

NEWSMAKERS

Compiled by Lindsay King, assistant editor

Within this “Newsmakers” column we share important news and accomplishments of our members, including state association activities, birth and marriage announcements, and news of Angus members’ passing.

In recognition



Michael H. McDowell of Vernon Hill, Va., has been selected the overall winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt

Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award for 2019. He is a fourth-generation Halifax County farmer and cattleman who grows mixed grass hay, annual hay, and alfalfa and raises registered Angus cattle.

His family farm, Locust Level Farms, historically grew tobacco and row crops. But when McDowell had gained experience with land management, he saw tobacco quota cuts approaching and an opportunity for future viability with purebred cattle. He developed an Angus seedstock operation and implemented improvements that included permanent grass cover and wide use of over- and interseeding with forage systems, along with stockpiling fescue and minimizing tillage production.

McDowell has embraced new techniques for producing Angus cattle for commercial herds that include genetic selection, ultrasonic evaluation for yearling bulls and heifers, evaluation of genomic rankings and embryo transfer (ET) programs with vet consultation.

The McDowell family includes three adult children — all physicians.

One is a veterinarian married to a veterinarian; one is a dentist married to a dentist, and the other is an ER doctor married to an optometrist. Michael and his wife of 43 years, Wanda, have eight grandchildren.

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 in early August of this year.

This is the 13th year for the Southeastern Farmer of the Year award. It recognizes excellence in agricultural production and farm management, along with leadership in farm and community organizations. The award also honors family contributions in producing safe and abundant supplies of food, fiber, and shelter products.

John Miller, president of Swisher International, Inc., of Jacksonville, Fla., praised McDowell for his farming accomplishments. “Mike is an outstanding farmer who took a unique path to build his operation over the years and become a role model for others who want to farm,” Miller says. “It is an honor for our company and our Swisher Sweets cigar brand to recognize Mike and his family for their accomplishments.”

Historic Angus Herd

In 1953, Ottis and his brother, Billy G. Wright founded their farm in Campbellsville, Ky. The Wright

brothers bought their first heifers for \$500 each and they showed calves in 4-H and FFA. The farm later became known as County Line Angus.

As a young man, Ottis always heard the media talking about President Eisenhower going back home to check on his Aberdeen Angus. His thought was if Angus were good enough for the president of the United States, then they were what they wanted to purchase. Later on, he learned all the other opportunities the Angus breed had to offer.

Ottis’s first purchases came from Oscar Lobb Angus in Gabe, Ky., and later from C.W. Burrell in Greensburg, Ky.

Throughout the years, Ottis held onto his best heifers to continue improving the herd. He then started using artificial insemination (AI) to improve the herd even more.

“I always kept my Angus cows, even when I was in the army with the help of my father and brother,” Ottis says.

Ottis has served on his local cattlemen’s association board of directors and also served as an advisor for his local junior cattlemen’s group. **AJ**