

Providence Farms: Family farm expands to include retail store

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press



Haylee and Ryan Mensonides with their boys, Titus, Noah, Luke and Jacob.

ENUMCLAW, Wash. — Ryan and Haylee Mensonides own and operate Providence Farms, an organic dairy near Enumclaw, Wash., where they strive to be good stewards of the land, produce high-quality milk — and raise four boys.

“I am a fifth-generation dairy farmer. My grandfather was born in the Netherlands and had a small dairy and a little store where he sold the milk,” Ryan said. “In 1953 my grandparents came to this country and started a dairy in Modesto, Calif. My parents both grew up in that area.”

His grandfather was killed by a bull when Ryan’s dad was only 14.

“My dad’s older brother ended up with the farm, so my dad worked for other dairies, then moved to Washington to run the dairy part of the producer-handler farm near Roy, Wash., called Faith Dairy,” he said. “My dad ran the dairy part of that operation for 25 years, and that’s where I grew up.”

Ryan went to Washington State University and got a degree in public relations and marketing, then worked for a big feed company in California’s Central Valley, where he met his wife Haylee.

They moved back to Washington, where Ryan continued to work as a salesman. He realized he was tired of telling other people how to run their farms and decided he wanted a farm of his own.

To get started in dairying, they got a Farm Service Agency loan to buy cows.

“We started in 2012 with 144 cows, a hope and a dream, and a rented place,” said Ryan.

In 2017, they purchased their farm.

“We are a cooperative member of Organic Valley and will continue to work with them, but will soon be processing a portion of our milk, selling dairy products through our own retail location here in Enumclaw,” he said.

He said that’s the only way to get the full value of their product.

“We want to stay in this business. We have four sons — age 5, 8, 11 and 12. We want them to follow whatever passion they find and love, but if they want to come back to agriculture we’d like to have something for them to come back to,” he said.

The goal is to take 10% of their sales direct to consumers and become more sustainable.

“We moved to Enumclaw so we could be in the suburbs of Seattle, become vertically integrated and have a consumer base nearby,” Ryan said.

“We are converting a nearby vacant gas station into a drive-thru market,” Ryan said. “We’ll sell our milk and products and also carry other small farmers’ products and give them a place to sell their products year-round.”

They now have 350 milking cows and manage about 600 head from start to finish.

“We work with the Washington State Farmland Trust and help conserve a large farm about an hour south of us. That’s where we raise feed and have all our heifers,” he said. “We are also working with (the Natural Resources Conservation Service) to put in a new irrigation system on the Graham heifer farm in Pierce County and a newer irrigation system here on our farm as well.”

With the new venture into direct marketing they are creating a new type of job.

“The first four years, I worked off the farm two days a week in a sales job to pay our living expenses — until the farm got so big that I couldn’t do both anymore. Now we are at a point that we must create our own job to supplement what we are doing,” Ryan said, and this will hopefully enable them to stay in agriculture.

Anyone interested in what they are doing or the products they are selling can check them out on Facebook and Instagram or their website: mountrainiercreamery.com



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