

upstarts

Play and Learn

A pair of Minnesota moms want to empower kids through their new entrepreneurial endeavor

BIZBRIEFING

Farmer's Hat Productions

Headquarters: Wayzata, Minnesota

Inception: Founded in November 2005, products available in April 2007

Revenue: Not disclosed

Seed Capital: Not disclosed

Patents: none

Employees: 6

Description: Farmer's Hat Productions, LLC — preview product line is trademarked as Bur Bur and Friends. The series features a diverse group of characters who introduce children to sports, outdoor exploration and active play.

Web site(s):

www.farmershatproductions.com,
www.burburandfriends.com

Management team

President: JoAnne Pastel

VP: Kakie Fitzsimmons

Project Manager:

Sarah Hermann

Creative Director:

Christopher Bohnet

Illustrator:

Lindsay VanDeWeghe

Advisor: Bill Dunlap

JoAnne Pastel and Kakie Fitzsimmons couldn't find books that featured young children of all ethnicities playing and learning together. So they decided to develop their own line of books, toys, children's clothing and accessories that encourage diverse populations of kids to learn about sports and outdoor activities.

Pastel's previous career as a stockbroker led her to realize that she and Fitzsimmons, who also works in financial services, could succeed with a children's product line if they were careful about planning and sharing information. (They declined to disclose sales, saying only that the books, priced at \$14.95, have sold in the thousands.)

Pastel and Fitzsimmons started working on the Bur Bur & Friends series of books in 2005 and named their company Farmer's Hat Productions after Pastel's son William's favorite hat, even though the hat was a bucket hat. Their first three books feature drawings of William (as Bur Bur, William's imaginary friend), Pastel, and her husband, Petters Group Worldwide executive Bill Dunlap. In the books, Bur Bur learns about fishing, boating and baseball. A book about hiking featuring a Caucasian girl named Anna was published last month and they plan to finish writing a basketball book by the end of December. Other books based on six additional characters of different ethnicities are planned.

The line debuted in April and Farmer's Hat held a kick-off at the Mall of America in July. Maureen Bausch, executive vice president of the mall, says the Bur Bur line has been very well received. The books are available at the mall's Park at MOA stores as well as online and at stores listed at www.farmershatproductions.com.

Multicultural market

Multicultural children comprised **43 percent** of the population of **3-5 year-olds** in the U.S. in 2006, according to U.S. Census Abstracts and the Kids Market in the U.S., published by Packaged Facts.

As they get older, more girls and fewer boys read books.



JoAnne Pastel, President, and Kakie Fitzsimmons, Vice President of Farmer's Hat Productions

farmershatproductions.com.

"I think people really like the concept," Bausch says. "It's unique."

Farmer's Hat has also teamed up with Minneapolis-based Sun Country Airlines to offer a free Bur Bur & Friends kit, including an activity book, crayons and a kid-sized box of cereal, to children flying on Sun Country.

Pastel and Fitzsimmons recruited 20-year-old artist and college student Lindsay VanDeWeghe to do the illustrations, and Dunlap has collaborated on some of the writing. "One of the things that has helped us is that the people who are working with us are just as passionate as we are," Pastel says.

Pastel and Fitzsimmons started Farmer's Hat with private money and are now looking for outside financing. Meanwhile, they are working at getting the books into other bookstores and libraries.

"William walked right up to a stranger and asked, 'Will you buy one of my Mommy's books?'" Pastel recalls with a laugh. "It's wonderful to see the positive reaction."

—NANCY CROTTI

Hispanic children are least likely and African American children are most likely to enjoy reading books other than school books, according to The Kids Market in the U.S., published by Packaged Facts.

24 million or **21.8 percent** of U.S. households purchased children's books in 2005, according to Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc.