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## **Is Bill Gates buying up farms in Vidalia? Documents and growers link Microsoft founder to recent sales**

October 17, 2014

VIDALIA, GA — It has been rumored and discussed on the streets here for months that the Seattle-based Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation or Cascade Investment LLC, the Gates' private trust located in Kirkland, WA, is actively seeking to purchase producing farms in the Vidalia area, renowned for its sweet onions and the center of that industry.

Already, two entities — Coggins Farms in Lake Park, GA, and more recently Stanley Farms and its subsidiaries in Lyons, GA — have been sold and, while the trail is murky, documents and interviews with other Vidalia-area growers link the purchases to Kirkland and seemingly to Gates.



Vidalia, GA, produces the most famous onion in the world. What growers here want to know is why Bill Gates seemingly wants to be in the sweet onion business — and why he apparently does not want that fact widely known. (Photo by Chip Carter)

*The Produce News* recently obtained a copy of a letter written by Stanley Farms General Manager Vince Stanley to vendors and suppliers dated Oct. 1 and headlined, "Re: Change of Ownership." An included W-9 IRS form showed that while the business name of the operation is Stanley Produce Georgia LLC, the owner is the Mt. Hood Administration Trust, with a listed address of a post office box in Kirkland. There is no readily available information on the trust.

Stanley wrote, "On Oct. 1, Stanley Produce Georgia LLC purchased the interests of [Stanley Farms subsidiaries] Vidalia Valley, Manning Farms and Vidalia Onion Farms. Please accept this letter as notice of such a change. The Stanley Family wants to personally let you, our valued customer, know that the entire staff you have come to rely on will 100 percent stay in place and will only add quality folks to better serve you!"

One visitor to the Stanley Farms Facebook page posted two questions about the sale, the second of which read, "Is or has Bill Gates already bought your farm business via Cascade Investments...? Seems he already bought Coggins Farms awhile back."

Neither post had received a reply as of Oct. 13, when *The Produce News'* queries regarding the sale began; by mid-day Oct. 14, both posts had been removed.

*The Produce News* contacted the Gates Foundation, Cottonwood AG (based in Naperville, IL and thought to be an agricultural assets management operation for Gates' interests) and others Oct. 13, but there were no replies to requests for information or interviews.

Derek Yurosek of Cottonwood AG, whose name has been mentioned by several Vidalia growers as a participant in some of the proceedings and whose LinkedIn profile shows a Kirkland address, forwarded *The Produce News'* email seeking information to several other Cottonwood AG email addresses and others from Los Arboles Management LLC, which also has a listed address of a post office box in Kirkland, albeit a different one. His message atop the email simply read, "Please do not respond." It is unclear whether Yurosek intended to copy *The Produce News* on that email.

While the Gates connection is still just rumor to some, others claim more intimate knowledge of the

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dealings.

"I've actually met with them," said one well-placed grower who asked to remain anonymous.

Gates' agricultural interests are well-known. He has been an active and ongoing crusader in developing countries, helping provide locals with means of improving subsistence farming operations.

What everyone in Vidalia would like to know is why Gates seemingly wants to be in the sweet onion business — and why he apparently does not want that fact widely known if that is indeed the case.

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