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# FORBES' NAMED COUNTY'S FARM FAMILY OF THE YEAR FOR 2022



*1The Forbes family: Back row: Kyle (left), Allana, Carina and Casey Forbes; and Jerrod and Hilary Blanchette. Middle row: Alexa, Tristan, Patti and Gord Forbes; Tessa Blanchette. Front row: Korbin, Kaden and Quinn Forbes; Kate Blanchette.*

When the Forbes Family is presented with their plaque at the Medicine Hat Stampede for being Cypress County's 2022 Farm Family of the Year, many of them won't have to go far to get to the main stage.

With Gord running a gate in the rodeo's infield, son-in-law Jerrod Blanchette not far away taking scores from the judges, daughter Hilary helping with the country in the city show, and son Kyle in charge of the wagon committee, the joke is that Patti might be up there on her own getting the prestigious award.

“I'm not sure how we're going to do that,” laughed Gord of his wife of 41 years. “We told Patti we wouldn't leave her high and dry, we'd have somebody to stand with her in the arena, anyway.”

Add in their eldest son Casey being away for the weekend and there wasn't a chance of a full group photo anyways. But that's the mark of a great family – busy in the community and enjoying every minute of it.

The Forbes family is the county's first Farm Family of the Year since 2020, when the Dick family was named to the honour. Due to the pandemic, there was no winner in 2021.

The award is paired with the Calgary Stampede and BMO Financial Group's Farm Family Awards, for which the Forbes' were nominated for. They received it July 11 along with 18 other southern Alberta families, feted with a full day of festivities at the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth.

“It was kind of shocking,” said Patti of being chosen for the awards.

“There's a lot of real well-deserving families around Cypress County,” added Gord. “To be recognized along with them, we're humbled to hear that they thought of us.”

Noting they might fly under the radar at times with their Cottonwood Livestock operation out near Suffield, the Forbes' have embodied a strong sense of community and perseverance with their cow/calf ranch. Gord grew up in Maple Creek and came to work on stepfather Alex McDougald's farm in 1978; Patti grew up in Medicine Hat. Together they've faced all sorts of challenges head-on.

“I think Gord adapts really well,” said Patti. “When we had the big drought (in the early 2000's), he decided he couldn't feed his way out of it, so we sold all of our cattle, got back in the next year when the grass was better.

“We've done different things to keep the operation going. We've pumped water out eight miles to fill dugouts in the past.”

“A year like the last couple years when there's been drought, it's taken quite a toll here,” said Gord. “We had to manage our ranch a little bit different; last year was the first we switched to silage. We could buy corn silage a lot cheaper, have it trucked in. This year, silage has climbed up in price too because of the grain prices.”

But, he maintains, they're lucky due to what the landscape gives them. The mighty South Saskatchewan River borders the ranch; however, cattle are prevented from getting to it to protect the riparian areas.

There aren't a lot of close neighbours in the expansive county either, but that's only geographical. The family regularly hosts visitors from CFB Suffield, and Casey coaches hockey both at the base and in Redcliff. Kyle is the chairman for the Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association, while Hilary and her husband Jerrod run Holsom Equine, a conditioning and rehabilitation business for horses.

“We've made a lot of real good friends through the base up there, we have contact with them still,” noted Gord. “It's nice, they involve us in a number of things they do up there.”

And the Forbes' are happy to get involved, too. Though Patti admits that with seven grandkids, she's happily had to cut back on volunteering.

“Gord would go to a meeting, for whatever, then he'd come home and say 'honey, they need somebody to be the rodeo secretary for Ralston and I told them you'd do it,’” she laughed. ““They need a treasurer for the grazing association, I told them you'd do it.’ I don't let him go to meetings unattended anymore! I've got too many little ones (now). But it was always fun.”

The Forbes family will be celebrated at the Friday, July 29 rodeo performance at the Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede.

