

ALASKA GROWN

Farmer Profile



Wild Game and Rhubarb Queen: Ruby Hollembaek

FAIRBANKS— Ruby Hollembaek always stays very busy, helping run Alaska Interior Game Ranch with her husband, hosting blogs, running rhubarb cook-offs and campaigning to improve Alaskan agriculture.

Born in Seward and raised in Palmer, Hollembaek grew up surrounded by agriculture. She became a teacher but never left her farming ways behind. When she and her husband, Scott, moved to Delta Junction they converted 1,000 acres of forest

to farmland. After seven years, they had beautiful grass fields for their cattle to graze. In 1990 they began raising bison, and they now have 500 bison and 200 elk.

“We are surrounded by a wild bison herd,” Hollembaek said. “Scott’s philosophy is if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.”

Marketing the meat is no problem. “Bison meat sells itself,” Hollembaek said. “We can’t supply the demand.” The Hollembaeks rely on farm gate sales but get constant requests from restaurants for the lean, tasty meat.

Hollembaek’s real passion however, is for rhubarb. If she had her way, there would be hundreds of acres of rhubarb covering our

state.

Rhubarb, Hollembaek said, is loaded with vitamin K and acts as a cleanser for internal organs. It is not only delicious in pies, but used in a lemonade, wine, and even vodka, she said. Hollembaek encourages other growers to start producing rhubarb, in hopes to market it outside of Alaska.

In her spare time Hollembaek is an artist who also likes to quilt, attend agriculture conferences, spend time with family and travel. She serves as president of the Alaska Diversified Livestock Association. Her advice for would-be farmers is concise: “Be ready for hard work.”

This story was written in 2011 by Nancy Tarnai for the University of Alaska Fairbanks. It has been edited and abridged by Rachel Kenley and re-printed with permission.



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