

Duckworth Farm Supply

In the South, we have always had a strong connection to the land-either through farming, raising livestock, or simply tending a kitchen garden. Since 1994, Duckworth Farm Supply (DFS), a family owned business, has supported the bonds between soil and human hands.

A Historical Location

The land on which DFS stands-the corner of Elbert and Hancock-has historical significance to the city of Milledgeville. In its planning stage, the new capital was modeled after Savannah and Washington, D.C. with a town plat of 500 acres divided into 84 four-acre squares. Duckworth sits on one of those originally planned squares.

During the early 1800s, the town experienced great prosperity from the cotton boom. Bales of the white money making fiber lined the streets of the city waiting to be shipped downriver to the port of Darien.

After the American Civil War ravaged the state, cotton was no longer “King.” Although some farmers continued to grow the crop in the area until the 1970s, it would never again be a staple for farmers in Baldwin County.

In the early 1900s, the site was owned by R.E. Long who operated a cotton storage facility. In 1953, it was purchased by G.T. Harrington along with his sons Ralph and Floyd. The Harrington Milling Company (HMC) would remain operational until being sold to the Duckworth family.

Harrington's granddaughter, Ellen Mayers, worked at HMC throughout high school and college. She continued working for Duckworth a few years after her family sold the business.

She remembers, "Smith's Cotton Gin was located across the River Bridge and we stored the cotton for the government and farmers until 1970. My grandfather also refurbished the structure to mill corn to feed livestock."

A Tradition of Family

The HMC was sold to the Duckworth family in 1994-continuing the tradition of a family-owned business inhabiting the space. With parents Austin and Wilma, along with sons Joe and Gary, it was renamed Duckworth Farm Supply.

With a history of farming-cattle, wheat, and hay-the Duckworths were the right fit to run a farm supply company. For the first 16 years, Gary managed DFS daily, with Austin and Joe helping out in the store when not at home on the farm.

The Duckworth family were not only experienced in farming but also in cultivating food to feed their large family. "Dad would plant the vegetable garden and mom would put it up," said Joe.

Sadly, the family patriarch Austin passed away in 2009 and Gary made a change in careers in 2011, leaving the manager's position to Joe. Additional family members lend support to the business including Joe's wife Connie and their children Amanda and Zane, along with Gary's wife Karen and their children Austin and Jackson.

“The business has always been a family effort,” said Joe. “All family members including our mom, wives, and children have made contributions over the years.”

Changes in Agriculture

After the glory days of cotton were over, agriculture, including raising livestock and fields of crops, were the mainstay of living for many in the South during most of the 20th Century. Corn, soybean, wheat, cattle, and swine, dominated farming in Middle Georgia up until 1970s.

During the 70s and 80s, many field crops were phased out and the swine farms moved out of the region. Since the 90s, Duckworth has concentrated on supporting locals with personal stock of cattle and swine, along with horses and small gardens.

“As time has moved on, the need to plant big gardens died off. Because of the availability of large grocery stores, there is no need for families to grow all of their own food,” said Joe.

Today, DFS focuses on providing lawn and garden supplies and feed for not only livestock but pets and wildlife. The store has found a new niche with year-around interest in growing for wildlife and the rise of hobby farms.

Springtime brings with it a desire to tend the soil and Duckworth’s supplies all that one needs to welcome the new season. Planting for wildlife, including doves and deer grazing, is a very popular activity in this part of the state.

Those with private gardens-whether floral or food-can find the very best soil amendments at Duckworth’s including High Cotton, Nature’s Helper, and Black Cow

Manure. A large selection of seed, plants, lawn care products, and weed control is also carried for the discerning gardener.

“We try to accommodate the customer’s needs-including those who live in the city or in the country,” said Joe. In the springtime, that can include promoting the favorite pastime of bird watching. Joe adds, “We carry the highest-quality of black oil sunflower seed which attract the largest variety of birds. Our customers appreciate the quality of the products we carry.”

In the fall, Duckworth’s supports the big push to create food plots for wildlife, mostly deer and turkey for hunting season. Wheat, Oats, sugar beets, and turnips are just a few of the crops the store offers to hobby farmers and hunters.

Cultivating Connections

Essential to the downtown community, Duckworth was the natural selection to host a mural for the Milledgeville Marketplace Farmer’s Market. DFS was approached by the Art Department at Georgia College, and the family agreed that a mural announcing the market was a perfect fit.

“We of course wanted to give support for this community event and a mural on the warehouse was a great way to promote it,” said Joe.

Although many family farms went away decades ago, a new movement in small and specialized farming has been growing across the country for the last 20 years. Duckworth’s has been present every step of the way to help these young farms find success.

Fort Creek Farm (FCF), in Sparta, Georgia, is a fine example of a customer that has achieved success with guidance from the Duckworth family. The farm offers beef, eggs, and chicken at Milledgeville's Saturday Green Market at the pavilion next to DFS.

"When we transitioned our cow-calf operation to a grass-fed beef and direct marketing business 16 years ago, we had a steep learning curve," said Bob Woodall of Fort Creek. "Joe Duckworth was there for us every step of the way. He is extremely knowledgeable and always takes time to answer questions in a way that even the novice farmer can understand."

Helping customers is a hallmark of Duckworth's service. Woodall adds, "We really appreciate Joe's personal interest in his customers. If he doesn't have what you need, he will order it for you."

Another Sparta based farm, Elm Street Gardens, also benefits from a working relationship with Duckworth's. Since 2011, Elm Street has used DFS's parking lot to deliver their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes.

"It seems to work great for all parties involved," said new Elm Street manager Jessica Legendre. "We are certainly grateful to be able to hand out our CSA at Duckworth's. It is a great way to link members of a food driven community together-farm supply to farm to table."

A small family business with deep connections to the land, to the community, and to their customers-that's what makes Duckworth's unique in today's big-box world. Drop in and visit DFS at 122 North Elbert Street or give them a call at 478-452-2515.

