

Doing the right thing to preserve their land

WHILE following Cary Lightsey down Sam Keen Road, the scenery seeps into my soul. Green pastures populated with hale and hearty heifers, cows and calves. Spanish moss blowing in the breeze. A couple of hawks drifting lazily on the wind. We stop to wait for a rafter of wild turkeys to cross the road.



Guest Editorial

By PAM GOLDEN

Later Cary will tell me that he was up at 4:30 that morning, driving around

the ranch, clearing his head. He'd been branding cattle for a couple of weeks, working the pens, and needed to get back in touch with his land.

I understood.

Lightsey Cattle Co., situated between Orlando and Tampa, is a trip back in time for those who remember a Florida before Mickey, the country before

condos. Drop most folks here and they wouldn't believe they were in Florida. But this will be a corner of Florida that stays pristine for years to come — the Lightseys have 80% of it set aside in conservation easements.

A few weeks earlier James Lee Adams took me to a 200-acre corner of his family farm that he's restored to its original state: Georgia swamp. The land had been drained and used for cattle grazing before James Lee bought it. As soon as he saw it, he knew that was the wrong thing to do to that land.

James Lee was the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year in 2000. Cary is Florida's nominee this year. They're not the exception in this competition. Many years ago I lost count of how many of these farmers also earned state and national conservation awards.

Soccer moms, Sierra Club geeks and Greenpeace kids want to talk about sustainability? Here it is. These guys aren't talking about; they're doing something about it.

And they're not alone. Farmers across this land take the time, energy and money to ensure America still will be beautiful for generations to come — or at least their corner of it will be. But these farm families set the standard for stewardship, for conservation, for business acumen. "For Excellence in Agriculture" is not just a savvy marketing phrase for this program.

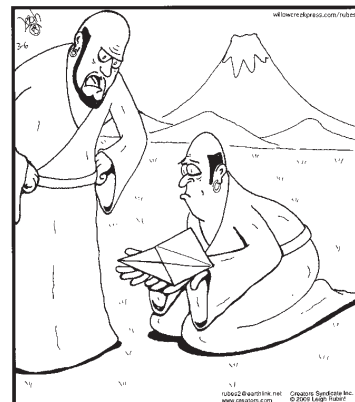
Know how many named Farmer of the Year have gone bankrupt? None.

Know how many Farmer of the Year award winners have a next generation ready to compete for one of Southeast agriculture's highest honors? Well, that's a trick question; I don't know how many either. What I do know is they all plan for a future that includes providing an agricultural enterprise for generations to come on land that's been tended with the skill and care our grandmothers put into our family christening gowns.

The hats for the Farmer of the Year program say "Swisher Sweets Salutes the American Farmer."

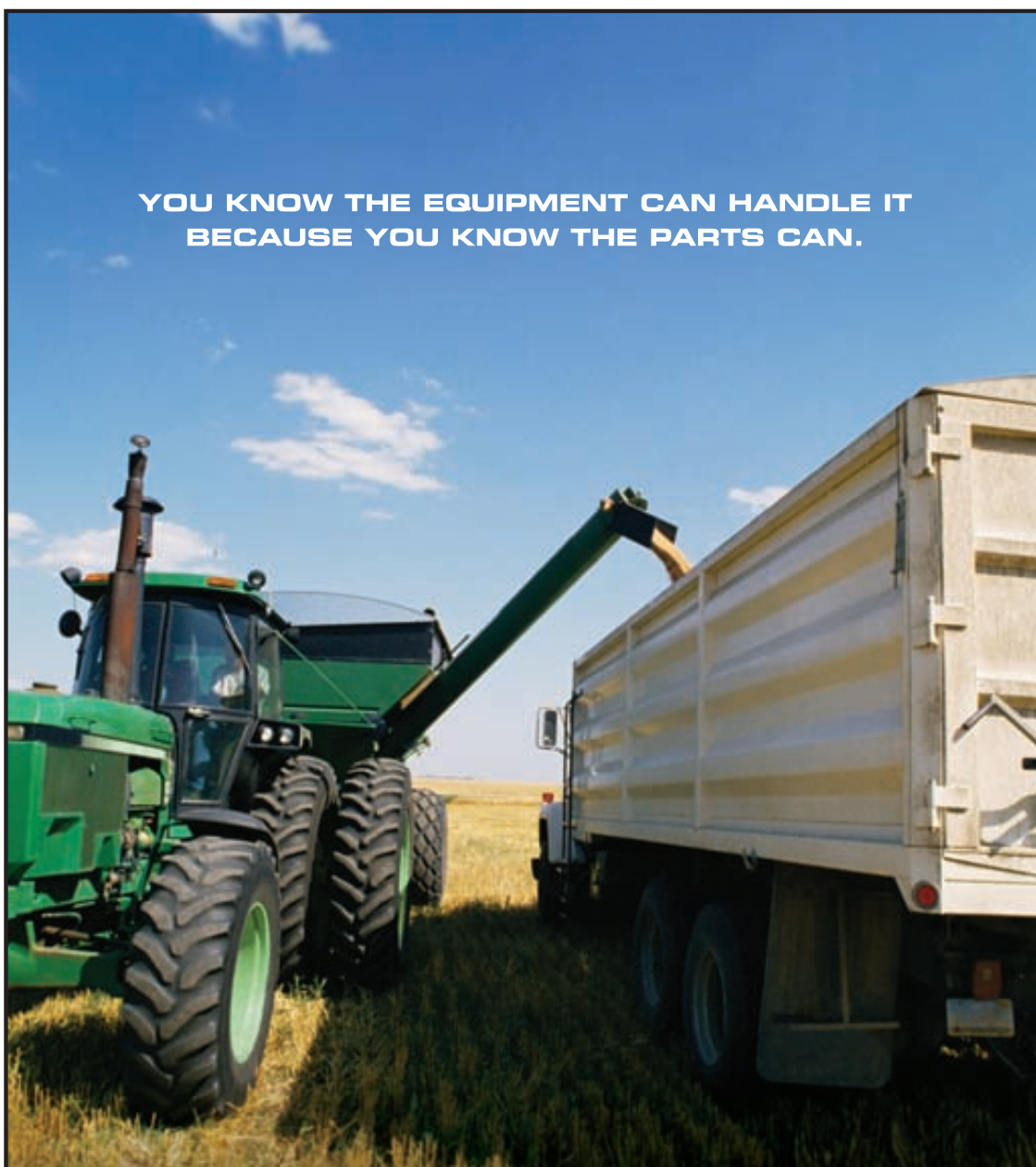
Today, however, we kneel before you and pray for your continued success.

Rubes



"You are a complete disgrace to the family! Five years of origami lessons and all you can make is a silly paper container?! Of what possible use is *that*?"

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