



Don't eat! Cheese sculptor Sarah Kaufmann completed her 1,400 pound cheese sculpture of a family of four Tuesday at the State Fair. And no, you can't eat it. Kaufmann says it will get made into pet food. - Michelle Pemberton / The Star

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Cheese lady makes dairy delights

Fair sculptor cooks up cheddar replica of naturally grown food

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Working feverishly to finish her 1,400 pound cheddar cheese sculpture, Sarah Kaufmann had just one request: Don't shut the air off.

The nationally known "cheese lady" is making her fourth appearance at the Indiana State Fair, and Tuesday afternoon, she was nearly finished cutting the cheese for her artistic project.

The work is scheduled to be completed and officially unveiled at noon today at the Pioneer Our Land Pavilion.

An air-conditioning malfunction would be disastrous, much like the mishap last month when a life-size cheese replica she made of the first men on the moon nearly melted at the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta, Ohio.

"I was done and already home, dreaming about astronauts," Kaufmann, 57, said while she carved white cheddar into a bunch of cauliflower. "I had to rush back and fix it fast."

The air inside her booth at the fair ranges from 40 degrees in the deepest part to about 50 where she sits on a stool and works her cheesy magic.

This year's sculpture, large enough to cover a six-foot table top, features a family of four surrounded by cheddar replicas of natural products -- corn, bread, tomatoes, a jug of milk -- all sculpted out of orange or white cheddar, except for some red gouda cheese used to create the red tomatoes.

Kauffman, who lives near Cincinnati, has been carving cheese since the early 1980s and does projects all over the country.

She's been here since opening day, starting with two blocks of cheddar, both weighing in at about 640 pounds.

"Between Friday morning and now, I've put in about 50 hours," she said, as dozens of visitors watched the sculpture come to life.

"We use this cheddar because it's very consistent and dense and it holds up really well."

Her tools: Ceramic wire loops, a triangle, square and rectangle, along with a pencil, knife and wires. Observers were impressed with her craftsmanship.

"I was completely awestruck," said Joyce Johnson, Middletown, who watched Kauffman with three of her daughters.

"And I think it's great for the kids to see, although now they are going to want to play with their food more."

Born in Wisconsin and a self-proclaimed "cheese head," Kaufmann worked for the Wisconsin dairy industry for 16 years before embarking on her career of turning cheese into works of art.

She maintains studios in Cincinnati and San Diego; her largest sculpture to date is a 12,500-pound dragon.

Other notable sculptures include a six-foot-long aircraft carrier for the USS Reagan, a 120-pound Mickey Mouse, a 300-pound gorilla, a six-foot cheddar cheese gator for the University of Florida and a host of special order TV personalities like Jay Leno, Matt Lauer, Katie Couric, Al Roker and Ann Curry.

And she only uses real cheese.

"I taste it before I start," she said. But when the fair ends, there will be no feast.

"No, it will get processed and made into pet food. It's great for dogs, cats and even fish farms."