

## Local spotlight

# Meat company sizzles during grilling season

■ Flint-based family firm cranks up production, staffing to satisfy hunger for barbecue fare.

By KAREN DYBIS  
Special to *The Detroit News*

For the Koegel Meat Co., Michigan's fascination with cooking outdoors has translated into a warm-weather boom in business.

"The summer really is time for us to gear up," said John Koegel, president and the third generation of the Koegel family to own and operate the Flint-based food company.

Not only does Koegel add about 25 people to its summertime payroll, but its volume also increases dramatically. While it produces about 250,000 pounds of product weekly during the winter, that number rises to as high as 400,000 pounds during key periods like Memorial Day and the Fourth of July weekends, Koegel said. Besides celebrating the warmer weather, Koegel is enjoying its expansion into new stores and territories. Last month, the company placed its first products — its famous skinless Vienna hot dogs — inside 10 Costco Wholesale Corp. stores in Michigan.

Their next target is Kroger and whoever ends up buying Farmer Jack, John Koegel said, ensuring Michigan residents have access to the complete line of Koegel products whenever the mood strikes.

The company also is in the midst of a sizable advertising push to remind people to try Koegel products on their grills this summer. The billboards aim to show how grilling brings families and friends together at home, and that Koegel is a key part of those celebrations, John Koegel said.

Besides Costco, residents can find favorites like Koegel bratwurst, Polish sausage, salami and Viennas inside restaurants and



Bryan Mitchell / Special to *The Detroit News*

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## Koegel Meat Co.

- Headquarters: Flint
- Employees: about 100
- Annual output: 13 million pounds
- Products: Lunchmeat, sausages and hot dogs

food retailers including Meijer Inc., Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Dairy Queen, A&W and about 200 different Coney Island operations across the state.

In all, Koegel produces about 35 different products in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

"Our challenge is to keep our products relevant," John Koegel said. "Grocery stores have so much data these days to keep track of whether you should be there or not. ... We want to be around for years to come."

Families are still among the largest consumers of Koegel's products, John Koegel said. Some of the company's most popular products like the bratwurst are those that make quick, healthy meals — something that appeals to busy parents, he said.

U.S. families have made meat a

staple of their diets. The U.S. meat industry is the largest sector of agriculture, and agriculture is the largest sector of the U.S. economy.

Meat industry sales in 2003 were nearly \$90 billion, the most recent year available, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The Koegel Meat Co. started in 1916 when Albert Koegel landed in the Flint area to start his own business. Koegel hoped to take advantage of the city's growth thanks to the success of the automotive industry there.

Koegel came to the United States from Germany, where he learned as an apprentice the recipes and processes that the company still uses today. By the mid-1930s, Albert Koegel had enough business in the region to open his own processing plant, ensuring that his products would be fresh.

"Our products have that old-world ambiance," John Koegel said. "They're tried, true and tested."

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