

# RANDY'S FARM STORY

## HOWDY FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS!

I hail from a small family dairy operation in the Hebron hills, and production agriculture is the only livelihood I have ever known. Since the impressionable age of twelve, I was planting corn. As the oldest boy of nine children, I quickly learned the powers of negotiation and efficiency and these skills have been steadfast throughout my career. From ensuring that all of my brothers and sisters received equal amounts of M&Ms (a treat as a child), to finessing a great price on a piece of equipment, negotiation has been key for me as a successful dairyman. My passion has never been the cows, but rather the land stewardship, equipment, technology and maintenance.

As a young leader in my 4-H club, I spent my summers thinking about all the interesting new equipment I might see at the Washington County Fair. The only burden I had to get there was actually showing a calf. Often, I found myself at the bottom of the lineup, but then, I was there for the tractors and fair food anyway. I supported Betty and the kids with their passion for showing cattle by trucking the animals, and keeping the farm humming while they were away for a week at the fair, Holstein conventions, or dairy bowl competitions.

When I met my wife Betty, I knew that we were not only going to be happy in life but also great business partners, as her passion is the cows, and mine the land and equipment. We raised our four children - Kyle, Emily, Luke and Tyler - with equal opportunities to engage in the crops, manure management, tractors, and the herd health management. Each of them spent many hours with me in the fields after school with the hum of the tractor lulling them to sleep. It is a privilege to continue this tradition with my grandchildren, taking trips around the field in the chopper, and teaching them all the intricacies of each piece of equipment. Each of my 10 grandchildren have spent their fair share of hours riding by my side in the chopper, learning all there is to know about harvesting corn. I look forward to this time bonding with them, the excitement on their faces and later their chattering recollections of chopper stories. It's always entertaining to hear them recount the experience from their point of view!

As Betty and I celebrated each success with our growing business, we learned not to be afraid of taking financial risks knowing that with hard work we would reap the rewards. On our small farm, I enjoyed finding efficiencies in labor, equipment, and processes to help us get ahead. To afford better equipment, I provided custom planting and harvesting to neighbor farms allowing us to advance financially and with better efficiencies during planting and harvest. I see this reflected in the way that the next generation continues to make decisions at Ideal Dairy. I often provide unsolicited insights, with the hope that these will influence key decisions. I am loud, proud, and learning to adjust to not being the boss. Another avenue to vocalize my vision for the community was by serving many years on the town planning board as the lone farmer in an urban community surrounded by agriculture. This is an important part of what our families do to ensure a viable future for Ideal Dairy in our community.

In our 30 years running Main Drag Farm, John and Denise were the first people I was able to connect with in Kingsbury. We shared not only a passion for agriculture but also a motto to work hard and play even harder. We have been "playing hard" together ever since, expanding our geography from domestic trips with Young Dairy Leaders and local auctions to spotting the elusive black rhino in South Africa, hiking Mayan ruins in Guatemala, trekking through Germany and many other countless travel adventures.

Today I support Crystal, Kyle, and Luke by maintaining field roadways and trucks, running for parts, and providing words of wisdom to their children. I combine my love of adventure and equipment as the Chief of Acquisitions for Ideal Dairy. I have been to Minnesota for a feed truck, Indiana for livestock haulers, Michigan for the big 8-wheeler, northern Vermont for a truck and expect to continue to support their search for the next best piece of equipment.

Certainly, there are easier ways to make a living, but none more rewarding than farming. I may now be a bit older, and no longer planting the corn on this flatter land, but I support Kyle by bringing him the fertilizer and seeds that he needs to ensure a healthy crop. Production agriculture is all I have ever known and I feel fortunate to be able to pass on my love for land stewardship and equipment to the future generation.

