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BUILDING A LEGACY: STAFFORDS NAMED FARM FAMILY OF THE YEAR

Many Farm Family of the Year recipients are recognized after generations of agricultural tradition.

Ross and Arlene Stafford are being honoured for building their own.

The Stafford family is Cypress County's Farm Family of the Year for 2026 after spending the past two decades establishing a ranching operation, raising a family, and becoming deeply involved in their community south of Irvine.

"We're excited about it," says Ross Stafford. "There's always opportunities if you look for them."

The Staffords will be recognized as one of 19 recipients of the BMO Farm Family Award at the Calgary Stampede July 6. They'll receive their county plaque during the Medicine Hat Stampede evening show on July 24.

Ross grew up on a mixed dairy and beef farm in Ontario, while Arlene was raised on a grain farm near Didsbury. The couple met after Ross moved west to attend Lakeland College and later worked for Arlene's brother-in-law near Pincher Creek.

After starting out in Ontario, they decided Alberta was where they wanted to put down roots.

The search for the right place wasn't easy.

"It was the longest two years of my life without cows," Ross says.

When they finally purchased their ranch in 2006, they started with about 20 cows and a vision for what the operation could become. Today, Stafford Ranching has grown to more than 200 cows.

The family has also invested in stewardship projects on the land. Located near multiple creeks, the ranch features extensive riparian areas the Staffords have worked to protect through fencing, off-site watering systems, and improved grazing management.

One recent project piped water to upland pastures, helping keep cattle out of sensitive waterways while improving pasture use throughout the ranch.

For Ross, caring for the land is part of building something that lasts.



The Stafford Family are Cypress County's Farm Family of the Year for 2026. From left, Rylan, Ross, Arlene, and Jane.

“You like to think you've made a positive impact, even just leaving your place in good shape for your kids,” he says.

Those children, Rylan and Jane, are already helping write the next chapter of the family's story.

Jane completed her animal science diploma at Lakeland College in Vermilion and is building her own cattle herd while working at Red Rock Ranch Vets. Rylan is a welder who also raises cattle and trains horses.

The family is encouraged to see both children pursuing careers connected to agriculture.

“We hope to be part of this community for a long time,” says Ross. “Our kids love it here too. They really like Southern Alberta.”

Beyond the ranch gate, the Staffords have become familiar faces throughout the region.

Ross has served as a director with the Bow Island Grazing Association and volunteers with draft horse events at the Medicine Hat Stampede. Arlene has spent more than a decade supporting students at Irvine School while volunteering with 4-H. Rylan and Jane continue giving back through 4-H mentorship, clinics, and judging opportunities.

Ross is quick to downplay the family's accomplishments, describing himself and Arlene as people who simply try to help where they can.

“We just try to be good citizens and help out wherever we can,” he says. “It's a great area. We love it.”

That attitude has helped the family build strong friendships and lasting connections since arriving in Cypress County 20 years ago.

The Staffords are focused on the future. They hope to continue expanding the ranch while creating opportunities for the next generation.

Their story serves as a reminder that agricultural legacies are not only inherited: sometimes they're built from scratch.

As Ross says: “If you're optimistic and you like what you do, you'll find a route, find a way.”