

**For Immediate Release**  
**Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers' Program**

**Mission Statement:** To provide a positive platform to celebrate and recognize progress and excellence in Canadian agriculture. The Program provides a unique opportunity to encourage young farmers to pursue excellence, to provide a forum for exchange and to foster better urban-rural relations through greater understanding and appreciation of farmers' concerns and achievements. The OYF Program strives to promote the values of excellence, advancement, opportunity and exchange.

**Ryan and Annette Mercer from Lethbridge, AB, selected for Canada's OYF Program**

**Edmonton, AB (February 1, 2010)** – Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers Program, spotlighting and promoting young agricultural leaders, selected Ryan and Annette Mercer of Lethbridge to represent Alberta at the National Awards Program, to be hosted in Victoria, BC from November 23 to November 28, 2010.

Ryan and Annette Mercer operate Mercer Seeds in Lethbridge, AB. Mercer Seeds grows processes and retails pedigreed seed throughout Canada and the US. They have three children, Ananda is 6, James is 3 and Raylene is 10 months old.

After completing the Agricultural Technology Plants and Soil Science program at Lethbridge College, Ryan purchased 320 ac and began farming with the goal of developing a profitable and sustainable operation where he could someday raise a family. Ryan became a select seed grower. Ryan values his parents' advice of maintaining good customer relations and product knowledge to maintain a strong and loyal customer base. Ryan became a sales representative for Gustafson LLC and became a Certified Crop consultant and began making contacts in the seed industry.

In December 1997, Ryan and Annette were married. In 2004, they began farming full time and purchased Mercer Seeds Ltd from Ryan's parents. Ryan and Annette expanded their customer base by diversifying to new crops. They tripled their staff, seed cleaning, bagging, and shipping capacity. They added new gravity separation and color recognition technology to begin processing product for the human consumption and pet food markets as well. Additionally, they began custom seeding, spraying and combining.

Mercer Seeds used intensive soil sampling and satellite imagery to create a variable rate fertilizer and seeding rates to prevent costly and wasteful over application of fertilizer. Ryan has been an environmental steward from a very young age. He started a soil conservation club in his first year of college. He leaves grass in waterways and low areas to prevent soil degradation and provide a habitat for wildlife. They have planted rows of shelterbelt trees on their farm; now they can enjoy bird watching as a family.

Mercer Seeds began growing mustard in 2002. In 2005, they began growing safflower and market it to birdseed manufacturers worldwide. In 2006, they began growing camelina and signed an agreement with an Ohio based company to give Mercer Seeds exclusivity to grow and contact out seed production throughout North America. Mercer Seeds is investigating producing and processing Thebaine Poppies for the manufacture of pharmaceutical pain relievers.

Ryan was a founding director of the Southeast Alberta Water Coop that brings freshwater from Ridge Reservoir to dry land farms. Ryan is the current Vice Chairman of the Alberta Branch of the Canadian Seed Growers Association. Ryan was a founding director of the Lethbridge Inland Terminal, a 100% farmer owned and operated 40,000 tonne high throughput grain handling facility. Annette is a volunteer at their children's school.

The Mercers were selected according to the progress made in their agricultural career, maximum utilization of soil, water and energy conservation practices, crop and livestock production history, financial and management practices and his contribution to the well-being of the community, province and nation.

Celebrating its 32<sup>nd</sup> year, Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers' program is an annual competition to recognize farmers that exemplify excellence in their profession and promote the tremendous contribution of agriculture. Open to participants 18 to 39 years of age, making the majority of income from on-farm sources, participants are selected from seven regions across Canada, with two national winners chosen each year. The program is sponsored nationally by CIBC, John Deere, Bayer CropScience and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and supported nationally by AdFarm and Canadian Farm Business Management Council. Nominations for 2010 Alberta's OYF are now open. To learn more, visit the regional website: [www.oyfalberta.com](http://www.oyfalberta.com).

**For more information or a picture of the Mercers, contact:**

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