

The Three Hills Capital (Three Hills, AB)			Order/Commande 150162
Date 13.04.2011	Circ. 4201	Page Ag2	1 / 3

Acme Couple wins Outstanding Young Farmer Award

by Debi Moon

Matt and Tara Sawyer, of the Acme area, were awarded the Provincial title of Outstanding Young Farmers for 2011 and will represent Alberta this coming November, at the national event being held in Brandon, Manitoba. The couple was nominated last August on the strength of their mixed farm operation consisting of beef and crops, as well as their community and industry involvement. They were notified in January of 2011 that from a selected group of 12, they made the cut as one of four semi-finalists, including Dean and Farrah Williams of Arrowwood, Clinton and Marsha Aarsby of Didsbury, and Brad and Cheryl McDermid of Bowden.

They were invited to a mid-March, two-day final judging banquet in Olds where Sawyer's were ultimate-

ly awarded the Provincial title. Adding to the moment was the fact that due to an age cut-off point (of 39), it was their last year to be considered for nomination. "To have earned such a prestigious award, knowing that the category held such a diverse group of farmers, is very flattering and thrilling but we are probably just as excited, if not more so, for the opportunity to represent Alberta at the national level. We have tremendous pride for our province and this is huge for us."

Matt tips his hat to his pioneering grandparents and Richard and Gay Farmer (uncle & aunt) for the 2400 acres that Matt began farming in 1993, some of it he purchased and some he rents. Matt and Tara grow grain and oilseeds and raise commercial Black Angus cattle, a 50-cow herd, for now. The fall calves are sold to a small feedlot

with a tracking system traceable back to their farm. On the farming side they practice a no-till method. "We are not afraid of change, but we also like to keep it simple." They are credited with having a productive operation and being responsible land stewards. "During the judging interviews we were asked about our farm business plan, how we manage risk and what government programs we like and use." While helping his dad farm another 2200 acres, Matt also finds the time and energy to sit on various industry boards. Matt is just beginning his second year as chairman of Region Two Alberta Barley Commission, and on its behalf he also sits on the Canada Grains Council and is a director of the Grain Growers of Canada. He has spent four years as a director of the Wheat Growers Association, and among other

side roles, one included speaking to the House of Commons in Ottawa (spring of 2010) on the topic of bio sciences and the importance of encouraging young farmers. "Genetics has sound science backing it up. These bio sciences are not the frankenstein of agriculture they are sometimes portrayed as, and all organic all the time is not a practical, feasible method for the population on a grand scale. Many in our industry believe what the United Nations has recently been stating, which is that the farming industry will have to produce, in the next 50 years, as much as was produced in the last 10,000 years."

In the Acme community, Matt is exalted ruler of Acme Elks and has the role of parade marshal for the Village's annual sports day celebrations. Both Matt and Tara are active in 4H. The Sawyer





The Three Hills Capital (Three Hills, AB)			Order/Commande 150162
Date 13.04.2011	Circ. 4201	Page Ag2	2 / 3

farm also plays host to foreign visitors, most recently - the Irish Tillage Society as well as a contingent of 30 Japanese on a tour group from Orion Breweries of Okinawa. "We have a big backyard and combined with a barbeque and Tara's catering expertise these are fun and productive." Tara grew up in Calgary, training as a legal assistant, but has been involved on the farm since her marriage to Matt 12.5 years ago. "I knew nothing about farming then." When asked how she adapted to the life and all the meals around harvest, she laughingly responded, "Catering. I parlayed it into a catering business." As well as catering, Tara also does all the farm books and quarterly reports to the accountant. In the community, she joined the Acme Royal Purple in 2005 and has worked her way up to becoming the Honored Royal Lady. This involves her in helping with the Strawberry Tea for the Acme Flower Show and catering jobs. She also volunteers at the school, is a soccer coach and Board Member for Acme/Linden, and was, for three years, the playschool president and fundraising coordinator.

Matt and Tara are also parents who think the farm and the community is ideal for raising a family. There is Emmett (10 yrs), Cassidy (9 yrs), and Quinton (7 yrs). "Emmett's interests are less about farming and more about geology," says Matt. "His room shows full well his interest, with rock and

geology displays everywhere. He has many books and even obtained a couple at university level, and he has many rock samples and photos on his walls."

In the past 30 years, since the award for outstanding young farmer was first offered in 1980, the only Acme area farmer to win the Provincial award had been Horst and Dana Wiebe in 1985. A few years back, Bill & Jeannie Taylor, living west of Linden, were in contention and placed second. Now in 2011 the award has come back to Acme where Matt and Tara will have custody of the trophy until next year. "I wasn't in it to win but more to promote the benefits and challenges in our industry. The award is positive affirmation for all young farmers and we are greatly excited for the chance to meet with all the young leaders from all over Canada. We are wanting to expand our farm and there is a great opportunity here, in exposing the farming techniques and practices of these innovative individuals so their ideas can be explored and adapted to the betterment of our industry and all young farmers."

Outstanding Young Farmers are selected from seven regions across Canada, with two national winners chosen each year. Information can be accessed with regard to nominations, winners, and events from the website www.oyfalberta.com



Matt Sawyer, wife Tara and their children accepted the 2011 award for Alberta's Outstanding Young Farmers from Agriculture Minister Jack Hayden (left).