

# FARM MAID SOAP



At the intersection of 8th and Esther each weekend, you'll see two red tents standing together, lined with shelves that are filled with soap, candles, shampoo bars, body spray, bug spray and more. Peek inside past the many different products, and you'll find the team behind Farm Maid Soap. It all started with one woman's effort to feed her family with goat milk – at the time she was pregnant with baby number five, with two more to follow. Since then, it has multiplied and manifested into a whole family-and-friend-run operation.

The woman at the helm is Kathy Johnson. In the 20 years since she got her first goat she has built a successful business that now employs 10 people. When she first set out to make goat milk soap, she learned that it could be a long process, taking up to 4-6 weeks to produce a finished bar. But through research, she learned about a number of shortcuts, combined them, and can now make a usable bar of soap in just 6 hours. For the first few years, her family sold their soap at the Fourth of July celebration in Corbett in order to make some extra money to send their kids to summer camp. Later, they added a few holiday markets.

When Kathy's husband lost his job during the 2008 financial crisis, the family decided to take the next step with the soap business and began to sell at a farmers market in Troutdale. The next year, they became a vendor at the Vancouver Farmers Market. In those early market days, Kathy found business advice through classes at Mercy Corps Northwest, a group that is currently partnering with the VFM to support new farmers market vendors.

As the business took off, Kathy found herself working up to 90 hours per week. She said her family faced a crucial decision to either scale back to a more sustainable level, or hire additional people and expand. They chose the second route, and were able to get to the point where the business did not have to rely so heavily on Kathy. By 2019, they had built such a strong structure that Kathy, her husband Jay, and their three youngest boys took a three-month RV trip around the western half of the U.S.

These days, Farm Maid boasts an impressive product selection, including 85 varieties of soap and 60 varieties of candles. Kathy said she enjoys educating customers about which products can treat different skin conditions. For example, she recommends lavender and sage products to treat eczema and psoriasis, and colloidal silver, lemongrass, and tea tree to treat acne. Another benefit to goat milk products is that they contain caprylic acid, a component which gently exfoliates and helps nourish the skin. "We help and encourage our customers, community, and our people," Kathy said. "If we're not doing things to benefit people, then why are we doing it?"