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McNEILL'S WIN COUNTY FARM FAMILY OF THE YEAR AWARD

Devin McNeill says you never count your crops until the yield is in the bin, but there is one reward his family can celebrate mid-summer: They're Cypress County's Farm Family of the Year.

McNeill and his wife Danielle started farming in 2008, and bought the family farm in 2016 in the Hilda area. Their kids Tyson (12), Emmitt (9), Aria (7), and Boyd (5) have learned to make the most of what the land gives them, and make their community better while doing it.

"If you want something, you've got to work for it," says Devin, a third-generation farmer who grew up in Bindloss. "You can't make any major decisions until the crop is in the bin. Even then, issues can arise."

The McNeills were picked as the 2025 winner months ago by Cypress County's Agricultural Service Board, but the festivities don't kick off until July. The family gets feted as one of the 19 BMO Farm family Awards at the Calgary Stampede July 7, then receives a plaque as county award winners during the Medicine Hat Stampede's evening show July 25.

"The McNeill family has been involved in the Hilda Community and farming in the area ever since they moved to the area," writes their nominee. "From volunteering on the fire department, Hilda and Community Association and at Schuler School, they are willing to work with their hands and their minds to make the area a better place."

Danielle grew up in Cypress County and is involved in a myriad of volunteer opportunities, from School Council in Schuler to the Elkwater Ski Club, various community/school committees, and more. Devin earned his 10-year award from fire services, where he's the captain of Station 8. He was a director on the 2017 wildfire recovery committee and remains with the community association.

"We enjoy helping where we can and have always believed that these positions are very important in small communities," writes Danielle. "If we don't have enough involvement, they may disappear and never return again."

Their grain farm operation consists of a 5-year crop rotation including pulses, cereals, and oil seeds. They've delved heavily into technology to ensure success, with weather stations, probes, and satellite imagery contributing critical data. But there are some foundational elements that Devin notes go beyond numbers on a screen.

"They don't make any more land, so you've got to make sure it's in the best interest of the land, always," he says. "You've got to find that balance."



The McNeill Family are Cypress County's Farm Family of the Year for 2025. From left, Tyson, Boyd, Devin, Aria, Danielle, and Emmitt.

“Sometimes you just have to do what in your gut makes the most sense.”

In practice that means having equal measures of discipline and flexibility, always learning, and trusting the process. From finding new ways to improve soil health to growing more drought-resistant crops, it all adds up.

“During these last couple of dry years, it’s been trying to find products that don’t have carry over from drought,” says Devin. “You might not see it to begin with, but the next year you see the damage if you don’t put the right products down.”

A little moisture this year has given some optimism for the growing season, but the McNeills look forward to the banquet in Calgary and other festivities around the Farm Family Award. They are certain that it will be a great break from all the hard work.

“It’s nice to feel appreciated for our hard work and the contributions that we make within our community” says Devin. “We are lucky to live this blessed lifestyle.”

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