

Title:

What Does "Made In America" Really Mean?

Word Count:

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Summary:

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Keywords:

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Article Body:

Patriotic symbols abound from California to the New York Island. Americans eat apple pie, sing the National Anthem at baseball games and visit the Statue of Liberty. They also demonstrate "American pride" by making certain choices as consumers. Some favor Ford and GM over Toyota or shop at American Apparel, the trendy clothing company with all operations in Los Angeles.

First and foremost, consumers seek the best product at the best price. Country of origin is often an afterthought; only one in five Americans seriously considers it when making buying decisions, says America's Research Group. The reality is that Americans probably underestimate the value of their buying decisions and how they can affect the nation's economy and future.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, the "Made in USA" standard means that "all or virtually all" of the product was made in the United States. Only automobiles, textiles and wool products are required to display the country of origin.

Who's Affected?

One sector increasingly affected by the "Made in USA" mantra is domestic manufacturing, especially with the outsourcing of jobs to China, India and other countries. Intense competition drives down product prices, while American manufacturers balance higher operating expenses including labor and health care. In fact, manufacturing jobs typically pay 23 percent more than other economic sectors, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. This contributes to the

22 percent higher price tag of doing business in the United States, which almost equals the total cost of production in China, says a study by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)/Manufacturers Alliance.

Ultimately, this affects U.S. jobs, export potential and even research and development. Economist Joel Popkin notes that during the recession of the early 2000s, more than 3 million manufacturing jobs were lost.

Good News

The good news is that American consumers hold some power.

"Although more things are made in America today than ever before, U.S. manufacturing faces some stiff challenges. Consumers can support manufacturing through their purchasing decisions. They can also write their elected officials and encourage them to support legislation that helps manufacturing thrive in America, by reducing costs and leveling the international playing field. One person can make a difference," said Bill Canis, vice president at The Manufacturing Institute, the research and education arm of the NAM.

Companies like Zippo lighters, Procter & Gamble, Boeing, Caterpillar, Channellock and tens of thousands of smaller companies are committed to preserving American manufacturing and jobs.

"Channellock hand tools, for example, has supported American jobs and commerce for the past 120 years-while remaining family owned and operated-which is a rarity these days. Channellock's hometown of Meadville, Pa., thrives today largely because it has helped so many employees and suppliers realize the American Dream," Canis continued.

The continuous challenge for Channellock and similar manufacturers is educating consumers about what distinguishes their products from competitors'. Elevated operating costs often force a higher price point for "Made in USA" products, so manufacturers differentiate themselves with superior quality and craftsmanship, aggressive investment in emerging technology and even less tangible benefits such as comprehensive employee-enrichment and recognition programs.

Channellock's core customers, including tradesmen and knowledgeable do-it-yourselfers, buy Channellock because it is a brand known and trusted by their parents and grandparents. The signature Channellock Blue handles mean quality, comfort and even nostalgia. Customers receive the highest-quality hand tool on the market today; but they also know the tool was made by highly skilled professionals whose jobs signify much more than just a manufacturing plant in

small-town America.

So before grabbing the next shopping cart, commit to informed shopping. Buying products that are "Made in America" may be the most impactful acts of patriotism, just ahead of eating apple pie.

George B. DeArment started a hand tool forging enterprise in 1886 that survives 120 years later as Channellock, Inc. Now led by the fourth and fifth generations of the DeArment family, Channellock has weathered the storm of foreign competition by continuous quality improvement and refusing to compromise on principles established by its founder.