

Southern Sensibility

Southern Foods is an independently owned, full-line food distributor in Bowling Green that continues to distinguish itself through steady, sensible growth.



Southern Foods is a company with deep roots in south-central Kentucky. To find the company's distribution center in Bowling Green, take the William Natcher highway off interstate 65. The highway is named in honor of a renowned congressman from the area who was the great uncle of Southern Foods President Joe Natcher. Natcher continues the family tradition of playing a prominent leadership role in the Bowling Green community.

Natcher and three partners purchased two area foodservice businesses, Bowling Green Frozen Foods and Cummings Produce. Several years later in 1987, they renamed the company Southern Foods. With the foundation of two companies that had been in the area since 1957, Southern began the process of becoming a centerpiece of the foodservice business into the next century.

The company has shown continuous and impressive growth for years. Natcher, who is now the majority owner with one silent partner, says that Southern Foods has averaged double-digit sales growth for the past fifteen years. Today, Southern employs 90 people, offers customers over 5,000 products and projects annual sales this year of \$43 million.

The secret to the company's success is an understanding of what customers need. "Foodservice businesses have a lot of challenges," says Natcher. "Not only can we help them by being their partner, but we allow them to focus on the challenges they face without worrying about the reliability of their food distributor"

Since the company began with the purchase of a produce company that operated in the area since the fifties, Southern Foods has a reputation for high quality when it comes to produce. Natcher says their customers acknowledge that Southern "handles produce as produce needs to be handled." However, he says they are recognized today as a full line distribution company.

Vice President and General Manager Michael O'Brien joined Southern Foods three years ago when he accepted a position with the company and relocated from Florence, South Carolina. He leads the company initiative to build upon its foundation of Wow! Customer Service. O'Brien says "customer service is not a department here. We believe everyone is in customer service."

Southern Foods is part of the UniPro buying co-op. The company feels that its association with the \$29 billion buying cooperative empowers Southern to offer purchasing clout, quality control, nationwide marketing and enhanced buying opportunities for customers.

Southern Foods moved to its new state-of-the-art distribution facility in Bowling Green in 2000. The refrigerated area of the warehouse operates in five different temperature zones. The company offers 24 hour service, seven days a week on beverage and chemical equipment. The company executives say that the new distribution center has increased efficiency and productivity and was designed to allow for multiple expansions.

Natcher says he "has a deep love for the south-central Kentucky area." His commitment is shared by co-workers, many of whom have been with the company for years. Natcher says Southern Foods is involved with the community through associations with

several organizations that support the young people and senior citizens of the community. Natcher has been involved with Junior Achievement, the Boys and Girls Club, and he is president of the board for the Commonwealth Health Free Clinic. The company also steps forward to help sponsor events that bring tourism to the region, such as a 10K Classic and the Wendy's Ultimate Golf Challenge.

Southern Foods is involved with Kentucky's military bases. The company supplies all non appropriate business to Fort Knox and Fort Campbell, which includes officer's clubs, catering, lodging and child care facilities. In addition to the large customers such as the military bases, Southern still opens its doors everyday to a regular clientele of walk-in business.

The company's growth has not gone unnoticed. The Bowling Green/Warren County Chamber of Commerce named Southern Foods the Industry of the Year in 2003. Natcher took special pride in the award, since it was only the second time that the award had gone to a locally owned business instead of a national company.

Southern Foods will welcome hundreds of customers and foodservice businesses to its annual food show Tuesday, April 26 at the Sloan Convention Center in Bowling Green. In addition to the food show, the company is moving forward with its goal of helping customers face the challenges they have in their businesses everyday. Seminars on Legal Issues and Menu Development will be offered during the day.

Information on the Spring Food Show or the company is available at Southern's award-winning website www.southernfoodsinc.com -PREP



Southern Foods Company Distinctions

- President Joe Natcher
- 2005 Projected Sales \$43 million
- Co-workers 90
- Product Line 5,000
- Member UniPro Foodservice Inc.
- ASI Certificate of Excellence for Food Safety
- 2003 Industry of the Year-Bowling Green/Warren County Chamber of Commerce
- 2003 Distinguished Marketer of the Year from UniPro
- 2004 Diamond Award from IFDA for Website for appearance, user-friendliness and effectiveness.
- Spring Food Show
Tuesday April 26,
Sloan Convention Center

