

Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo
Southeastern Farmer of the Year

News Release

Contact: Janie Batson

704-788-7026

E-mail: jbbatson@etc.net

For Release Tuesday, Oct. 18, 2011

After 2 p.m.

NORTH CAROLINIAN THOMAS PORTER JR.
NAMED SWISHER SWEETS/SUNBELT EXPO
SOUTHEASTERN FARMER OF THE YEAR
FOR 2011

Moultrie, Ga.—Thomas Porter, Jr., from Concord, N.C., has been selected as the 2011 overall winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.

A successful livestock farmer, Porter raises poultry, hogs and beef cattle. He was announced as the overall winner during the Willie B. Withers Luncheon held on the opening day of the 2011 Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show. Porter was chosen as Farmer of the Year over eight other state winners who were finalists for the 2011 award.

This is the second time for Porter to compete for the award. He was also a state winner for North Carolina in 2006. Since the award began in 1990, Porter is the third overall winner to come from North Carolina.

The Farmer of the Year award recognizes excellence in agricultural production and management, along with leadership in community and farm organizations. The award also honors family contributions in producing safe and abundant supplies of food, fiber and shelter products for U.S. consumers.

J. Thomas Ryan, president of Swisher International, Inc, of Jacksonville, Fla., praised Porter for his farming success. “Thomas and his family represent the best of American agriculture,” said Ryan. “He is an excellent environmental steward and an individual who gives back to the farming community through his leadership in many farm organizations. His wife Vicky is also a strong contributor and an outstanding leader in her own right.”

This is the 22nd consecutive year that Swisher International has sponsored the Farmer of the Year award. Ryan said, “It is a great privilege for our company and our Swisher

Sweets cigar brand to support this award and to recognize this outstanding farmer and his family for their many achievements.”

“It is a great honor to have been selected for this award,” said Porter. “I’ve known of the high standards for this award since I was named as a state winner in 2006. To be named again as a state winner, and then to have been selected as the overall winner is a humbling experience. All of the state winners are outstanding farmers who are effective leaders and who are strongly supported by their families.”

As a contract grower of hogs and chickens, Porter is at the top of his profession. He raises hogs for Murphy-Brown, and this company has designated his farm as a “multiplier” operation. This means his farm is a primary source for gilts grown as replacement breeding stock. He grows broiler pullets and produces eggs from broiler layers for Tyson Foods. Porter has been entrusted with the responsibility of producing the breeding animals, the eggs and the birds that are vital to the success of both companies.

Porter grew up on a dairy farm where he developed his strong desire to become a full time farmer. He built his farm largely on his own. He worked at off-farm jobs, as a pipe fitter, welder, and building contractor. He saved enough money to invest the earnings from his off-farm work in his new farm. While working at these off-farm jobs, he never lost his desire to earn his living as a full-time farmer. “My family and I established and built this farm,” Porter said. “All of my income is from the farm, and I appreciate what the farm contributes to our livelihood.”

The new Farmer of the Year was selected for the honor by three judges who visited his farm and the farms of the other state winners during August of this year. The judges this year included Jim Bone, retired manager of field development with DuPont Crop Protection from Valdosta, Ga.; Charles Snipes, a retired Mississippi Extension weed scientist who is president and research scientist with Stoneville R&D, Inc., from Greenville, Miss.; and John McKissick, longtime University of Georgia Extension ag economist from Athens, Ga.

Jim Bone, the senior judge for the award this year, said, “Without a doubt, this is the closest competition we’ve had since I have been judging the Farmer of the Year award. Each of the state winners had a strong record of farming innovation and outstanding management. These state winners were outstanding examples of ingenuity. We saw many new farming practices on their farms that will become commonplace in the years to come. It was refreshing to see such outstanding examples of family togetherness in producing quality food and fiber to meet not only U.S. demand, but world demand as well.”

According to Bone, the judges were impressed with how Porter built his farm from a humble start. For instance, Porter’s current 300-head beef cattle herd was started from an original small herd of five cows that he bought during the 1970’s.

The judges were also impressed with the appearance of his farm and his environmental stewardship. In particular, they admired how well he gets along with his farm's nearest neighbors, a children's daycare center and a church. Porter takes great care not to apply lagoon effluent through irrigation anywhere near these facilities during the business hours of the childcare facility and when activities are scheduled at the church.

Porter's farm also features a state-of-the-art stack house for storing dry poultry litter, along with a modern composting facility for handling animal carcasses. These allow him to apply the compost and litter as to his pastures and save money on what he'd normally spend for fertilizer.

Being a good neighbor to the church and the daycare center reflects the hard work Porter has undertaken in keeping his farm aesthetically pleasing while minimizing offensive odors that might come from the animals.

The judges also appreciated the time that Thomas and his wife Vicky devote to serving as leaders in local and state agricultural organizations. In addition, the judges concluded that Porter would be an enthusiastic spokesperson for American agriculture.

The judges also admired the support the Porters receive from their family. Their sons Derek and Jared work at off-farm jobs, but also work at the farm during time off from their main jobs. Their daughter Erin handles payroll and accounts receivable for the farming operation. Jared's wife Colleen manages the poultry layer operation for the farm.

As the Southeastern Farmer of the Year, Porter will receive a \$15,000 cash award from Swisher International. He will also receive the use of a tractor of his choice for a year from Massey Ferguson North America, gift certificates totaling \$1,000 from Southern States and a custom made Canvasback gun safe from Misty Morn Safe Co. He will also receive a jacket, \$500 gift certificate and \$500 in cash from the Williamson-Dickie clothing company.

Other state winners this year include Andy Wendland of Autaugaville, Ala., Michael Oxner of Searcy, Ark., Ron St. John of Trenton, Fla., Carlos Vickers of Nashville, Ga., Scott Cannada of Edwards, Miss., Kevin Elliott of Nichols, S.C., Mac Pate of Maryville, Tenn., and Donald Horsley of Virginia Beach, Va.

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