

# Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo

## Southeastern Farmer of the Year

*Press Release*

Contact: Janie Batson

704-788-7026

e-mail: [jbbatson@ctc.net](mailto:jbbatson@ctc.net)

For Immediate Release

### **DOUG LANGLEY NAMED 2009 KENTUCKY FARMER OF THE YEAR**

A Spanish-speaking Kentuckian who grows corn that's made into premium sour mash bourbon has developed a diversified farming operation during a 26-year farming career.

Doug Langley of Shelbyville, Ky., farms more than 5,000 acres of which 422 acres are owned and 4,900 acres are rented. He raises 200 acres of burley tobacco yielding 2,700 pounds per acre, 2,800 acres of corn yielding 130 bushels per acre, 2,400 acres of soybeans yielding 42 bushels per acre and 60 acres of wheat yielding 80 bushels per acre. He also backgrounds about 2,000 head of beef cattle each year. He's the largest producer of tobacco, corn and soybeans in Shelby County.

As a result of his success as a crop and livestock farmer, Langley has been selected as the 2009 Kentucky winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. Langley now joins nine other state winners from the Southeast as finalists for the award. The overall winner will be announced on Tuesday, Oct. 20 at the Sunbelt Expo farm show in Moultrie, Ga.

He began backgrounding cattle in 2005 to diversify his operation, and converted an old leased dairy farm into a small feedlot. Adding modern watering and mobile feed bunk facilities allows him to continuously keep 300 to 600 feeder steers. While backgrounding, he adds about 300 pounds to each head for a total production of about 600,000 pounds of beef per year.

As a young child, his first tobacco crop consisted of six plants in his backyard, and his full-time farming father fostered his love of farming. "My father sharecropped and never farmed more than 300 acres," he recalls. "We had a small combine and a mix of equipment I used to get my start in farming." His father retired in 1989, and Langley began sharecropping with another landowner. He also did custom work, and slowly started buying his own equipment and farming on his own.

"Today, we still do custom work," he says. This includes planting and harvesting 1,000 acres and spraying 10,000 acres each year. Custom farming provides cash flow and allows him to invest in new equipment that makes his farm more efficient and allows him

to farm more land. Custom farming has also helped him build relationships with landowners who offer Langley Farms early rights to bid on available land.

Top-quality, non-transgenic corn grown on his farm is sold on contract to a renowned Kentucky distillery that produces Woodford Reserve bourbon. For the past five years, Langley has been the exclusive supplier of corn used by the distillery. The bourbon is aged for a minimum of seven years and Langley says, "I'm looking forward to buying the first barrel of Woodford Reserve made from my corn." He plans to give bottles of that bourbon to employees and others who had a hand in helping to produce that corn crop.

Close proximity to the Consolidated Grain & Barge facility on the Ohio River adds value to his soybeans. "Instead of getting hammered by huge transportation and basis costs, our soybeans are direct marketed in the winter months through this river port," he says.

"Our burley tobacco is sold through direct contract to Philip Morris International," he adds. Since the quota buyout, buyers have demanded top-quality, consistent tobacco, and the contracts can be revoked if the tobacco fails to measure up.

"I am building two new state-of-the art curing barns to provide the product Philip Morris demands," says Langley. The new barns are indeed efficient. "Two men can hang tobacco in the entire barn, compared to four men required to hang tobacco in older barns," he explains. The new barns also allow him to consolidate curing so he won't need to move his work crews so often from one barn to another. He says, "By investing in better curing and storage facilities and producing a top quality product, we plan to continue contracting tobacco for many years to come."

"We also grow tobacco transplants we sell to other producers," he says. "One of my customers is a Tennessee farmer I met through the Philip Morris Leadership Program." The tobacco company has also recognized Langley for his excellent production practices.

"This is not a one-person farm," he says. "I have many talented people I rely on to make this place work." Langley employs about 12 workers during the spring, and about 30 during the August harvesting season. He depends on H-2A workers, foreign nationals who come from Mexico and Honduras. He says the H-2A labor program is cumbersome, but worth it to get a willing workforce. "I also depend on my Southern States store, my Deere dealer, and my landlords, and I've received good advice from older farmers," he says. "I'm no good without the people who help me."

The farm can store up to 300,000 bushels of grain. Urban growth in his area has taken land out of farming and left developers with grain bins to unload. Langley teamed up with an Indiana man and learned how to deconstruct, move and rebuild old grain bins. "We worked with him to move one bin, and the next year we moved another," he says. "We're now able to move the bins ourselves. We provide a service to developers who give us the bins if we take them down."

Locally, Langley is active in Farm Bureau, Southern States, Farm Credit Services, Community Charities, Extension board, Ruritan Club, First Baptist Church, and the county fair. On the state level, He has been a member of Kentucky's 200 Bushel Corn Club, Soybean Association, Corn Growers Association, Young Farmers Association, Farm Bureau, Burley Advisory Committee and the Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative.

On the national level, he serves as a member of the Southern States board. He enjoys meeting farmers at events sponsored by Farm Bureau, Southern States, Philip Morris and other organizations, and says, "There's a lot more education from these groups than what's just on the agenda."

Langley and his wife Robin have three children. Their daughter Elaine is nine years old. Son Bruce will be a student at Western Kentucky University this fall and supervises hay production. "We needed more forages, and my plate was full, so I asked Bruce to manage the hay," says Langley. Their younger son Christopher sells sweet corn from a roadside stand. Langley says Christopher's sideline business has good growth potential. Christopher recently donated \$200 of his earnings to a paralyzed cousin who needed a larger home to accommodate his wheelchair.

Robin keeps records and helps make major decisions regarding the farm. She is active in Community Charities, First Baptist Church, Farm Bureau and has joined her husband in hosting tours and field days. Students attending the National FFA Convention, congressional aides, Michigan Farm Bureau families and visitors from Japan and Russia have all been welcomed to their farm.

Jay McCants, director of Young Farmer programs with Kentucky Farm Bureau, is the state coordinator of the Farmer of the Year award. Another farmer, Eddie Melton of Sebree, Ky., nominated Langley for the award. Melton, a grain and beef producer, knew Langley as a fellow Farm Bureau member and Southern States board member, and encouraged him to apply for the award.

"One thing I'm proud of is that I can communicate with my Hispanic employees," says Langley. "They taught me Spanish and I am fluent. People miss out if they don't really get to know their Hispanic workers. We visit their homes in Mexico, and there's a satisfaction in seeing these people succeed, buy land and build their own homes."

As the Kentucky state winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award, Langley 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 20<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Swisher has contributed some \$764,000 in cash awards and other honors to southeastern farmers since the award was initiated in 1990.

Kentucky farmers became eligible to compete for the award in 2006. Previous state winners from Kentucky include Sam Moore of Morgantown in 2006, Scott Travis of Cox's Creek in 2007 and Loretta Lyons of Tompkinsville in 2008.

Langley'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 Aug. 10-14. The judges for this year include Elwyn Deal, a retired Clemson University Extension leader from Anderson, S.C.; James Lee Adams, a farmer from Camilla, Ga., and the overall winner of the award in 2000; and Jim Bone, manager of field development for DuPont Crop Protection from Valdosta, Ga.

###

**Note to media:** The farm of Doug Langley will be visited by the judges on Thursday, Aug. 13 from 1:45 p.m. until 4:45 p.m. The farm is located at 3248 Taylorsville Road, Shelbyville, KY 40065. 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](mailto:jbbatson@ctc.net), or contact Langley by calling 502-834-7406.