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HOW I MADE IT

Farm formula stops getting under baby's skin

Liam Kelly

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Joanna Jensen has raised £2m from backers

PHIL YEOMANS



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When stay-at-home mum Joanna Jensen could not find toiletries suitable for her young daughter's sensitive skin, her

husband challenged her to make them herself. So she did.

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Jensen, who was interested in alternative medicine and homeopathy, developed her own recipes and found a manufacturer to produce the shampoos and moisturisers. Daughter Mimi loved them. “She called them the ‘no stingy’ ones,” said Jensen.



The idea grew out of the family bathroom into a business called Childs Farm, named after where they lived, which makes products for babies and small children. Jensen partnered with an illustrator, Emma McCall, to design colourful packaging featuring animals on the farm, including Ben, a pony who lived to the age of 37.

Last year, Childs Farm, which is stocked by big chains such as Waitrose and Boots, turned over £5.7m and reported a profit of £61,000. It overtook PZ Cussons to become the country’s second-largest baby brand – behind only the American giant Johnson & Johnson, according to the analyst Kantar Worldpanel.

Jensen had no retail experience when she set up the business in 2010. “I thought you phoned up Waitrose and asked if they fancied putting your products on the shelves.” She was a letting agent, interior designer and investment banker before having children.

Jensen wanted to make children's toiletries more fun. "Why is it that adults get stuff with lovely smells and kids' stuff looks medicinal or smells of mung beans and flip flops?" she said. The range includes strawberry and organic mint shampoo. 

The farm animals on the labels proved such a hit that they were turned into a series called Childs Farm on the children's TV channel Cartoonito. Jensen's two daughters were written into the show as Mimi the mouse and Bella the goat.

The girls, now aged 12 and 9 respectively, help test new products and advise their mother on matters such as which fragrances to use.

Early on, it was clear that the natural recipes were working as Mimi's "red-raw" skin improved. Jensen has the range independently clinically tested, though, even though it eats into the profits. "We want to be the safe option, we want parents to feel good," she said.

Jensen started the business with £50,000 of savings and has raised about £2m over the years from 25 backers, including friends and family, angel investors and private equity veteran Andrew Leek. Today, the founder owns 40% of Childs Farm.

Jensen and her 20 staff work from a converted barn in a village near Basingstoke, Hampshire. She lives close by with her partner, Jonathan, an executive coach who helps her with recruitment.

Childs Farm is also popular with people who do not have children. Jensen was, though, coy about whether she would launch an adult range: "Never say never."

She urges entrepreneurs to savour the start-up phase: "That's when all the challenges come, and when it's most exciting."

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