

Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

WALLICK HARDING NAMED 2010 VIRGINIA FARMER OF THE YEAR

For Wallick Harding of Jetersville, Va., life on his Hard Acres Farm got a little harder this year when he missed out on getting a contract to grow flue cured tobacco. He has come up with a few ideas, however, to ease the loss his main money crop.

This tobacco setback notwithstanding, Harding has had a long career as a successful crop and cattle farmer. As a result, he has been selected as the 2010 Virginia winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. Harding now joins nine other state winners from the Southeast as finalists for the award. The overall winner will be announced on Tuesday, Oct. 19 at the Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show in Moultrie, Ga.

He farms with his younger brother Kerry on 785 acres. Last year's crops included 24 acres of tobacco yielding 2,083.3 pounds per acre, 400 acres of soybeans yielding 36 bushels per acre, 120 acres of corn yielding 110 bushels per acre, 48 acres of barley yielding 92 bushels per acre and 150 acres of wheat yielding 48 bushels per acre. Their commercial beef cattle herd consists of 55 about head.

Wallick grew up on the farm he now operates and was raised in a house built around 1735, though it hasn't been in his family that long. "I was on a tractor and helping my dad when I was five years old," Wallick recalls. "His old tractor had a hand clutch I operated."

In 1979, he became a partner in the farm as did Kerry in 1986. In 2000, their dad developed Alzheimer's disease, so the brothers took over its management.

When they grew tobacco, their costs were low. They raised their own transplants and the brothers provided the labor. They had been growing tobacco for Philip Morris International, but contracts this year were not available. They heard others grew tobacco this year without a contract, but felt that would be too risky for them.

If tobacco contracts are offered next year, they'll be ready. And if tobacco contracts aren't available, they have other plans they intend to put into action.

For one, they'll expand their existing on-farm repair service. Kerry has been fixing cars, trucks, tractors and other machinery on the side for a number of years, and this year

Wallick stepped in to help this business grow. “The repair service is an integral part of our farm, and it is something we’ve always done during the winter,” says Wallick. “Kerry loves to solve complicated engine problems, and he is meticulous. He gets that from our grandfather who maintained factory boilers and as a hobby built small scale fully working replicas of railroad engines.”

Wallick says he’ll also expand his custom grain harvesting up to about 800 acres. He used to provide custom hay baling, and may offer this as well. He also owns two bulldozers, a dirt pan and a road grader and can use this equipment to pick up temporary jobs. He has mostly used this equipment on his own land to build ponds, roads, grassed waterways and to clear trees.

He’ll also probably increase corn and soybean acreage. Wallick is planting two new Pioneer corn hybrids developed for their ability to produce well in dry weather. He has an eye for selecting good corn hybrids because he has sold corn seed over the years as a farmer dealer for four different seed companies. This year, the Hardings are planting STS soybeans tolerant to sulfonyleurea herbicides as a lower cost alternative to Roundup Ready varieties.

Wallick is pleased with the barley he has grown. He sells it to Osage Bio Energy for making ethanol at a new plant in Hopewell, Va. “Barley has been better than wheat for growing doublecropped soybeans,” he explains. “Barley has been higher yielding, cheaper to grow and we can harvest it earlier than wheat. It can be early July before wheat is harvested and our soybeans don’t yield as well when planted that late. When we harvest barley, we’re able to plant full season doublecropped soybeans.”

The Hardings practice conservation on their farm. They’ve used no-till planting since the mid 1980’s along with contour planting and buffer strips. They farm in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and they’ve voluntarily taken steps to make sure water leaving their farm is clean.

They farm an urbanizing area not far from Richmond. While this makes it hard to find land to farm, it also presents challenges in conveying a positive image of farming to neighbors who may not have much appreciation for agriculture. Wallick says, “Our farm is on a major highway and we keep a neat farmstead so those driving by will have a positive view of our farm and our industry.

Wallick has supported community organizations. He served in the Jetersville Volunteer Fire Dept. He’s a member of Amelia County Farm Bureau and has served on its board and as its secretary, vice president and president. He has been a member of the Farm Service Agency county committee. He’s a member of Trinity United Methodist Church and has also been a supporter of local FFA.

He is a member of the Virginia Corn Board overseeing farmer-contributed checkoff funds for research and education. He has been a board member of the Virginia Soybean Association. And he has served on committees for Virginia Farm Bureau. In 1989, he

was a district winner in Virginia Farm Bureau's Young Farmer of the Year award program. In 1987, the Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District recognized him as the Outstanding Young Conservation Farmer. Wallick also took part in the American Soybean Association-DuPont Young Leader Program in 1997.

His wife Mary Beth is a special education teacher and is a member of school and teacher's organizations. She has also been a sponsor for students attending state and national Beta Club conventions.

Wallick and Mary Beth have four children. Their oldest, Matthew, works in site cleanup and debris removal. Their son Andrew spent four years in the Marines and is now attending a police academy. Their daughter Meghan is currently unemployed and their daughter Emily will attend a local college this fall.

Kerry and his wife Renee have a son Parker and daughters Juliana and Carly. Renee works as a school paraprofessional and assists Mary Beth in her classroom.

"All of our children, both mine and Kerry's, have helped on the farm, especially during tobacco harvesting," says Wallick. "They still help us as their schedules permit. Also, our mother Lorraine Harding handles our bookkeeping."

Cathy Sutphin, associate Extension director for 4-H at Virginia Tech University, serves as state coordinator of for the Farmer of the Year award. Cynthia Gregg, Extension agent in Lawrenceville, Va., nominated Wallick for the award.

"Wallick and Kerry work diligently to protect water and land resources," says Gregg. "They make people feel welcome on their farm and they're always willing to help their neighbors."

As the Virginia state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo award, Wallick Harding will now receive a \$2,500 cash award and an expense paid trip to the Sunbelt Expo from Swisher International of Jacksonville, Fla., a jacket and a \$200 gift certificate from the Williamson-Dickie Company, and a \$500 gift certificate from Southern States.

He is also now eligible for the \$15,000 that will go to the overall winner. Other prizes for the overall winner include the use of a Massey Ferguson tractor for a year from Massey Ferguson North America, a custom made Canvasback gun safe from Misty Morn Safe Co., and another \$500 gift certificate from the Southern States cooperative. Also, Williamson-Dickie will provide another jacket, a \$500 gift certificate and \$500 in cash to the overall winner.

Swisher International, through its Swisher Sweets cigar brand, and the Sunbelt Expo are sponsoring the Southeastern Farmer of the Year Award for the 21st consecutive year. Swisher has contributed some \$804,000 in cash awards and other honors to southeastern farmers since the award was initiated in 1990.

Previous state winners from Virginia include: Nelson Gardner of Bridgewater, 1990; Russell Inskeep of Culpepper, 1991; Harry Bennett of Covington, 1992; Hilton Hudson of Alton, 1993; Buck McCann of Carson, 1994; George M. Ashman, Jr. of Amelia, 1995; Bill Blalock of Baskerville, 1996; G. H. Peery III of Ceres, 1997; James Bennett of Red House, 1998; Ernest Copenhaver of Meadowview, 1999; John Davis of Port Royal, 2000; James Huffard III of Crockett, 2001; J. Hudson Reese of Scottsburg, 2002; Charles Parkerson of Suffolk, 2003; Lance Everett of Stony Creek, 2004; Monk Sanford of Orange, 2005; Paul House of Nokesville, 2006; Steve Berryman of Surry, 2007; Tim Sutphin of Dublin, 2008; and Billy Bain of Dinwiddie, 2009.

Virginia has had two overall winners with Nelson Gardner of Bridgewater in 1990 and Charles Parkerson of Suffolk in 2003.

Harding's farm, along with the farms of the other nine state finalists, will be visited by a distinguished panel of judges during the week of August 9-13. The judges for this year are James Lee Adams, a farmer from Camilla, Ga., and the overall winner of the award in 2000; Jim Bone, manager of field development for DuPont Crop Protection from Valdosta, Ga., and Charles Snipes, a retired Mississippi Extension weed scientist who is president and research scientist with Stoneville R&D, Inc., from Greenville, Miss.

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Note to media: Hard Acres Farm owned by Wallick Harding will be visited by the judges on Tuesday, Aug. 10 from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. The farm is located at 21200 Patrick Henry Hwy., Jetersville, VA 23083. If you would like to visit the farm during the judging, please call Janie Batson at 704-788-7026, or contact her by e-mail at jbbatson@ctc.net, or contact Harding by calling 804-561-2216.