

Allen Eubanks

ALLEN EUBANKS, 1992 AGRICULTURAL economics alumnus, was selected as 2015 Mississippi winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.

His operation, Eubanks Produce, is one of Mississippi's largest vegetable farms. He has acreage across six counties and into Alabama.

In addition to Eubanks Produce, he and his wife Janice own Charlie's U-Pik, where customers hand select their own harvest, and Farm Fresh Gourmet, an entity that provides products, recipes, and canning and preserving tips. Charlie's U-Pik, named after his father Charlie Eubanks, is a 100-acre produce farm where customers can pick their own fruits and vegetables. Farm Fresh focuses on developing recipes and creating products, like green tomato relish, pickles, and strawberry pepper jelly.

The entire operation encompasses approximately 2,800 acres; crops include cantaloupe, watermelon, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet corn, squash, and soybeans. This past year, Eubanks planted sweet potatoes for the first time.

A farmer for more than 20 years, Eubanks is a fourth-generation farmer and the legacy continues on with his entire family.

"I've loved farming for as long as I can remember. My grandfather held me as a baby and told everyone I would be his 'little farmer,'" he said. "I am honored and greatly blessed to be able to carry on the family farm tradition. My wife, Janice, and our children, Andrew, Allison, Joshua, and Jacob are all involved in the farm. Janice handles all of the accounting and office staff which is huge in our business. All of our kids are heavily involved in our U-Pik operation during

the summer. Some of them will probably carry the torch to the next generation, but time will tell."

Eubanks and his family give back to the community in several ways. He has served on the boards of the George County Co-op and Southern Ag Credit and was a member of the USDA Farm Service Agency state committee. He's also been recognized by the Mississippi Public Health Association and is a member of several organizations including the National Watermelon Association, Produce Marketing Association, and United Produce Association. Janice makes sure the operation is compliant with the Produce Traceability Initiative and Good Agricultural Practice. She also serves on the Ivy League Garden Club, on the board of the United Way for Jackson and George Counties, and is a 4-H volunteer. Recently, they held a farm-to-table dinner, which raised \$3,000 for St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

Eubanks said his time at MSU helped him prepare for a career in farming, which has evolved over the years.

"Farming has changed drastically since I began. We have many more tools available and are able to manage down to the square foot now," he said.

Eubanks uses precision agricultural tools including GPS, precision spraying, land leveling, and drain tile installation. He also uses drip irrigation.

"My degree provided a solid base. At MSU, I learned a lot about agriculture and economics, but more importantly I learned about the world and how things flow. I learned how to get the answers I didn't know."

He says since then he's reached out to MSU Experiment Station scientists and extension personnel for help multiple times with a particular problem or question.

His advice to current students is to figure out what you like to do and do it with passion.

"My favorite place to be has always been the field," he said. "I enjoy seeing the seeds get planted in the ground and develop into crops that feed thousands." ❖

Allen Eubanks co-owns Eubanks Produce Farms with wife Janice. Eubanks grows diversified truck crops of fruits and vegetables, as well as classic row crops and is the 2015 Mississippi Farmer of the Year.

