

Sussex County Farm Family Receives Delaware Secretary's Award for Agriculture

DOVER, Del. (June 10, 2021) – With COVID restrictions in place earlier this year, the annual presentation of the Secretary's Award for Distinguished Service to Delaware Agriculture looked a lot different than a ballroom full of agriculture supporters. Recently, Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse took a road trip down to Sussex County to make a surprise presentation to a family farm in Laurel.

Scuse recognized the Vincent Family for their commitment to Delaware through agricultural production and equipment sales, for providing gainful employment to community members, and for continuing to alleviate hunger through their participation in the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program.

"The Vincent Family has a truly outstanding family farming operation that has contributed tremendously to Delaware agriculture," said Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse. "The Vincent Family is very deserving of the 2021 Secretary's Award for Distinguished Service to Delaware Agriculture, and it is my pleasure to present them with this honor."

A fifth-generation farm family, Vincent Farms has a long history of growing food sold in retail markets up and down the Eastern seaboard and even into Canada. While the sixth-generation is beginning to grow – currently, two young granddaughters are waiting their turn to get a role on the farm – the fourth generation, brothers Clay and Ray Vincent, along with their children Jonah, Haley, Nathaniel, Josh, Connor, and Erin, and even their mother Carole (third generation) are involved in the day-to-day operations of Vincent Farms.

“We are really blessed to be operating in the state of Delaware because there are a lot of states that don’t have the support at the state level that we do in Delaware, and that’s a testament to our Department,” said Ray Vincent. “We see it as a partnership, not a regulatory agency. I think everybody benefits when there is a partnership.”

When presented with the opportunity to participate in the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program, the farm applied because they recognized this was about directly feeding people struggling because of the pandemic. In addition, Vincent Farms also helped boost the local economy by hiring more staff to process boxes, contracting with truck drivers to deliver food boxes in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions, and provided more sales to their box supplier to meet the demand.

“Being a part of this program was extremely rewarding for us as a family and for our business to know that we were making a difference. All of the employees stepped up as well as the family members because we explained what was going on, what we were doing, and what the consequences were if we didn’t do this for the people,” said Vincent. “It was absolutely remarkable. My wife uses the term astonishing, but that probably is an understatement. But it was astonishing how we were able to get it all done, but it was bigger than just the Vincent Farm team, and it was because everyone knew what the overall objective was.”

All of the people involved in getting the food out to individuals and families in need were involved in agriculture directly or indirectly. However, the production side is a very small part of the grand scheme of what agriculture is about today.

As Mr. Vincent shared, “There is demand for motivated, dedicated people in agriculture. We need young people in agriculture because there are plenty of opportunities. As digital technology gets more mainstream, the caliber of people

we need in this industry will increase dramatically. We need to encourage education, and while many people like to go away to school and there are opportunities elsewhere, there are many opportunities right here in Delaware between the grain industry, the poultry industry, and the vegetable industry. We are fortunate to be able to grow just about anything here that farmers can grow elsewhere in the country, and we are so close to the markets that there are so many opportunities for young people to get into agriculture and, ultimately, to help feed the world.”

In 2008, Secretary Scuse developed the Secretary’s Award for Distinguished Service to Delaware Agriculture to recognize individuals and families who make significant contributions to Delaware’s agricultural industry.

Past recipients include Delaware State University Department Chair Dr. Richard Barczewski (2020); University of Delaware Provost Dr. Robin Morgan (2019); Fifer Orchards (2018); brothers Richard and Keith Carlisle of Greenwood (2017); former MidAtlantic Farm Credit senior vice-president Kenny Bounds (2016); Farm Service Agency official Robin Talley (2015); Schiff Farms of Harrington (2015); farmers Laura Hill of Lewes and Barbara Sapp of Milton (2014); dairy farmer Walter C. Hopkins Sr. of Lewes (2013); then U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Michael Scuse, a former Delaware secretary of agriculture (2012); Delmarva Farmer Senior Editor Bruce Hotchkiss (2012); James Baxter of Georgetown (2011); brothers David, Ed and Robert Baker of Middletown (2010); Bill Vanderwende of Bridgeville (2009); and Ed Kee of Lincoln (2008).

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