

# AG & NATURAL RESOURCES

## “THANK A FARMER” SERIES: Only One Left!

Elbert County Extension is excited to introduce the “Thank a Farmer” series for our newsletter. Our goal is to highlight local farms, farm families, and some history of Elbert County. We believe that Agriculture in Elbert County plays a major role in our local economy, the development of our youth, and the strength of our heritage. We hope you enjoy!

Randy Ruff always wanted to be a farmer. He grew up helping his grandfather with his farming operation. I guess you could say it was in his blood. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1981, Randy’s dream became a reality. On that day, he and wife Delores started a dairy.

In those days, dairies were plentiful in Elbert County. Randy can remember several in the near vicinity. RR Dairy started with approximately 60 cows. Today they milk over twice that many and distribute over 5,000 pounds of milk daily to the Georgia market. That equates to almost 600 gallons per day or over 219,000 gallons per year. When asked about the odds of his milk making it back to the shelves of Elbert County, Ruff responds “very good”. The day I visited, 10,589 pounds of Ruff’s milk was headed to a Kroger processing facility in Atlanta. It is also possible that Ruff’s milk could be shipped to Mayfield, Wal-Mart, or even Ingles facilities for bottling. And, *none* of it contains antibiotics. Each load is tested and will be discarded if such chemicals are found.



Elbert County 8th grader, Brandon Slater’s summer job.

So, 60 cows milked twice per day, 365 days a year for 34 years totals 1,489,200 milkings. When asked about vacations, Randy responds, “not many”. In fact, for many years Randy did all the milking himself. He told me of only one time that he actually did miss a milking. Shortly after his twin children were born, sometime around Christmas day, the cows got into the area around the milking barn. The temperature was so cold that the cows broke the PVC vacuum line. By the time that he could get it all fixed, it was time for the next scheduled milking. Although Randy is still involved daily in farm activities, he now employs several local assistants; this allows him time to fulfill his many other obligations in the Elbert community.

Farm Bureau, FFA, and 4-H are just a few of Randy’s side jobs these days. Randy has served as the Farm Bureau Federation District 2 elected director for over 12 years. The Federation is separate from the insurance side of Farm Bureau, and its mission is to support agriculture in Georgia. He also graciously provides show animals for the FFA and 4-H programs in Elbert County. An average of 20 animals are donated by his farm to these youth causes every year. Randy helps transport these animals to show events



Ruff’s milk ready for transport.

as well as participates in many other local efforts. If you purchased Vidalia onions from FFA or 4-H this year, or your child benefited from those sales, thank Randy. He assists with acquiring the onions and transporting them to Elbert County for this very beneficial fundraiser.

Unfortunately, Ruff’s Dairy is the last to operate in Elbert County. When asked about the future of his operation, he responds with uncertainty. The fewer dairy operations in the area make logistics for supporting agencies, such as transportation companies, more difficult. Less farms means they must drive farther to collect less. This increases the cost of doing business. In the end, we all may pay the price.

So, the next time you pick up a gallon of milk from the grocery store shelf, thank a farmer. Specifically, thank Randy!



Randy welcoming a group of 4-H’ers to his farm.