

Lisa Johnson - Fiber

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Give a gnome a home.” That catchy slogan works especially well when the gnome in question is a cute little hand-knitted figure from a fiber spinner and goat milk soap producer in rural Kansas. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Lisa Johnson is the owner of Leap of Faith Soap Shoppe and Fiber Farm. She produces soaps, lotions, herbs and fiber products, including these charming little gnomes.

Lisa grew up traveling because her dad worked in the aviation industry. She married a Coloradoan and became a teacher. She and her husband pursued careers in education. They worked at various schools across Kansas, most recently settling near Elsmore.

When their first son was born, he couldn't consume store-bought dairy formula so they turned to goats' milk as an alternative food for him. It worked well and the Johnsons started raising excellent herds of dairy goats of their own. The four Johnson children raised goats as projects in 4-H and FFA. Today's herd consists of Nigerian Dwarf milk goats, Angoras for fiber and Nigoras for both milk and fiber.

Lisa got involved, serving two terms as a director with the American Dairy Goat Association. Her kids became active showmen. Youngest daughter Lindsay won the showmanship competition at the national show. At one point, the Johnsons were milking 40 goats per day. Since the scientific name for goats is caprine, her place was nicknamed Caprine Corner.

One outlet for the goats' dairy products was to make goat milk soap. Lisa experimented with different blends of essential oils to get her soap just right. She started marketing her goat milk soap at craft fairs and festivals. Her products were sold under the brand name Leap of Faith.

Lisa also had an interest in spinning and weaving fiber. “I would see someone spinning at a craft fair and just stand and watch (in fascination),” Lisa said. She finally got a spinning wheel of her own and went to a yarn school at Harveyville, Kansas.

In 2007, Lisa started spinning professionally. Now she is the one whom other people watch when she spins at craft fairs.

“It’s the way people used to do things,” Lisa said. “So much stuff is made in China and Japan. I love making homemade gifts.” She adds, “Spinning is relaxing. I can sit and spin for hours.”

Then tragedy struck. Lisa’s husband passed away in an auto accident. She now is a substitute teacher while also working at a farm store and managing her business.

Today, Leap of Faith Soap Shoppe and Fiber Farm sells products around the country. Her soaps come with wonderful scents and creative goat-related names. For example, there is doe-lishish blackberry, cornmeal baa-d-scrub, and udderly goatmeal, plus many more.

Lisa also sells rovings (which are cleaned fibers ready for spinning) plus yarn as well as finished products which she creates by knitting, crocheting, felting or weaving. The soap and fiber are combined in one product she calls “soap in a sweater.” This consists of felted fiber around a bar of her milk soap. As it gets wet, the wool will contract as the soap shrinks with use. “It’s kind of like a scrubby,” Lisa said. “People like it because it’s not slick and doesn’t slip out of your hand.”

Another popular product is Lisa’s gnomes. These are cute little knitted figures with long pointed hats filled with nylon fiber so they are totally washable. Kids of all ages seem to love them.

Leap of Faith Soap Shoppe and Fiber Farm sells products from Florida to Hawaii. Lisa even has one client in Beverly Hills. Wow. That’s impressive for a business based near the rural community of Elsmore, population 72 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to Facebook and search for Leap of Faith Soap Shoppe and Fiber Farm/Caprine Corner.

“Give a gnome a home.” That slogan helps market these cute little knitted gnomes, produced by Lisa Johnson at Leap of Faith Soap Shoppe and Fiber Farm. We commend Lisa for making a difference with her creativity in using products from her own farming operation. That means these gnomes are home-grown.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.