LATANIER (AP) — Bob Ward milked his first cow when he was 3. He expects to milk his last sometime this summer, then see his 114 cows and their calves hauled off for slaughter.

"It's going to be a shock to look out here and not see any," said Ward, 57, squinting across the pasture at the herd of black and white cows. "I'm going to look for where the fence went down for a few days."

Ward is among four Rapides Parish dairymen — half the parish's total — who have asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to buy their cows for slaughter and pay them to stay out of dairy farming for the next five years.

Carlos Benoit, who lives near Latanier, said he's keeping his 94-head herd but might have sold out if he'd known the USDA would accept $15 bids.

The herd produces about 2,500 pounds of milk a day and will bring in about 40 cents per pound for slaughter, he said.

"I bid what I thought would give me a fair price on my cattle . . . I didn't bid to try to get rich on it, just to get a fair price," Ward said. "Everything I've read led me to believe they would accept up to $10 or $12."

Ward said he doesn't consider the money as a subsidy, since assessments on dairy farmers will pay about 38 percent of the $1.8 billion cost.

He said he will stay on his farm and raise tomatoes, alfalfa, kiwi and beef cattle.

"It will be quite a change for me. I'll have to buy milk at the grocery store."

Ward said he'd been trying to sell his cattle for about 18 months. He said it's been several years since he last broke even, and he has heart problems which made the non-stop work too much.

But he couldn't find a buyer. "No one had any money."

Slaughtering the calves and heifers is what he'll regret the most, Ward said.

He has been breeding his cows with better breeds of bulls to produce a more expensive line in case he was to sell them as a milking herd. He invested $200 in breeding one cow and will only get about $160 for her slaughter.

"That's all down the drain. They're all going to be hamburger. And they'd have made as good hamburger on $1 bull as $15 bull," he said.

Ward won't even be able to keep one milk cow for himself and his wife.