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## TMK Creamery: 'We decided to go vertical'

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For the Capital Press

CANBY, Ore. — TMK Creamery of Canby, Ore., began as a 4-H project of Todd Koch at the tender age of 12.

As it grew, family members joined in and the dairy shipped milk for 23 years until the creamery they supplied dissolved, threatening to leave them high and dry.

"It got to where it was liquidate or do our own thing," Todd's wife, Tessa Koch, said. "We decided to go vertical."

TMK started making their own cheese and ice cream in 2017. Early the next year they built a retail space that, besides creating an outlet for their products, enables them to host large

groups of kids and the public to show them the inner workings of a dairy.

On weekends, visitors enjoy live music, food and drink with plenty of space to stick around and enjoy the country atmosphere. Special events include Friday night "Milking with Marc" events, which sell out every time. During the events, 15 participants get a chance to milk a "cowlebrity."

Then there's the vodka.

Getting the idea from research at Oregon State University, the Kochs embarked on making vodka from the whey left over from the cheesemaking process.

They spent two years designing and engineering their own vodka, which met with great success and led them to build a still.

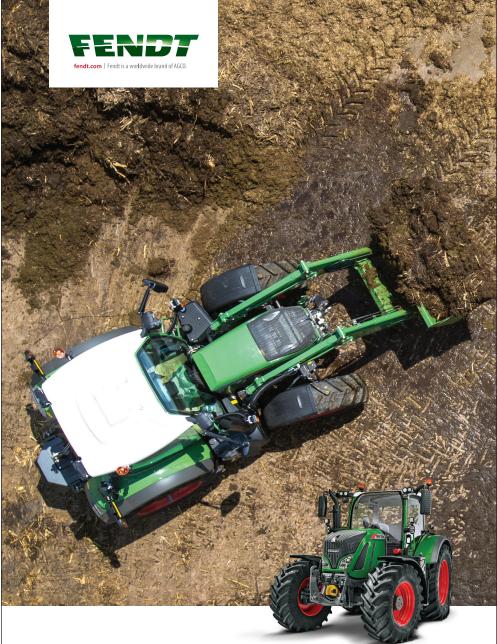
In the process they had to develop a unique heat exchange method to keep the protein-rich liquid from scorching during the brief time involved in producing each batch.

"When we're done making the cheese the whey goes into fermenters for about a week before going through the still," Koch said. "It's immediate; you're getting alcohol as soon as you start putting it in."

It's a "sipping vodka," she said. Most of its appeal is not in alcohol content but in knowing a waste product was upcycled in its making. Having their own still makes TMK the only 100% farmstead creamery distillery in the world. Their plans include going nationwide with the product.



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