By striving to be a responsible steward of our land, livestock, and natural resources, I hope to serve as a positive example of sustainable agriculture while helping educate others about the importance and impact of the dairy industry,” said Pete. “At the very least we want to stay off the six o’clock news,” he joked.

Pete was nominated for the Georgia Farmer of the Year award by Macon County Extension Agent Madison W. Luke.

“Pete Gelber exemplifies the dedication, innovation, leadership, and stewardship which define a true Farmer of the Year,” said Luke. “Through hard work, perseverance, and a commitment to strong values, Pete built and grew one of Georgia’s leading dairy operations. Under his leadership, the operation has evolved through extensive modernization efforts. Pete’s impact extends far beyond his operation. He has devoted decades to serving the dairy industry and agricultural community through leadership roles, mentorship, educational outreach, and support for future generations.”

A distinguished panel of judges will visit each finalist in August and the winner will be announced during the 2026 Sunbelt Ag Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year Luncheon.

Returning program sponsors in 2026 are Harper Family Holdings, the Alabama Farmers Federation, Arkansas Farm Bureau, Florida Farm Bureau, Georgia Farm Bureau, North Carolina Farm Bureau, South Carolina Farm Bureau, Virginia Farm Bureau, the Georgia Association of Conservation Districts, Ag Georgia Farm Credit, Ag South Farm Credit, and SW Georgia Farm Credit and Arkansas Farm Credit. New sponsors for 2026 include Phoebe Putney Health Systems.

As the state winner of the Sunbelt Expo award, they will receive a \$2,500 cash award and an expense-paid trip to the Sunbelt Expo from the sponsors. A vest from the sponsors will be given to each state winner and nominator. The Moultrie Colquitt Co. Chamber of Commerce will give each state winner a local keepsake.

The state winners are now eligible for the \$15,000 cash prize awarded to the overall winner by the sponsors. Massey Ferguson North America will provide each state winner with a gift package and the overall winner with the use of a Massey Ferguson tractor for a year or 250 hours (whichever comes first). A jacket from the sponsors will be given to the overall winner. Hays LTI will award the overall winner with a HAYS Smoker/Grill. In addition, the overall winner will receive a Henry Repeating Arms American Farmer Tribute Edition rifle from Reinke Irrigation and a diesel prize package from Howes.