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MSU Helps Meijer Source Michigan Specialties

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — Blueberry Butter, Wild Bill's Root Beer and Organic Cherry Honey Mustard have gained placement in 33 [Meijer](#) locations under a Made in Michigan initiative launched Sunday.

Forty-nine products from 22 state-based vendors were selected for the inaugural Michigan section. The items will be showcased in 4-foot Center Store displays for a year, and have an opportunity to branch out chainwide.

"If the product meets Meijer's goals it will go mainstream and allow new local products to be [cut] in," explained Matt Birbeck, High Impact Venture Action Team project manager for the Michigan State University Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The Product Center was established in 2003 to help commodity farmers create value-added products. The High Impact Venture Team helps small-scale Michigan food businesses gain placement in retail chains like Whole Foods Market.

Meijer approached Birbeck and his colleagues seeking a plan for sourcing local specialties from small businesses. "A lot of supermarket chains really want to get local foods into stores but they're so busy with day-to-day life that it doesn't get done," Birbeck explained.

Meijer's campaign is the latest in a series of retailer programs to highlight foods and other products sourced locally.

[Wal-Mart](#) launched a yearlong Wisconsin's Own program last week including special shelf tags, signs and displays in 84 stores in the state. Eligible items are made or grown in Wisconsin or produced by companies with headquarters there. Unlike the Meijer effort, products were not brought in specifically for the campaign.

Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Co. beer, Johnsonville Brats and Shullsburg Creamery cheeses are among highlighted brands. "A lot of the items are Wisconsin heritage products such as sausage, beer and dairy," Wal-Mart spokeswoman Lisa Nelson told *SN*.

"When customers buy products that are manufactured in Wisconsin, they support Wisconsin jobs," she said. "We're the largest company in the state and employ more than 30,000 associates so the impact we can make by helping our customers make choices and buy Wisconsin products is huge."

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