

Goat Milk Soap Business Profitable For Oshkosh Family

Pam Keller knew her goats had to pay for themselves when she bought them in 2003. What the stay-at-home mom didn't anticipate was that the goats would soon be at the center of a successful family business selling soaps and other skin cleansing products.

At first Keller sold goat milk, meat and soap at a farmers market. The soap sold the best so she focused on that.

"We have a 100 percent money-back guarantee on your first bar of soap," Keller says, but no one has ever requested a refund. At the end of 2006, the Kellers opened a store in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 10 minutes from their 7 1/2-acre hobby farm. Keller homeschools her three daughters at the store, and the girls, ages 8 to 11, also help with customers and chores.

Keller anticipated attracting customers who want to use natural products. She was pleasantly surprised when people purchased her soaps for severe skin conditions.

"Skin is the largest body organ, so what you put on it goes into your system," Keller explains, adding that commercial soaps often contain synthetic, chemically-produced detergents that strip the skin's natural oils. "Our goat milk soap actually supplies nutrients to the body."

Keller's soap is 30 percent goat milk, plus vegetable oil and lye and optional essential and fragrant oils. She is careful not to make health claims about her soap, but has many repeat customers who have tried all kinds of dermatology treatments and lotions that didn't work. Keller recalls one man who had red, flaky alligator-like skin. She told him she didn't think she could help him, but she sold him a bar of her Shampoo Soap and a jar of Miracle Butter, told him not to use anything else, and said to bring it back if it didn't work.

"He came back in two weeks later, and I didn't recognize him," Keller recalls, be-

cause his skin had improved dramatically.

Keller, who has a bachelor's degree in microbiology and chemistry with the goal of one day being a doctor, finds satisfaction in her business because it helps people.

For people considering starting a similar business, she offers the following tips.

- Research various methods of soap making through books and the internet. Keller selected a non-cooking method — the lye heats the mixture. The internet is also a good place to shop for supplies, such as bulk vegetable oil and essential oils.

- Be meticulous with measurements, cleanliness and record keeping. Keller's science background helps, but anyone who likes to experiment and is good with details can make soap, she says. Start with small batches.

- Be safe. Lye is a caustic, but essential ingredient in soap. It must be used in the right proportion and handled carefully. Keller's soap is finished in 24 hours, and she tests a piece of soap from every batch on her own skin and with a pH test.

- Be patient. Lye and oil must be mixed thoroughly. Adding fragrance and essential oils is tricky. Keller had a few batches harden before she could pour them in 20 to 30-lb. sheets.

- Experiment. As customers express needs, Keller creates new products. Soap with Dead Sea mud for acne and other skin problems is one of Keller's most popular products, as is natural makeup. She sells shampoo bars, which include castor oil and extra conditioners for dry scalps and dandruff. She also makes fragrance soaps, facial scrubs, massage oils and lip balms.

- Enjoy the goats. Besides the soap-making end of her job, there are chores. It takes about an hour to feed and milk her 24 goats, Keller says. It's a good family activity, because her daughters also like the goats and helping out.

- There are few regulations for soaps, but



Pam Keller operates a successful family business selling goat milk soap and other skin cleansing products. They're sold at her store in Oshkosh, Wis.



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entrepreneurs must comply with federal labeling regulations.

Keller packages her soaps in cardboard boxes to reduce shrinkage and maintain moisture. Cost is about \$1/oz. plus shipping for most of her soaps. She sells by phone, through

the business website, and at the store.

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Farm Family Prospers By Marketing Their Own Milk

By processing and marketing the milk from their 200 cows, everyone in one large Ohio family is able to make their living on the farm.

"We do it all, from the soil to the shelf," says Janis Steiner, the youngest sibling of eight children who own and operate Hartzler Family Dairy. Inspired and encouraged by their parents, Harold and Patricia Hartzler, who began farming without chemicals in 1964, all the siblings returned to the farm 11 years ago to turn the farm into a successful business that processes and sells milk, butter and ice cream.

Since no new dairies had opened in 30 years in Ohio, the Hartzlers' start up was by trial and error. They worked with state inspectors and consulted with a former federal agriculture employee to meet regulations. An employee from the plant where they sold their milk helped design their processing plant.

Steiner says her father and a couple brothers took trips to look at other processing plants and find used equipment at operations going out of business.

The processing plant and store, The Hartzler Ice Cream Shoppe, were built on the edge of Wooster, Ohio. "We knew we had to do something unique to set us apart," Steiner says. "And we're kind of an old-fashioned family."

They decided to go with glass bottles to enhance the value of what they market as a

premium product. In addition to not using chemicals on their 1,500 acres of crops or giving their cows BGH, the Hartzlers use minimal processing practices. They use vat pasteurization, where milk is held a longer period of time at a lower temperature than ordinary pasteurization. The process preserves more of what the Hartzlers consider the good qualities in their milk.

"We believe the least processing, the better the milk is," Steiner says. They don't homogenize their milk either, so whole milk has a healthy head of cream. Loyal customers appreciate the quality product, Steiner adds.

Hartzler Farm sells quart bottles for \$3 and half gallon bottles for \$3.50 (plus \$1.50 bottle deposit). Their chocolate milk, known for its rich flavor, sells for about \$4/half gallon. During the holiday season, they bottle 20,000 quarts of eggnog and can't keep it on store shelves.

The dairy also makes butter and more than 50 flavors of ice cream. With a convenient location on a busy highway more customers are discovering the family's store, Steiner says.

High milk prices in 2007 helped the Hartzlers. Since milk was more expensive, some customers decided to spend a little more to get top quality milk.

Creating a business has not been easy and there are struggles, Steiner says. The parents, their six sons and two daughters, and their spouses are all financially and physically in-



The Hartzlers, along with their eight children and their spouses, run the successful dairy themselves processing their own milk, butter and ice cream.

vested in the business. Each brings different talents. Some take care of the cows; others work in the plant or store. One is in distribution; Hartzlers' milk can be found in 100 stores and in institutions all over Ohio. Steiner handles public relations, advertising and giving tours.

"The biggest piece of advice I can give is to have good communication," Steiner says. Her family has board meetings, which include

a general manager who is from outside the family. "Have people involved who are outside of your family circle," she adds. "They see things differently; we sometime have blinders on."

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