

Home Grown: West Virginia Made Products We Love

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Educational Objectives

- Participants will explore popular West Virginia brands and products.
- Participants will be introduced to some hidden treasure products they will want to check out.
- Participants will learn about the importance of supporting local vendors and producers.

When the western portion of Virginia began exploring the possibility of secession in the early 1800s, many factors drove this decision. At the heart of the matter, those living in the mountainous west felt underrepresented within the state legislature, which resulted in them feeling both overtaxed and under-supported by

state spending. Unwilling to allow things to continue as they were, those early people pursued and ultimately achieved statehood. One could say West Virginia boasts a rich entrepreneurial history; citizens had an idea with huge economic implications, and they acted on it despite the major risks.

The people of West Virginia have long proved to be resourceful, adapting to challenges and finding solutions. Over the years, as many traditional avenues for employment have closed their doors, people created their own opportunities by starting homegrown companies that boast West Virginia-made goods. From goods and wares people need to tasty foods they love, many of these West Virginia-made products have gained notoriety far and beyond the boundaries of the Mountain State.

Popular West Virginia Brands

West Virginia features an array of remarkable brands and companies that have made a mark far beyond state borders. Let's delve deeper into these iconic companies.



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- **Fiesta Tableware Company:** Originating from the Ohio River valley in 1871, brothers Homer and Shakespeare Laughlin began a whiteware company. However, Shakespeare moved on quickly, and in 1877, Homer Laughlin China Works was born. The company found its permanent home in Newell, West Virginia in 1907. Its iconic Fiesta dinnerware line was released in 1936, designed by Frederick Rhead. It was their answer to the dreary styles of the Great Depression, trying to cheer up the country with vibrant colors, high gloss and exceptional quality. There are more than 50 colors of Fiestaware, including retired colors. The back of each item is stamped with the signature Fiesta logo and has earned the brand's followers the nickname of "plate flippers" as they quickly flip items to ensure that they are authentic. The brand's invitation to the White House in 2017 to represent West Virginia during Made in America Week underscored its significance as a symbol of American craftsmanship. The unique shapes and colors provide the everyday user or collector with a plethora of options for their table setting.
- **Blenko Glass Company:** Situated in Milton, West Virginia, the Blenko Glass Company has upheld the tradition of hand-blown glass since 1893. Renowned for its distinctive colors and artisanal craftsmanship, Blenko's

384 Water Bottle Collection stands as a testament to its timeless appeal and remains its most iconic shape in a wide variety of colors. Visitors to the factory can witness the artistry firsthand through guided tours and explore the rich heritage at the glass museum.



- **J.Q. Dickinson Salt Works:** Rooted in a storied history of salt production dating back to the 19th century, siblings Lewis Payne and Nancy Bruns revived the family's salt enterprise in 2013. Located in Malden, West Virginia, the company hand-harvests salt from ancient sea deposits beneath the Appalachian Mountains in the Kanawha Valley. Embracing traditional methods and a commitment to sustainability, their salt lineup is natural and rich in minerals, offering a diverse range of flavors, from the classic heirloom to innovative varieties like ramp and ghost pepper.
- **Holl's Chocolates:** Founded by Swiss immigrant Fritz Holl and located in Vienna, West Virginia, Holl's Chocolates epitomizes the essence of traditional Swiss craftsmanship. Since its inception in 1986, the family-owned business has remained dedicated to producing authentic Swiss chocolates. With a focus on quality ingredients and exemplary customer service, their delectable range of caramels, truffles



and sugar-free options continues to delight chocolate enthusiasts.

These West Virginia brands exemplify a rich legacy of artistry, innovation and dedication to quality, earning them recognition and admiration in the Mountain State and beyond.

The Hidden Treasures

While these big West Virginia brands are known and loved, other small businesses are opening around the state all the time, with the same desire to share their amazing products with others. A quick glance around any West Virginia community will introduce an array of clothing and jewelry designers, culinary creators, soap and candle makers, and more. With so many to choose from, it is sometimes hard to find those hidden gems, so here are a few we recommend.

Clothing and Jewelry Designers: The Pretty Pickle designs gorgeous resin-based jewelry showcasing a variety of items found within the nature of West Virginia, including flowers and butterfly wings. Since 2010, this woman-owned business, based in Weston, has provided artistic options, including many in the shape of the Mountain State, for others to wear and love. One thing that is certain about jewelry and clothing designers from around the state is that their love of West Virginia is obvious in their products!

Loving WV is a fan favorite when it comes to West Virginia clothing and apparel. The Fairmont-based company has t-shirts, sweaters and sticker options with many state destinations, sayings and more. One final hidden gem to check out when thinking about apparel is a brand called Those Shoes. If you are looking for high-quality, handcrafted leather shoes in a variety of designs and colors, this Weston-area designer will not disappoint.

Culinary Creators: If you are looking for savory treats, Ordinary Evelyn's is the place to be. Evelyn McGlothlin has been putting out dips, jams and jellies from her rural, Clay County home-based business since 1996.

Blue Smoke Salsa is another great food vendor. It was originally produced in Robin Hildebrand's Fayette County home in 1993. Today, it is produced out of Cross Lanes, continuing the tradition of small batch salsa, healthy ingredients and delicious flavor.

For the sweet treat lovers, Macy Lou's Gourmet Apple Company in Thomas is definitely a West Virginia business that you don't want to miss. While the business began as a high school junior trying to earn some extra money, COVID-19 disrupted everything, and the young business owner opted to open a storefront in 2021, where she now sells a variety of apple creations.

Finally, when looking at the delicious foods around West Virginia, one must not forget the drinks. If you are a coffee lover, check out Folk Hero Coffee Company, located in Buckhannon, where they pair their delicious coffee beans with famous West Virginia cryptids and historical figures, creating fun and unique flavors.

Soap and Candle Makers: There's no lack of great local soaps and candles being crafted by West Virginia entrepreneurs. Dirty Mama's Clean Soap out of Elkview offers a variety of soaps with no artificial fragrances or colorants. They also offer other self-care products for her, him and even the pets! Additionally, MoG Handmade is a veteran-owned luxury soap, bath bombs and wax melts business out of Glenville that is worth checking out.

There are entrepreneurs with amazing products all over the state. You can support them by sharing your favorites with others and shopping local.

Shop Local

The impact of shopping locally has been heavily researched in recent decades, with many focusing on the economic impact of supporting local producers. Small businesses recirculate 48% of each purchase back into the community by purchasing supplies for products, hiring local employees and using local banks.



This more than triples the amount that most large chain companies put back into the local economy, about 14%. However, the social and civic impact of supporting local businesses is often overlooked. Research has shown that the increased presence of local businesses in a community results in higher levels of social capital, civic engagement, well-being and reduced rates of crime. Supporting local products is not just about purchasing goods, it's about investing in West Virginia communities. When people buy from West Virginia artisans, farmers and businesses, they're not only getting quality items but also nurturing the livelihoods of neighbors, creating local jobs and contributing to the vitality of the state.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture's dedication to promoting homegrown products through initiatives like West Virginia Grown underscores the importance of this philosophy. The campaign, developed in 1986, assures that products purchased under that label are high quality and grown or made right here in West Virginia.

Nationally, support of local small businesses is also encouraged each fall through Small Business Saturday. First observed in 2010, Small Business Saturday occurs the Saturday after Thanksgiving each year, sandwiched between Black Friday and Cyber Monday. While it was originally sponsored by American Express in an effort to celebrate small businesses and their impact on local communities, by the second year, the U.S. Small Business Administration had come aboard as a co-sponsor.

Today, supporting local businesses is easier than ever. Whether it's through dedicated storefronts like Blenko and Holl's Chocolates or via retail outlets, farmers markets, local fairs and festivals, or online platforms,

there's no shortage of ways to support local craftsmanship and obtain their outstanding products.

The Tamarack Marketplace and the Capitol Market serve as vibrant hubs where consumers can discover a diverse array of West Virginia goods. The Tamarack Marketplace in Beckley was designed to feature West Virginia craftsmen and brands. Shoppers can purchase one of thousands of products made by artisans from all 55 counties that are sold at the regional showcase. It features arts and crafts, as well as companies like Blenko and Fiesta. The Capitol Market in Charleston features a farmers market with more than 40 West Virginia growers, providing flowers, plants, pumpkins and Christmas trees. Additionally, there is 16,000 square feet of indoor specialty retail space that features products including wine, Holl's Chocolates and many more West Virginia-made favorites.

Explore ways to encourage others within the community to shop local. Some fun ideas may include:

- **Promote Your Favorites** - Create slogans or advertisements to promote local businesses that are meaningful to your members.
- **Shop Local Bingo** - Develop a bingo card featuring your local or hometown businesses and encourage members to visit them and have their card signed – this may boost foot traffic to these stores.



Summary

West Virginia businesses are growing and delivering quality products that residents want and need. By prioritizing local purchases, we are not just buying goods, we are investing in the future of our communities and preserving the unique character of our state. Whether it is a handcrafted piece of art or a jar of locally sourced honey, each purchase is a vote of confidence in our homegrown talent and a testament to the spirit of West Virginia.

Let's Chat!

1. What are some of your favorite locally-made products? Consider show-and-telling these at your next meeting!
2. What motivates you to shop locally? Is it the product, relationships, access to the vendor, etc.?
3. What could you do to increase support for local businesses in your community?

Resources

- <https://www.holls.com/our-story/>
- <https://blenko.com/pages/blenko-history>
- <https://www.jqdsalt.com/our-story/>
- <https://www.fiestatableware.com/fiesta-history>
- <https://www.tamarackwv.com/>
- <https://capitolmarket.net/>
- <https://wvliving.com/best-of-wv-2023-shop-ping-services/#:~:text=GIFT%20SHOP%201%20CARDINAL%20MARKET%20WV%20Living%20readers,Tamarack%20Place%2C%20Beckley%2C%20tamarackwv.com%2C%20%40tamarackwv%20on%20FB%20>
- <https://agriculture.wv.gov/ag-business/west-virginia-grown/>
- <https://www.theprettypickle.com/>
- <https://lovingwv.com/>
- <http://www.thoseshoes.com/>
- <http://www.ordinaryevelyns.com/>
- <https://bluesmokesalsa.com/>
- <https://www.macylousgourmetapplecompany.com/>
- <https://folkherocoffee.com/>
- <https://dirtymamascleansoap.com/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/moghandmade>
- <https://ilsr.org/articles/key-studies-why-local-matters/>
- <https://news.d.umn.edu/articles/expert-alert-economic-impact-shopping-local>
- <https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/organization/sba-initiatives/small-business-saturday>

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