

THE ONLY
WAY TO GO
IS UP!

FROM ROCK BOTTOM

By Shon Wylie

What's a girl to do when all she ever wanted her whole life was to own horses and live on a farm?

"My father always told me that if I wanted a horse, I had better get a really good job, because horses are expensive!" Amy Henson laughed as she began to explain how Rock Bottom Soap came to be—an unintentional endeavor if ever there was one.

Taking her father's words to heart, Henson headed off to college, obtaining her undergraduate degree from Cumberland

University—a major in biology with a minor in chemistry. That was quickly followed by a medical degree in optometry from Indiana University, providing her the 'day job' that allowed her to pursue her equine dreams.

After marrying Wes McFadden, whom she had literally known since they attended kindergarten together in Laurel County, Amy's dream came true when they purchased a farm in that same county where they were both raised.

The name "Rock Bottom" carries a double meaning—the young couple

was down to rock bottom after investing everything they had to acquire their land which didn't even have one improvement on it. Later as they began to run fencing and build on their farm, they hit copious amounts of rock at every turn.

It was the advent of a foal born to a milk-less mare that brought dairy goats into the picture, as their vet suggested goat's milk on which to raise the baby.

Words of Wisdom

from Amy Henson for newcomers to goat keeping:

"You will need lots of patience, and you will need to do lots of research! Goats will make you laugh and always keep you learning something new to aid in their care."

Advice for getting into large retail stores:

Tell your story. Explain what makes your product different than that of a large manufacturer. Also, always be prepared – you never know when an opportunity that you would never dream of will come knocking!



Amy researched dairy goats to determine which breed she wanted to raise before purchasing her first doe, eventually settling on Nubians because of the higher fat content of their milk.

Ms. Henson assumed that others might also have a need for milk on which to raise orphan animals and that she could easily find a market for the excess. As the milk began accumulating in her freezer for lack of buyers, Amy realized that she needed a Plan B and decided to try her hand at soap making.

"My first batch of goat's milk soap was such a huge success, I got really excited!" Ms. Henson laughed as she recalled the experience. "My second batch was an equally huge disaster, but that just made me more determined to figure out the process and get it right."

Once the initial batch had cured and she began handing it out to friends and family to try to gain feedback, she realized that maybe—just maybe—she was onto something.

"I knew I liked it and that it made my skin feel better than the commercial soap I had always used. But it was the fact that people who had tried it kept coming back to me wanting more that really convinced me that I could sell the stuff."

As she honed her craft and gained more experience making soap, Amy began adding lotions, lip balms and other products to the Rock Bottom line. She contacted the Kentucky Proud program online and went through the process to become certified, a move that would prove to be extremely beneficial to the fledgling company.

"The Kroger company had obtained a listing of Kentucky Proud certified producers, and we received an invitation to participate in a vendor event in Louisville to present our products to be judged by Kroger managers from all over the state," Ms. Henson explained. "After visiting each vendor booth and trying products, they voted for their favorites and the top vote getters were invited to sell at Kentucky Kroger stores."

What was it like for someone who was producing and selling soap on a small(ish) scale to receive that first purchase order from Kroger?

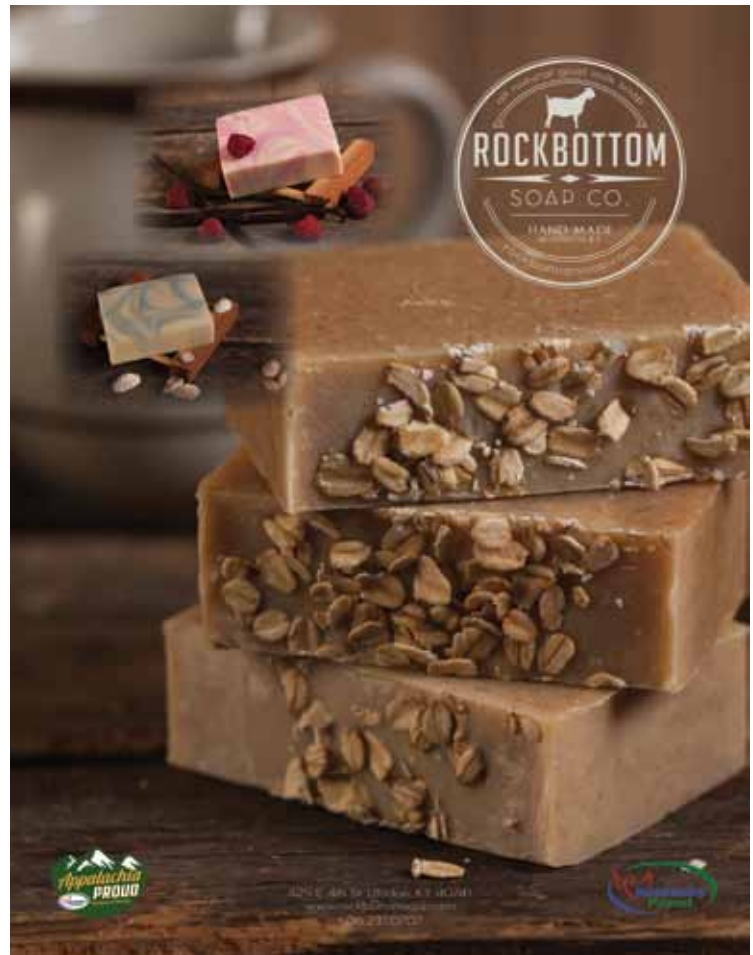
In a word—or three—"A bit overwhelming," acknowledged Ms. Henson. "The first purchase order was for 200 dozen!"

While Kroger was the first affiliation with a large chain for Rock Bottom Soap that followed as a direct result of their Kentucky Proud certification, it wasn't the only one. Lucky's Market in Lexington is now carrying their product line. In addition, they have their own brick and mortar store at 429 East Fourth Street in London, Kentucky as well as selling online through their website.

With Wes handling most of the milking duties in addition to running his landscaping business, the couple has adopted a rotational strategy for kidding and milking their current herd of 20 does. The plan is to breed a few does each month so that there is a continual supply of milk and Mr. McFadden is milking no more than five does at any one time. Ms. Henson is adamant about the humane treatment of her animals, and the goats are no exception. She feels that the rotational system they have in place insures that her does will never be overburdened in their milk production, and their bodies will have plenty of time to recuperate between freshening.

For more information on Rock Bottom Soap, contact them at (606) 231-0707 or through the website at www.rockbottomsoap.com.

Shon Wylie, graduated from the University of Kentucky with a B.A. in journalism. She and her husband, Jerry, are both Thoroughbred trainers that now also raise sheep, dairy goats and cattle. With an eye toward natural and humane treatment of animals, their agri-tourism farm seeks to educate others in self-sufficiency.





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