WISCONSIN MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME

2006

Carl W. Kuehne
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Over the past twenty years, Carl Kuehne has successfully guided American Foods Group, Inc., making it into one of the largest food processors in the United States. Recently, the company merged with Rosen Meat Group to create American Foods Group, LLC, with Kuehne at the helm as co-chairman and co-CEO. Kuehne is also known for implementing innovative programs to raise employee morale, supporting community programs and holding leadership positions within the meat industry.

Born and raised in Seymour, Wisconsin, Kuehne holds a law degree, as well as a bachelor’s degree in economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He practiced law for 20 years in Green Bay before purchasing Consolidated Beef Industries in 1985.

At the time of purchase, Consolidated Beef Industries consisted of two harvesting and processing plants and netted around $200 million per year. Within a few years, the company—which Kuehne headquartered in Green Bay and renamed American Foods Group—was netting upwards of $600 million.

To grow American Foods Group, Kuehne purchased a number of meat processing plants to expand production capacity and to introduce new product lines. Currently, the company produces fresh and frozen meats, ground beef, deli meats, hams, bacon, sausages, as well as fully-cooked and case-ready meat products. American Foods Group has also increased profits by adding value to meat products through further processing.

When deciding what new value-added products to make, Kuehne listens to his customers. For example, the company works directly with retail markets to produce case-ready cuts of meat (already wrapped in trays with plastic film) affixed with the store’s very own price labels.

Over 1,200 employees work at the main beef processing plant in Green Bay, where 1,900 head of cattle are processed each day and 4 million pounds of ground beef are made every week.

In addition to offering health and life insurance, vacation and holiday pay, 401(k) plans, and an onsite employee cafeteria, Kuehne developed innovative programs to improve the work experiences of his employees, who hail from as far away as Laos, Vietnam, Mexico and Poland. The programs—which include English as a Second Language lessons and classes exploring different cultures—helped reduce the turnover rate of line workers from 100% to 35% annually.

American Foods Group also offers an “Employer Assisted Homeownership Program” that provides employees with forgivable loans of up to $3,000 for the down payment and closing costs of a home purchase. Along similar lines, the company has a “Baby Troops Program” to encourage and help provide pre-natal care to expectant employees.

Before merging with Rosen Meat Group, American Foods Group was already one of the largest food processors in the United States. The company was on Fortune 500’s list of largest privately held U.S. companies. In 2004, the combined total sales for American Foods Group and Rosen Meat Group were over $1.5 billion. In total, the new American Foods Group, LLC, employs over 3,000 people and has food processing plants in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio and Virginia.
Kuehne has also taken an active role in the support of numerous community and civic organizations in and around Green Bay, including the American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, the Green Bay Boys and Girls Club and diversity training for local Green Bay businesses. He also sits on the Green Bay Packers Board of Directors as chairman of the Packers Foundation.

Kuehne is a member of the executive committee and board of directors for the American Meat Institute, where he also served as chairman in 1996. In 1997, he was recognized by The National Provisioner as the "Industry Executive of the Year." He also participates in the U.S. Meat Export Federation and the National Meat Association.

Kuehne is married to Mary Ellen. They have three children—Kim, Sarah and Scott—and three grandchildren.

For his astute leadership of American Foods Group and his service to his employees, community and the meat industry, Carl Kuehne is highly deserving of induction into the Wisconsin Meat Industry Hall of Fame.