

Walmart Pushing For More U.S. Product Makers

Chuck Bartels, Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — With labor and energy costs on the rise in Asia, Walmart highlighted an effort to promote domestic goods on Monday, including products made by more than 40 Arkansas suppliers.

Bentonville-based Walmart is encouraging customers to buy items made in the United States. In the company's home state, the effort includes a red, white and black placard bearing the slogan "Arkansas' Own."

Walmart Senior Vice President Michelle Gloeckler said promoting in-state vendors will improve sales and help the world's largest retailer sell more U.S.-made products. Presently, 44 Arkansas suppliers produce 73 brands and 1,700 items for Walmart, according to the company.

"Of course, we expect these numbers to grow," Gloeckler said, standing amid shelves packed with Arkansas -made foods and other items.

Gloeckler said about two-thirds of Walmart's goods are produced in the United States. She also said the days of deeply inexpensive goods coming from Asia are over and that U.S. factories can now compete on price.

"The economics of manufacturing is changing," Gloeckler said.

Gloeckler said Walmart is investing \$50 billion over the coming 10 years companywide to promote development of U.S.-made products, as well as offering longer contracts to U.S. suppliers so those companies can invest in new facilities, Gloeckler said.

State Economic Development Director Grant Tennille said more than 80 percent of the Arkansas-made products that Walmart stocks are available nationwide.

Gov. Mike Beebe said the state is in talks with foreign manufacturers who are interested in building U.S. factories, but he said he didn't have anything specific to announce.

Springdale-based Tyson Foods Inc., the nation's largest meat company, has a healthy presence on Walmart shelves. So do many smaller companies, from candle makers to specialty poultry producers.

Randy Zook, president of the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce, said businesses can grow with a company — such as Walmart — promoting their wares.

"We've got plenty of capacity for lots of items across the state. We just need more business, we need more activity," Zook said.

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

The company stocked a corner of the store with items made in Arkansas, including tortilla chips, bread, peanut butter, ice cream, paper products, beauty items, frozen dinners and other goods.

"You could make a pretty good meal," Zook said. "I don't see any utensils, though."

Source URL (retrieved on 08/22/2014 - 10:34pm):

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