

They Make Vintage Favorite Pickles

Sechler's Pickles has been a northeast Indiana favorite since 1921. The pickling processor sells nostalgic flavors like Candied Sweet Orange Strip Pickles, which are 5-in. pickled cucumber slices twice sweetened with sugar and orange flavoring.

Today, Sechler's Pickles sells 54 distinct products, ranging from pickles and peppers to relishes and salsas. The brand's original recipe, Genuine Dills, is still on the shelves. "Our Candied Sweet Mixed Pickle is our most popular item," says Matt Troyer, company President. "It contains candied pickles, sweet cauliflower, pearl onions, and red bell peppers. We sell it in 16-oz, 32-oz, 1/2-gal., and gallon jars." Recently, the business has responded to evolving customer tastes with spicier options like Sweet Heat Mixed Pickles and Jalapeno Sweet Relish. Prices start at \$3.80 per pint in the St. Joe Showroom but can vary by location.

Founder Ralph Sechler began the business in 1922 when he leased two pickle-receiving stations for farmers to bring cucumbers. There, Sechler would grade and size the cucumbers by diameter before curing them in salt brine. The pickles would then travel by train to the D. M. Sears Company in Fort Wayne for processing. After the Great Depression bankrupted the Sears processing plant, Sechler and his wife began processing the pickles in their farmhouse kitchen (still standing today as the company office), later converting their barn into a factory. In 1948, Ralph's son joined the business, and the family officially established their



Sechler's sells 54 different products across the Midwest.

pickles as the Sechler brand.

Much of Sechler's Pickles' business remains the same today, 80 years later. "While new processes and procedures are introduced, we've resisted change that might in any way detract from the quality of our pickles," says Troyer.

The cucumbers themselves are grown mostly in Michigan. Sechler's preserves them by fresh-packing directly from the field or by a preservation method known as brining. This requires the cucumbers to soak outdoors in oak tanks, where they ferment in water, salt, and calcium chloride. This usually takes 3 to 6 mos. After brining, the pickles are removed from the tanks and used as needed for orders.

Sechler's products are found throughout Midwest retail stores and online at the company website.

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Ranch Sells Steak In Vending Machines

Thanks to vending machines, consumers in Kansas City, Mo., can buy Angus beef cuts as late as 11 p.m. at Front Range Coffeehouse & Provisions in Waldo, Mo.

Though it can be challenging to keep it and another vending machine in the Kansas City Marketplace full, it's been a great way to direct market beef, says Tim Haer, a fifth-generation member of the family ranch, Green Grass Cattle Company.

"Kansas City strips are the most popular," he says, noting he monitors a card reader so when steaks and other products are low, he makes the 40-mile trip to restock.

"My background was in software, so I knew capturing and aggregating data was important," Haer says. Besides keeping track of stock levels, he can monitor temperature levels and remotely lock down the vending machine if necessary.

After successfully setting up the first vending machine in February 2023, he set up the second machine in September in another location with the same business.

"Finding the right partner is key to being successful," he says, noting the business (Made in KC) he works with supports novel ways of marketing local Kansas City products and has 15 locations. They negotiated an in-kind trade arrangement, and the stores benefit from the meat vending machines bringing in new and repeat customers.

Haer invested about \$4,000 for each of the refurbished vending machines, and he customized them with the business logo and a business card.

"The advertising and exposure are valuable," he says. After a TikTok video of one of the vending machines went viral,



Vending machines can be monitored remotely for stock levels and temperature, allowing for multiple vending locations.

900,000 views on their online store resulted in sales from San Diego to Cape Cod.

"It also provides a unique advantage to educate," Haer says. He's received calls from customers asking how the beef was raised.

While it can be challenging to find time to make the trip to keep the vending machines stocked with brats, sausage, hot dogs, and steak cuts, they've been a positive add-on to the ranch's Weston store and online store.

"My biggest message is to help other farmers and ranchers to market their products and not to accept commodity prices," Haer concludes.

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Gross-Wen Technologies originally developed their equipment to grow algae in wastewater, which they buy back, harvest, pelletize, and use to produce slow-releasing fertilizer.

They're Growing Algae To Use As Aviation Fuel

A rural Iowa company currently selling algae-growing equipment to different cities and industries with wastewater treatment plants is expanding its mission.

Algae is a plant crop taking in carbon dioxide and producing oxygen making it a popular consideration for companies actively improving water quality while stressing sustainability.

"The water industry views nitrogen and phosphorus as a solution and a problem, but the farmers view them as a fertilizer," says Max Gangestad, Gross-Wen's COO. "It's a natural marriage if we can use excess chemical elements from one industry as the needed inputs in other industries."

Gross-Wen Technologies originally developed their equipment to grow algae in wastewater, which they buy back, harvest, pelletize, and use to produce slow-releasing fertilizer. Soon, they'll expand their operations and partner with a prominent yet unnamed oil and gas company interested in their algae plant lipids for conversion into sustainable aviation fuel.

Gangestad says this partner company will

extract the oils and needed components from the algae at their own refinery. He's optimistic that Gross-Wen will continue to make some fertilizer with their algae, plus work outside the box to increase its value.

He explains they're still early in the research and development process but believes the actual transformation of algae into sustainable aviation fuel will take place soon. This is driven by large amounts of federal funding targeting the development of more sustainable feedstock.

"There's a huge demand for sustainable aviation fuels," Gangestad says. "The Department of Energy (DOE) has determined there will be a lack of feedstock for required sustainable aviation fuel going forward. We have a great marriage and application here as many feedstocks initially have high costs to produce, whereas algae grown in wastewater is a beneficial, low-cost waste from another industry."

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Soy Candle Project Launched A Family Business

Soy Wicked Candles is a Kentucky business run by the Deweese/Williford family. The candlemakers got their professional start when family matriarch Lynne Deweese's granddaughter Dallas Williford needed a project for her FFA SAE (Supervised Agriculture Experience). She decided to make soy-based candles. The extended family jumped in to help, and things started snowballing.

Their big breakthrough came from the local soybean refinery. A member of the soybean association connected with Lynne Deweese and put in an order for 1,000 candles made from their beans and scented Kentucky bourbon. "It's our most popular scent. That made us scale up quickly," says granddaughter Kimberly Schwartz. "It took a lot of research to get this business off the ground and fulfill that order."

All the candles are poured on the family property, within "the old house," an empty farmhouse where multiple family members have lived in past decades. Today, it serves as an intergenerational gathering space. "It can be a little chaotic," says Schwartz. "On candle-pouring days, one moment it's sandwiches on the table; the next we're clearing everything off to get to work."

Every part of the candles comes from Kentucky except for the fragrances, which come from neighboring North Carolina. Using soy as the base compound was an intentional choice. "Soy wax is cleaner burning, comes from all-natural ingredients, and tends to last longer," says Schwartz. "Plus, it supports our



Soy Wicked Candles started as an FFA project and grew into a family business.

local farmers and businesses."

Today, Soy Wicked Candles are sold at two local businesses. The family has also been to area farmers markets. They don't currently ship, as soy wax can melt en route. "That's our next big challenge," says Schwartz. "Temperature-stable soy wax."

Though they've been in business for less than a year, the business continues to grow. "We're doing at least one pouring, sometimes two, each week," says Schwartz. "We've snowballed into a real business. We never thought we could launch this way, but it's been great."

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