



(Clockwise from left) Vidalias are hand-planted and hand-harvested—1 acre typically produces about 34,000 pounds of onions for G&R Farms; Blake Dasher (top); Heath Dasher (center) and his family Logan, Jackson, Hannah and wife, Leland.

the judges noted his enterprising start, when, at age 10, he began farming. He took out his first loan at 16 and, when he was in his early 20s, formed a partnership with Gerald called G&R Farms.

Together, the brothers seemed to have never stood still. They inherited less than 50 acres when their father died, then grew that enterprise into 4,800 acres of ranch and cropland, about 700 of which is dedicated to growing Vidalias. Among other operations, G&R owns a few thousand acres of timberland and 2,500 head of cattle.

The judges commended Robert's work that centered around the Vidalia and by extension helped his neighbors. "Our decision was based not only on the quality of his farming operation," says judge James Lee Adams, "but also on how he has assisted with the economic development of other farmers in his area, and even more so, the economic development of the area in which he lives."

Robert says he was "shocked" when he received the award. "I thought they were pulling my leg. There were just too many other successful farmers in the running."

There was, however, something missing from Robert's big day, he says. It was his brother. Gerald passed away in 2003.

Robert is especially careful to recognize his brother's good business sense and effort in promoting the Vidalia. "I want to give a lot of credit to him. He and his wife, Pam, drove all over selling this onion.

"Our daddy had just died, and I was fairly young when we formed this partnership. I had just gotten out of high school," continues Robert, who was the youngest of five children. "Gerald thought big and we both kept pushing this business, because we thought there was real potential."

Gerald's son, Walt, and wife, Pam, still work at G&R, as does Robert's wife Debbie and their two sons, Heath and Blake. "I can tell you right now," Robert says, "this ain't Robert Dasher's farm. I mean, it might say G&R Farms, but this is a family-run business, and there ain't enough family members to hardly go around."

"There aren't enough people like him and my uncle Gerald. They don't make them like that much anymore," says Blake. "That's for sure."

"If you think about where they've come from and how far they've come in such a short period of time, it's remarkable. I just feel very fortunate to be a part of this family." **FL**

The 2011 Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Ag Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year will be named October 19, at the Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, Ga. For the past 14 years, Massey Ferguson has been a sponsor of the program, donating the use of a tractor to the Farmer of the Year. For more information on the Expo, visit sunbeltexpo.com.