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2015 Alaska State Fair Farm Family of the Year Announced

(Palmer, AK) – The Pettit Family of Little Pitchfork Ranch has been selected by the Alaska agriculture community as the 2015 Alaska State Fair Farm Family of the Year. The Pettit family will be honored at the Alaska State Fair on Thursday, August 27.

Jack and Jane Seeman of Lazy Mountain established Little Pitchfork Ranch in 1947 and are the grandparents of the Pettit family. The ranch originally was an oat and barley operation that evolved to include beef cattle and draft horses. In the mid-1980s Timothy hay was added to the production. Todd Pettit assumed ownership of the ranch in the mid-1990s.

When Todd arrived beef prices were low. Bison meat was becoming popular due to its health benefits and appeared to be the next logical step to expand the farm. Todd favored raising bison because they are somewhat self-sufficient and introduced them to the farm in 1998. Bison birth small calves, can eat snow for water, and are extremely efficient with their feed. Todd ensures his bison are socialized by interacting with them on a regular basis. Todd's wife Roxann has been experimenting with bison wool for 15 years. She processes the wool into fiber to make garments and small products, then sells the items locally.

Todd further expanded the ranch when elk prices were low by trading some hay for a bull elk and some heifer calves. Elk are now well-recognized as a meat breed and are a successful component of Little Pitchfork Ranch.

Since January 2014, Todd has also managed the Windy Valley Musk Ox Farm that produces qiviut wool. Currently the farm is focusing on increasing the population and the genetic diversity of the musk ox.

The Pettits are very involved with their community and volunteer a lot of their time to the agriculture industry. The Pettits are founding members of the Alaska Diversified Livestock Association. Todd is the chair of the Palmer Soil and Water Conservation District, the president of the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, has volunteered on the Agriculture Advisory Committee for the Alaska State Fair, the Alaska Division of Agriculture Plant Materials Center Advisory Board, and the Alaska Farmland Trust Board of Directors. Todd is also a member of the Mat-Su Chapter of the Alaska Farm Bureau.

The Farm Family of the Year award, sponsored by the Matanuska Valley Federal Credit Union, was established by the Alaska State Fair in 2000 to honor an Alaska farming family and show appreciation for all the hardworking Alaskans committed to agriculture. After reviewing nominations, an awards committee chaired by the Alaska Division of Agriculture selects the winning family based on production of quality Alaska Grown products, community and agricultural organization involvement, and overall image.

“Congratulations to all the nominees and the Pettit family. We admire their commitment to being responsible farmers actively involved in their communities and forwarding the interests of agriculture in Alaska,” said Jerome Hertel, the fair’s general manager.

“I would like to congratulate the Pettit family for being chosen as the 2015 Farm Family of the year. It is an honor to be nominated by their peers for their active involvement in the community and the agriculture legacy they began building in Alaska in 1947,” said Franci Havemeister, director of the Division of Agriculture.

Recent Farm Family winners include the Williams Family of EagleSong Family Peony Farm (2014), Vern Stockwell and Becky Gardner of Stockwell Farm (2013), and the Martin Family of Dimond M. Ranch (2012).

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