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YOU HAVEN'T LIVED HERE UNTIL: You've picnicked just on Michigan products

September 2, 2007

The calendar may not say it, but let's be honest, summer's officially over Monday.

At picnics this weekend, celebrate like a true Michigander. Fill your picnic basket only with products made by your neighbors. Your basket will overflow.

On the grill

In 1916, Albert Koegel settled in Flint to start a meat company he called **Koegel's**. An apprentice in the meat business in Germany, he settled in Flint because he was told that with the projected growth of the auto industry, there would be lots of customers coming to the area. By the mid-1930s, he had his own plant. The company moved to a new Flint facility in 1972.

Today, the company has nearly 100 employees and produces 35 products at a plant near Bishop Airport, most from the same recipes Albert Koegel developed. There are frankfurters, bratwurst, braunschweiger, and for those who like their lunchmeats, there's bologna, salami, olive loaf, pickle loaf, Dutch -style loaf, honey-style loaf and even macaroni and cheese loaf. Most of the products are sold only in Michigan.

Another Michigan institution – **Kowalski** – has been making Polish kielbasa and dozens of other meats from the secret family recipes of Agnes and Zygmund Kowalski for 85 years. The business started as a grocery store on Chene in Detroit. Demand grew for the homemade sausage and the family built a factory in Hamtramck to accommodate. It's still there. The business has remained in the family and employs more than 200 people, making 75 different products, from fresh meats and sausages to seafood, poultry and Polish specialty foods like horseradish and sauerkraut.

On the table

Need a snack while the grill gets hot? You have plenty of Michigan-based options.

Ferndale-based **Garden Fresh Gourmet** makes 10 kinds of chips from barbecue-flavored pita chips to sweet cinnamon pita chips to blue corn kettle-style tortilla chips. Salsas come in 15 varieties from artichoke garlic and sweet onion to peach pineapple and Screamin' Hot. There are two types of guacamole, too, and five kinds of hummus to go with those pita chips. And there are six kinds of dips, from a traditional spinach to the award-winning cream cheese and salsa. Annette and Jack Aronson started the company in the back of their small Ferndale restaurant.

The Karpe family started roasting nuts in their kitchen to sell outside Tiger Stadium. In 1939, the family incorporated **Kar's Nuts** and has been making snacks ever since. It was based in Ferndale for about 50 years before moving to Madison Heights in 2004.

Kar's Sweet 'n Salty Mix is a big seller, and various trail mixes are favorites in vending machines. Some are sweet, others not so much. Perhaps the most unique is Wasabi Nut Crunch, a combination

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of wasabi peas, peanuts, almonds, cashews and rice crackers.

Better Made has been cranking out yummy potato chips and other snacks in Detroit since 1930. About 40 million pounds of potatoes annually are made into the chips metro Detroiters regularly choose as the Best of Detroit in the Free Press poll.

For those who like healthier snacks, the pleasant-f-prim-looking **Aunt Mid's** has been providing vegetables to Michigan for more than 50 years. The Detroit-based firm started in 1948 with spinach in a bag. It now produces salsas, sprouts, Oriental products and salad dressings for sale to homes and food service.

In the cooler

You can't have a Michigan picnic without something to drink from **Faygo** or **Vernors**.


Faygo turns 100 this year and is celebrating with a blue-tinted pop called Centennial Soda. It started out as the Feigenson Brothers Bottling Works. The brothers, Ben and Perry, were Russian bakers who based their original flavors on frosting recipes. The company became Faygo in the 1920s and moved to its location on Gratiot in Detroit in 1935. Their most popular flavor? Redpop.

Then there's Vernors, which is – for those who know – not ginger ale. It's Vernors, a unique drink that will tickle your nose with its extra carbonation and claims to be the oldest soft drink in the United States. The firm got its start from a concoction Detroit pharmacist James Vernor created from a blend of 19 ingredients and put in an oak barrel before going off to fight in the Civil War. When he returned, he sampled the drink he had put together four years earlier and a taste sensation was born.

Bon appetit!

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