FARMSIDE CHAT

Meet Jennifer Hatcher
Veterinarian and dairy farmer shares her family's story of agriculture

What's your farm history?
It was started in 1853 by my great-great-grandfather. He was fighting in the Civil War for the Confederates and being so close, they let him go home for the night. He completely missed the Battle of Franklin, and we probably wouldn't be here today if he hadn't come home. We've had dairy cattle on the farm off and on since then. Back in the '50s, my grandfather divided up the 800 acres between all five kids. They stopped milking cows temporarily when Dad went to vet school, and in 1992, they reestablished the dairy with just Uncle Jim and Dad becoming business partners.

The house I was raised in used to be a goat barn, and my parents converted it to living quarters. My husband, Chuck, and I live there now, so both me and my son were born in the hospital and brought home to the goat barn.

The entire family — grandparents, four of my dad's siblings and their children and children's children — live on the farm. Our mantra is 'your farm is important. But your faith should be No. 1, your family second and then your farm. Because without your faith and your family, you don't have anything.'

How did your family manage to keep farming in an urban area so close to Franklin and Nashville?
In 2006, we decided we either needed to sell out or we could keep the business going and do beef cattle or something like that. It's a niche market, or do something completely different. We decided we wanted to be more sustainable and begin retaining ownership of our milk. We built our creamery in 2009 and currently produce and sell all our milk. We sell whole, 2 percent, skim, half-and-half, cream, butter and ghee. We sell our own meat from keeping our steers (male cows) and lambs. We also sell eggs from our hens. We sell to just under 50 vendors in the greater Nashville area — everything from grocery stores to coffee shops. My uncle and brother farm full time, and everyone else in the family pitches in when needed.

We have always had good husbandry and farming practices, but agriculture in general has a negative perception, and we want people to know agriculture is a positive thing. We absolutely want to hide, and our doors are open for people to come and see what we do on a daily basis.

We are blessed to live in this area because the local food movement is huge and people want to know where their food comes from. By having a relationship with them, people are extremely supportive of us and know what farming is.

Are you Farm Bureau proud?
Absolutely. The biggest reason Chuck and I have been involved is not only because of the support Farm Bureau gives to young people in agriculture, but also because we can't find an organization that is any more dedicated or devoted to us. It makes me so proud to have the voice we have in agriculture. Not only are we Farm Bureau proud, but we are Farm Bureau proud because their delegation is so supportive, especially to young farmers.

Why did you and Chuck help start the Young Farmers & Ranchers group in your county?
Farms are dwindling by the moment, and it is very difficult for us and future generations to continue with all the growth and development. Having others who share the same commitment and want agriculture to be their livelihood, you need that network and support.

— Midihae Iratson

The Dirt on the Farm

Farm Family: Jennifer and her husband, Chuck Yong, both have off-farm jobs (as a vet and wildlife officer, respectively) in addition to working for the Hatcher Family Dairy, run by Jennifer's parents, uncle, brother and other family members.

Farm Legacy: Jennifer represents the fifth generation, and her son will be the sixth.

Farm Location: College Grove in Williamson County

Crops & Livestock: Dairy cows, beef cattle, sheep and laying hens, plus hay and seasonal grasses for the cows' intensive rotational grazing.

Farm Bureau Membership: Three years