SOUTH DAKOTA FFA FOUNDATION

NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release:** April 18, 2024

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**Stiefvater Family Receives "FFA Family of the Year" Award**

The Elizabeth and late John Stiefvater family, of Salem, received the South Dakota FFA Foundation’s 2024 “Family of the Year” award. The award honoring the family's long-term involvement in the South Dakota FFA/Agriculture Education program was presented April 18th at the State FFA Convention in Brookings. The Stiefvater family includes John and Elizabeth and their six children, Monica, Jim, Sara, Kurt, Mike, and Rita. Recipients of this award based on active involvement include: John and Elizabeth, Kurt and wife Kathy, Dr. Mike and wife Carie, and grandchildren Lauren, Megan, Karlie, Hadley, Ella, Colton, and Skylar.

The Stiefvater family has a long history in the South Dakota FFA, spanning three generations. John served on the South Dakota FFA Advisory Board in the 1980s advocating for agriculture education in schools when many programs were being cut. Liz, the family matriarch, supports and promotes the chapter in a variety of capacities. Jim, Kurt, Dr. Mike, Carie, Lauren, Megan, Karlie, Hadley, Ella, and Colton are all current or past South Dakota FFA members. Each individual has been active in various chapter offices, contests, Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs), and community development projects in Salem, Dell Rapids and McCook Central. Hadley and Ella both served in state officer positions in recent years, Hadley as the 2021-22 State Secretary and Ella as the 2022-23 State President.

As a testament to the importance of agriculture within the Stiefvater family, John actively advocated for the preservation of the local chapter to the Salem school board in 1984 after a period of declining student involvement and financial support. Kurt, an incoming senior FFA member, also spoke at the board meeting to convince them to continue the program for at least one more year. The following year, John helped Mr. Rieckman, the new teacher, develop curriculum and source funds, projects, and opportunities to encourage members. They donated meat for the chapter banquet and a hog to raffle for member dues and expenses. Since then, John, Liz, Kurt and Dr. Mike have all served on the local ag advisory board.

Kurt’s influence and guidance helped the chapter rent 45 acres for a land lab, which has continued for over 30 years, helping teach FFA members and non-FFA high school students alike through hands-on experiences. The chapter plans, plants and harvests the plot and then invites local farmers to a Field Plot Day in the fall. Kurt and his family provided equipment to remove fencing at the plot and supported a recent grant for a hoop barn and pens to allow students to learn about and exhibit livestock. Kurt currently serves as school board president where he continues to advocate for agriculture education and FFA.

Dr. Mike and Carie have donated an abundance of time and resources to coaching many successful LDE and CDE teams at the district, state, and national level. Their efforts have resulted in a reserve national champion Veterinary Science team, third overall national Livestock Judging team, and three other CDE teams placing gold nationally. They both chaperone many FFA events, help judge agriscience fair projects and proficiencies, inspect animals at the hoop barn for livestock shows, and assist with fitting and hauling animals to the State Fair.

“This award recognizes a South Dakota family that goes the extra mile for FFA,” said FFA Foundation Board President, Sandy Osterday. “The actions of the entire Stiefvater family through multiple generations serve as an inspiration to others as they have modeled the FFA mission of developing premier leadership, personal growth and career success. We hope others follow their example.”

The Stiefvater family values hard work, honesty, and dedication, which has led four of them to serve as district officers and two as state officers, as well as all receiving a variety of chapter, state, and national accolades through their FFA experience. Accomplishments include numerous state proficiency winners, a national proficiency winner, five State Star finalists, three State Star winners, a State Star Greenhand winner, an American Star in AgriScience finalist, numerous state winning Agriscience Fair projects, three National Agriscience Fair winners, reserve champion national homesite judging individual, and a champion homesite land judging team. Additionally, six family members each earned a spot on two or more nationally competing teams, four individuals received National FFA scholarships, seven State FFA Degree recipients, four American Degree recipients, three Honorary Chapter Degrees, two Honorary State FFA Degrees, and two Honorary American FFA Degrees. Membership continues with two current FFA members and one youth anxiously awaiting to be a member.

As individuals in FFA and as a family, they continue to attend and support the local, state, and national FFA activities. Elizabeth shares, “The opportunities available to students in FFA are abundant and have opened many doors for lifetime skills for both present and alumni members. I have seen first-hand how FFA has taught responsibility, positive interaction with others, and critical communication skills. We are grateful to be a part of this organization and are happy to continue supporting students in agriculture.”

Beyond their time as active FFA members, the Stiefvater family continues to give back to the organization in many ways. As local alumni and supporters, family members volunteer at chapter, district, and state events, assist with transportation needs, host land judging site practices for schools in the region, provide SAE mentorships, jacket sponsorships for state winning teams, as well as financial contributions. Family members also judge district and state FFA events including state and national proficiency award applications, Agriscience Fair written reports and interviews, and National FFA Creed Speaking. Additionally, the family has helped staff, set up, and rehome animals from the State Fair Ag Adventure Center. The Stiefvaters are state award and scholarship supporters through the South Dakota FFA Foundation. They have also established a Stiefvater Family Scholarship, in memory of their father and grandfather, the late John Stiefvater. It is presented at the McCook Central Chapter Banquet to a senior FFA member pursuing a degree in the agriculture or medical fields.

FFA Advisor Terry Rieckman, shares “The Stiefvater’s carry the torch for FFA wherever they go. Many of our chapter service projects are possible because of money earned from our land lab, which would never have happened without this family. They exemplify what agriculture families are all about with their support and involvement in so many community and state activities and organizations. I look at all they are involved in with their children and grandchildren from school to church and it is easy to see why they are respected. Three generations of support to the state, district and chapter level are here in one family.”

The entire family has given freely of their time and talents with a reach far beyond FFA. They are active and volunteer with the SD Corn Growers, SD Soybean Association, SD Cattlemen's Association, SD Veterinary Medical Association, SD Soil Health Coalition, SD 4-H, McCook County Conservation District, USDA Agricultural Research Service Lab, their churches, and many college campus and high school activities. Each family member continues to play an active role in production agriculture and advocating for the industry.

The Stiefvater family wishes to thank the SD FFA for this award and looks forward to supporting the FFA tradition long into the future. “We cherish our involvement to share, educate, and lead all students in having a successful experience in FFA”.

The South Dakota FFA Foundation thanks the Stiefvater family for their tremendous impact on agriculture education and the FFA.

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