

# *The Shelby Report of the Midwest*

salutes



# BUSCH'S™

*Fresh Food Market*

## *for 50 years of success*



Founders Charlie Mattis and Joe Busch







# Company honors its roots – quality, partners, community

As Busch's Fresh Food Market enters its next 50 years, the family-owned Michigan grocer is strengthening its foundation through strategic investment in people, technology and community. The company's mission remains clear: deliver an exceptional fresh food experience while staying true to the neighborhood-focused culture that has defined Busch's for generations.

The momentum at Busch's is built on the legacy created by the Busch family. In 1986, John, Tim and Doug purchased the company from their father, Joe Busch, and began shaping it into the community-focused fresh food market it is today.

John's decades of leadership established Busch's culinary identity and commitment to quality. Tim contributed strategic and operational discipline during key periods of growth, and Doug expanded the company's presence in the community through meaningful outreach and long-standing partnerships. Their combined leadership created a culture that more than 1,600 associates carry forward every day.

Freshness and local sourcing continue to set Busch's apart in a crowded grocery landscape. About 85 percent of the company's produce comes through the Detroit Produce Terminal, and many relationships with Michigan growers and suppliers have lasted decades.

These partnerships have strengthened as the company expands its hyper-local strategy, which now includes picking up products directly from small farms and delivering them straight to stores. This approach supports Michigan agriculture and ensures exceptional quality for guests.



Community connection remains central to the brand. Stores like Saline, which recently received a community lifetime award, reflect the multigenerational trust that Busch's has earned across southeastern Michigan.

Locations regularly support local schools, food banks and community events, demonstrating the belief that every store should act as a true community partner.

Over the past five years, Busch's has invested heavily in store improvements. These projects are designed to enhance both the guest experience and the work environment for associates.

The Novi location received a complete revitalization that incorporated the former Rite Aid property into an expanded store footprint. The Rochester store remodel delivered immediate gains in fresh department sales and improved workflow for associates. The Ann Arbor Main Street store, which also houses the company's headquarters, is preparing for a major renovation once city approvals are finalized.

Looking ahead, every location will receive deli enhancements and a return to more in-store scratch baking. These updates will reinforce the company's commitment to fresh prepared foods and strengthen the culinary identity that has been part of the Busch family vision since the beginning.

Associates remain at the heart of the organization. This year, 35 associates celebrated five-year milestones at the company's service awards banquet, including many who joined during the COVID-19 pandemic and chose to build long-term careers with Busch's. Cultural initiatives such as the Fun Ambassador program give each store the time and resources to plan engagement events and recognize team accomplishments.



Alongside store investments, Busch's is making significant advancements in technology. The company has modernized communication systems, introduced digital collaboration tools and shifted away from paper heavy processes.

These improvements have increased accuracy, reduced manual workload and created greater transparency throughout the organization. Store and department

leaders now spend more time on work that supports associates and enhances the guest experience.

Technology also plays an important role in Busch's vision for growth. Rather than building new stores, Busch's is prioritizing the acquisition of independent grocers whose cultures and communities align with its own.

This strategy allows the company to retain experienced associates, preserve locally rooted grocery stores and enter markets where technology-enabled operations and a strong fresh food platform can bring new value.

The company expects to expand from 16 stores to about 20 within the next five to eight years, with opportunities emerging in western Michigan, lakeshore communities and the Traverse City region.

Even with expansion and modernization, the organization remains grounded in its core values. Stores maintain their own community involvement budgets and have the autonomy to support the programs that matter most to their neighborhoods.

A leadership development initiative called Fifty and Beyond is helping unify a largely new leadership team around collaboration, accountability and shared purpose.

Across the company, the focus is on building the systems, culture and technology that will shape the next era of Busch's. As President and CEO Bobby Turner states, "Our associates are the heart of Busch's. When we invest in them, trust them and support them, everything

## President, CEO finds home at family-owned grocer

As Busch's Fresh Food Market enters its next half-century, President and CEO Bobby Turner is nearing his third year leading the 16-store, family-owned grocer with a focus on modernization, cultural strength and deep community connection.



**Bobby Turner** Turner began his career in 1988 as a bakery associate in Whole Foods' fourth store. He grew with the company through multiple phases of expansion and

change, ultimately serving as a regional president and overseeing the opening of its 500th location, a 90,000-square-foot, three-level flagship in Midtown Atlanta.

"I opened store five and store 500," Turner said. "Those were definitely two different stores."

After Amazon acquired Whole Foods, Turner stayed through four years of transition before choosing not to remain through another restructuring. That experience reinforced his belief that protecting culture is essential to a company's long-term health.

"When culture changes, it's like those old kung fu movies where they rip the heart out of the body," he said. "That's what it felt like. And I never want to see that happen again."

Today, Turner describes Busch's as a perishables-driven, service-driven organization where community relationships serve as a

true point of differentiation.

He is committed to preserving the company's neighborhood focus, from corporate giving to store-level support of local schools, food banks and community organizations.

His leadership approach centers on service, empowerment and helping people grow.

"For me, it's really about helping people see their potential," he said.

Turner's focus now is on building the systems, infrastructure and leadership capabilities that will position Busch's for long-term success, ensuring the company's next 50 years remain as strong, local and community-centered as its first.







**Gary Pfeil**  
Gary Pfeil, former CEO. “As I move into the vice chair role, I could not be more confident in the leadership team and the direction of the company. The future is bright, and I am proud to continue supporting the organization in this next chapter.”

else flows from that.”  
With a strong team in place and a clear mission guiding the work, Busch’s Fresh Food Market is positioned to remain a deeply local and community-focused grocer for decades to come.  
“Busch’s has always been about people, community and doing things the right way,” said

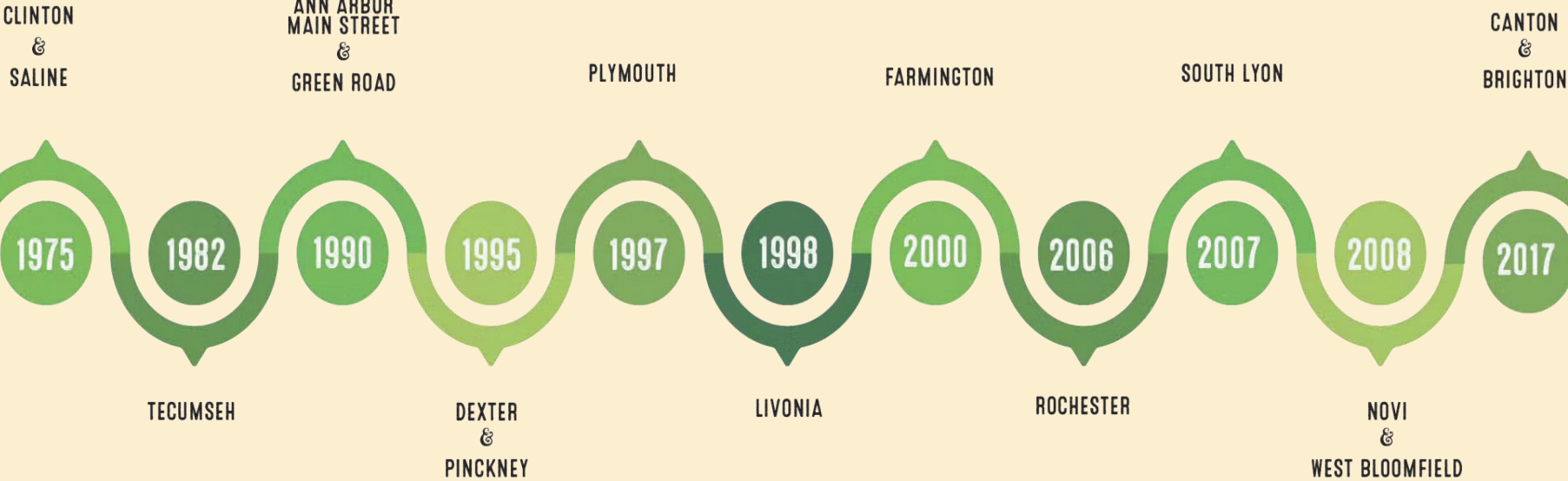


# Busch’s Fresh Food Market through the years ...

Busch’s Fresh Food Market was founded by Joe Busch and Charlie Mattis in 1975 when they took over two Vescio’s supermarkets in Clinton and Saline, Michigan, and renamed them J&C Family Foods.  
When Joe Busch retired in 1986, his sons John, Douglas and Tim took over the family business and continued to build and acquire more stores. Now the company, which is headquartered in Ann Arbor, has stores in Michigan’s Lenawee, Livingstone, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties, with 1,600 employees.

## Mission statement

As Busch’s closes out its 50th anniversary year, the mission for President and CEO Bobby Turner is clear: modernize operations while preserving the community focus that has defined the grocer since its 1975 founding.  
“For us, it’s really always making sure that our mission statement is our north star and that you never veer from that,” Turner said.  
That mission is straightforward: “To be the premier local fresh food market in southeastern Michigan. We exemplify the standard by providing an exceptional shopping experience that satisfies our guests’ changing expectations and differentiates us. We utilize our extensive passion for and knowledge of food in a friendly environment that maintains focus on our guests. We feature a broad array of food products to meet the needs of our local communities with an emphasis on locally produced items and premium quality fresh products.”







## Vendor relationships build community through partnership

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

For 50 years, Busch's Fresh Food Market has built its reputation not just on what it sells but on who it partners with – a philosophy of community-rooted collaboration that has helped local businesses grow while strengthening the company's connection to southeastern Michigan.

"As a local company ourselves, it's incredibly rewarding to support other Michigan-based businesses on their own journeys to success," said Brad Busch, VP of sales and merchandising and third-generation grocer.

"Our mid-sized scale gives us a unique advantage – we're large enough to make a real impact yet small and flexible enough to collaborate closely with emerging local partners without overwhelming them."

Busch's approach to vendor relationships begins with a clear



Brad Busch

focus on quality and uniqueness.

"We take pride in offering products that stand out – items and brands that our guests can't find just anywhere," Busch said. "We're especially drawn to vendors who bring something new and exciting to the market. Being among the first to introduce exceptional products to our guests is part of what makes the Busch's shopping experience special."

But partnerships must align with the company's core values.

"Above all, every partnership must align with our commitment to quality," he said. "Delivering on that promise – consistently and authentically – is essential to earning and keeping the trust of our guests, and it's the foundation of long-term success for both Busch's and our partners."

The company takes particular pride in watching local vendors succeed.

"Watching our vendor partners grow alongside us – and sometimes even beyond us – is one of the most rewarding parts of what we do," Busch said. "These relationships not only strengthen our product offerings but also reinforce the community values that define Busch's Fresh Food Market."

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## Investing in store renovations to better serve communities

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

Busch's Fresh Food Market has made significant investments in renovating and refreshing its stores across southeastern Michigan, with projects ranging from décor upgrades to multimillion-dollar expansions.

The family-owned grocery chain has remodeled nearly all its 16 locations at least once, according to Aaron Preston, director of facilities. The scope of each project varies based on individual store needs, from layout changes to major additions of square footage.

"We look at the other stores in the area. We always check to see what our competition is doing," Preston said. "And then we look at the stores, and we look at the numbers of what we sell and who we sell to."

Customer feedback also drives renovation decisions, and Busch's takes those comments seriously.

"If they suggest that a store is not easy to navigate or if the decor is a little older, we take that to heart ... and we provide the updates as necessary," Preston said.

### Novi project sets the standard

Busch's typically upgrades at least one store annually. Its most recent major project was the renovation of the Novi location, which included leasing and incorporating a former Rite Aid space to expand the store's footprint.

"We had an existing store that we had not done much to in a plaza. We leased that store," Preston said. "So we leased the store next to it, the Rite Aid, and added our existing footprint to a larger footprint."

All renovation work is completed overnight between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. to avoid disrupting the shopping experience. When the Novi deli reopened after a six-week closure for renovations, customers were impressed by the speed and quality of the transformation.

According to Preston, customers raved about how quickly the project was completed, how they love the layout and new lighting and that the store "shops easier."

"We still get feedback. We get shoppers that came back to us that had left us ... it's a totally new store, so a whole new shopping experience," he said.

Customer response to renovations has been

overwhelmingly positive across all locations. Preston said "99.9 percent" of the feedback is from customers saying, "thank you" and that the company "should have done it 10 years ago."

While renovations do increase sales and profit, Preston emphasized that's not the primary motivation.

"For us, it's knowing and ensuring that we have done better for the community, better for the people that shop here. That's our No. 1 goal," he said.

### Ann Arbor Main Street store up next

The chain's next major project is a renovation of its store on Main Street in Ann Arbor, which will include more square footage, reconfiguring aisles, expanding and upgrading the deli area and adding a Starbucks.

With the store's recent alcohol license approval, plans include creating seating areas where customers can enjoy beer and wine during special functions.

All renovations prioritize safety, compliance, cleanliness and sanitation, along with facility appearance and ease of shopping.

Projects often include replacing older equipment with newer, more efficient models. The Novi renovation, for instance, featured all new deli equipment, Preston said.

### Balancing comfort, efficiency

Busch's also considers sustainability and efficiency improvements, particularly in refrigeration systems. The chain has moved toward refrigerated cases with doors in most stores to reduce cold air exposure and improve temperature comfort for shoppers.

Store design follows a deliberate philosophy focused on the complete customer experience, from the parking lot to checkout.

"Right when you walk into our building, what do you feel? What do you see? What do you smell? We design our buildings to flow very naturally, and as you go around the store, you hit all of the aisles. You don't miss anything," Preston said.

The open-concept layout guides shoppers through produce first, then deli and meats, followed by bakery items, grocery aisles and finally dairy. Strategic placement of high-demand items, proper lighting and clear signage all contribute to an easier shopping experience.

"As we get older and we can't see as well, we want to make sure that you can see and everything's tagged properly," Preston said.



Recent updates have included modernizing checkout lanes. Busch's recently transitioned self-checkout stations to accept only credit cards while maintaining cash payment options at staffed lanes.

The change, which some feared might frustrate older customers, received positive response and reduced wait times.

"The feedback was very positive on that. Gets people in and out a little bit faster," Preston said.

### Eyes on expansion

Beyond renovations, Busch's continues exploring expansion opportunities. The facilities team regularly receives emails from customers requesting stores in their communities, particularly in areas west of the chain's current footprint.

"We get that almost every other week," Preston said. "We are always looking at new areas."

Preston, who joined Busch's after spending 24 years at Eastern Michigan University and a stint at Hyundai Motor Group, said he found the right fit with the family-owned grocer.

"I am so happy to be here. You want to work with people that you can consider family ... and that's a huge part of why Busch's is successful – the people that work here," he said.

Preston credited the company's foundation and values, established by its founder and continued under current leadership.

"Busch's is a great company," he said. "I feel at home. I feel like this is a place I should be. We do it right when it comes to everything about grocery shopping. That's because of our founder [Joe Busch], and currently, John Busch [chairman of the board of directors]. I appreciate what he's done. Every day I come to work, I appreciate it."



# 'We believe learning never stops' – training program rooted in passion

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

As Busch's Fresh Food Market celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, few people understand the milestone's meaning better than Cristy Hess, director of human resources. After all, she's lived it.

"It is my family's business," said Hess. "My grandfather's the one who started it."

She is the daughter of John Busch, chairman of the board of directors. Hess said she and her siblings grew up in the store.

"Actually, one of our first stores we opened has a picture of me at 6 months old, while they're stocking the shelves and getting it ready, and I'm just sitting in a baby cart with a box of cereal in my hand, gnawing on the box while they stocked."



Cristy Hess



Cristy Hess as baby in store

That early introduction set the stage for what would become a 30-year career with the company, not counting her high school years working in the stores. After earning a teaching degree and briefly considering other paths, Hess returned to the family business.

"I was not planning on doing this. I was so determined ... [now] I couldn't imagine doing anything else," she said.

As Busch's celebrates its 50th anniversary, Hess is helping shape the future of the company through innovative training programs that focus on continuous learning and community connection.

## More than selling cereal

What sets Busch's apart from competitors, Hess said, is the emphasis on educating employees beyond basic job tasks.

"Anyone can sell a box of Rice Krispies cereal," she said. "But it's how do you sell the other items? How do you sell Busch's signature items or the local things we carry?"

"We really have to educate on more than just the task of doing your job. It's why do you do your job? What is it that you're selling? Why are you selling it?"

The company created a separate learning and development department just one year ago, led by Hess and moving beyond paper-based training that had been handled primarily through human resources.

"We were kind of really behind the times," Hess said. "When I look at where we were, it's amazing the strides we've made."

Busch's University is a completely online program that assigns a learning plan to each new associate. The platform also delivers monthly lessons on topics ranging from guest service to dry-aged meat to stress management during the busy holiday season.

"At the core, we believe learning never stops ... we're just committed to continually growing and giving our associates that empowerment through an ongoing education," Hess said.

## Building connections

Hess also launched a mentorship program that has become one of her proudest achievements. The program started with four or five participants and grew to 17 in its second year, with four more already signed up for the next six-month session.

The program pairs associates eager to grow with experienced mentors who meet with them monthly to support and guide them but also to set short-term goals.

"These sessions can be anything from doing deep dives into financials, or they'll go visit competitors," Hess said. "Or, 'Here's some ideas you can take back to your own team.'"

"It's really creating this meaningful, hands-on learning experience but also making sure the mentee takes ownership in their own development."

The response from mentors has been equally enthusiastic. Hess said she carefully selects mentors she considers "the cream of the crop" and matches them with mentees based on specific needs and goals.

"Everyone seems to really be excited they get to be part of it," she said.

## From farm to store

The company's commitment to local products extends to employee education through field trips that bring the supply chain to life. Hess recently organized a bus trip for produce managers to visit Applewood Orchards, a local apple supplier located just 30 minutes away in Deerfield.

"They got to not only see where the apples were grown, but the owner actually got to come out and walk us through his orchard, tell us the whole process," she said. "They got to see the process and the care that goes into the apples, from the time they're planted all the way to when they go through their processing plant and are washed and tagged and bagged for us."

"We got to pick apples right off the tree and taste them, and now they get to go back and talk to their associates about what they got to see."

A similar trip took meat managers to Miller Amish Poultry to observe the process from two-week-old chicks to packaged chicken arriving at stores.

"It was just a really great way for them to learn and see what we do, and to take great pride in what we offer and be able to tell that story to our guests," Hess said.

This part of associate education and development helps strengthen ties to local communities.

"We encourage our stores to support the communities that we serve as much as we can and to just be involved," she said.

"It's making sure our associates know we couldn't be here without them, and we couldn't be here without the community. It's making sure we're part of the football games and the schools and donating water and things like that. It's a huge part for us."

## Culture of recognition

While Busch's University is taking education and development to new levels, showing appreciation for associates is nothing new.

At the company's recent annual service awards dinner, more than 100 team members celebrated milestone anniversaries, including 25 with 20 or more years of service and one celebrating 40 years.

"Those are the people that I'm making sure are still feeling valued, still feeling that they can continue with education and feel better in their jobs," Hess said.

As Busch's marks its 50th anniversary, Hess reflects on her grandfather's perseverance through early failures to build a lasting company.

"My grandfather, he started the company a couple times, and he failed a couple of times. But he got up and he kept moving and he kept pushing it forward," she said. "I have a 15-year-old son, and I always remind him that it isn't ever going to be easy."

The family legacy continues with Hess, her brother and sister all involved in the business – and a fourth generation waiting in the wings.

"My son tells me I'm a placeholder until he's ready, so definitely it's going to continue to be a family business," she said. "And I think that's the best part."

For Hess, success comes down to a simple philosophy: take care of associates, and they'll take care of customers.

"I think of our associates as my guests," she said. "They're the heart and soul of the company. We as owners can make any decisions we want, but they're the ones who represent us [to guests]. They truly are what make us who we are. We wouldn't be anywhere without them."







# Busch's Bakehouse – 50 years of fresh-baked tradition

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

Busch's Fresh Food Market's commitment to freshness is evident in the Busch's Bakehouse, a dedicated production facility operating nearly 24/7 to supply all 16 in-store bakeries with handcrafted baked goods.

"The Busch's Bakehouse creates a wide variety of baked goods that are truly unique to our stores – many of which are made completely from scratch and can't be found anywhere else," said Jessica Benn, Bakehouse manager.

The Bakehouse's origins trace back to an acquired store with excess bakery capacity in Tecumseh, Michigan. Busch's Fresh Food Market Chairman John Busch explained that when two other stores proved too small to house bakeries, centralizing production became "a smart solution."

"As Busch's continued to grow, it became clear that investing in automated equipment for a central production facility would be far more efficient than replicating the traditional, labor-intensive in-store bakery model at each location," Busch said.

"This approach allowed us to deliver higher quality and more consistent baked goods across all stores."

The shift also enabled the company to develop its trucking and distribution system. This not only streamlined bakery deliveries but also enabled the transport of other products between stores, "helping lay the foundation for the logistics network we rely on today," Busch said.

When Benn started in 2010, the Bakehouse was "small – almost an afterthought" compared to the commissary operation that shared the facility. As food safety regulations evolved, the company partnered with third parties for salad production and home meal replacement products, allowing the Bakehouse to expand.

"Over the past decade, the Bakehouse has grown from a small corner of our commissary into a major production hub, now supplying our 16 store bakeries," Benn said.

## Made from scratch, delivered daily

Today's production numbers tell the story of that growth: more than 11,000 units of artisan breads and rolls weekly, about 1,800 packages of muffins, 1,400 loaves of sweet bread and 4,100 packages of cookies shipped to stores each week.

"The [artisan] bread line alone runs 70-80 labor hours each day to meet demand," Benn said. "We don't use preservatives to extend shelf life like many commercial bakeries do – and honestly, our breads never last long enough to need them."



The artisan bread program exemplifies the Bakehouse philosophy. Each day, bakers mix dough using only King Arthur flour. Brownies are crafted from scratch with real butter – "never oil – for a rich, indulgent taste," Benn said.

Brioche dough, made in-house with butter and eggs, forms the base for five varieties of coffee cakes. The facility also produces its own 12-count and six-count cookies "made from a special Busch's-only recipe."

Busch's Bakehouse also makes its cakes completely in-house, "ensuring a level of freshness, quality and personalization" that Benn says sets it apart.

"Perhaps most impressive are our cake decorators, whose skill and creativity make almost any design possible," said Benn, recalling creations ranging from simple elegance to a dragon sleeping on a castle for a little boy's birthday.

The Bakehouse operates on a daily delivery schedule, ensuring every store receives freshly baked products each morning.

"This daily rhythm – mixing, baking, packaging and delivering seven days a week – allows us to provide consistently fresh, high-quality products that live up to the Busch's name," she said. "It's a cornerstone of our Busch's Fresh Initiative and one of the biggest ways we differentiate ourselves."

## Signature items, seasonal traditions

While staple items remain popular throughout the year, the Bakehouse also has signature items that have become seasonal favorites.

Irish soda bread has become a customer tradition. When Benn started, she mixed and formed about 400 loaves daily leading up to St. Patrick's Day. This year, the Bakehouse produced more than 6,500 loaves, plus 3,100 packages of soda bread scones.

"It's a simple recipe – made with butter and heavy cream – but it hits the palate just right, and no one seems to ever get enough of it," she said.

The Christmas cookie collection represents another popular tradition, particularly Springerle cookies [traditional German anise-flavored cookies with intricate, embossed designs] made in small batches using traditional European methods. Each cookie is rolled by hand, pressed with Springerle molds and cut individually.

"Alongside our Springerle, our Old World Butter Cookies (made with real butter) and Shortbread Christmas Cookies (made from scratch) have graced holiday tables for decades," Benn said. "They may feel a bit old-fashioned – but that's exactly the point. After all, the holidays are about traditions, and we're proud to help keep those alive for our guests year after year."



## Balancing innovation, tradition

The Bakehouse team continuously works to honor traditional recipes while meeting evolving tastes and trends.

"Some of our recipes have stood the test of time – they're tried and true classics that our guests love just the way they are, and we wouldn't dream of changing them," Benn said.

When inspiration strikes for new products, the team often turns to archived recipes "looking for something that can be adapted or reimaged to meet modern tastes. It's a great way to honor our history while still keeping our offerings fresh and relevant," she said.

While machinery has become essential for consistency and efficiency, some items still require the human touch.

"Some things simply can't be replicated by automation – like our hand-formed scones and Irish soda bread," Benn said. "Those items rely on the skill and care of our team, and that human touch is part of what makes them special."

## Looking ahead

VP of Sales and Merchandising Brad Busch, a third-generation grocer who oversees the Bakehouse among other operations, sees continued growth ahead.

"Our Bakehouse has experienced tremendous growth over the years – and that momentum shows no signs of slowing down," he said. "With the facility now operating almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we're actively exploring opportunities to expand the space and increase production capacity to meet growing demand."

Busch, who started with the company at age 15 as a service clerk and worked his way through various roles before assuming his current position, emphasized the Bakehouse's importance to the company's identity.

"The Bakehouse has become an essential part of Busch's success story, and we're committed to ensuring it continues to thrive as we look to the future," he said.





# Commitment to local farms brings fresh flavors, boosts MI economy

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

When Dave Holloway joined Busch's Fresh Food Market seven years ago, he brought with him a passion for produce and a clear vision – connect local Michigan farmers directly with customers seeking the freshest, most flavorful products.

As director of produce for the family-owned grocery chain, Holloway has expanded partnerships with Michigan growers, from organic blueberry farms in South Haven to microgreens producers just minutes from store locations.

"Produce eats best in season," Holloway said. "The majority of my blueberries that I purchase, for example, I buy when we're in the Michigan season."

That commitment to local sourcing extends beyond standard offerings to what Busch's calls its "hyper local" program, featuring farms within miles of select stores. The initiative now operates in 10 of Busch's 16 locations, showcasing products from small-scale growers like Jacob's Fresh Farm and Garden Fort Farms in Dexter and Green Things Farm Collective in Ann Arbor.

"We have some stores that are within 10 minutes of the farm," Holloway said.

The relationships extend beyond transactions. Holloway conducts regular farm tours, often bringing produce managers along to meet the growers whose products will stock their shelves.

"It's really nice to help connect the produce managers to the farmers," he said. "It began to help build that relationship. They put a name to the face."

Once Busch's commits to a farm partner, the company follows through. When the chain selected Better Way Farms as its source for organic blueberries, those became the only organic blueberries carried in stores.



Dave Holloway





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**DEXTER, MI**









**GREEN THINGS FARM COLLECTIVE**  
A practitioner of small-scale, regenerative farming that provides an array of organic produce such as beets, celery, cilantro, green leaf lettuce, fennel, and rainbow kale.

**ANN ARBOR, MI**



"Once we commit, we stick with the farm that we commit to, and that's really helped grow our partnerships over the years," Holloway said.

The impact reaches both ways. Garden Fort Farms saw its business grow by 50 percent after Busch's came on as a customer for microgreens and leafy greens.

"Not only are we delivering fresh, locally grown product, but we're also helping support the local economy and those local farmers as well," Holloway said.

Busch's also works with Richard Lucido & Sons Produce, a Detroit Produce Terminal company that has supplied the chain for about 40 years.

Mike Lucido's family has worked the terminal for a century, beginning its relationship with Busch's founder Joe Busch.

"We rely heavily on Mike," Holloway said. "I try to visit the terminal around once a month or so, and I walk the terminal with him, and we look at produce together. It's nice to see his process."

Seasonal Michigan products drive major celebrations throughout the year. The company's two-week Cherry Fest centers on Michigan cherries from Third Coast Fruits/Wunsch Farms in Traverse City. Michigan corn, asparagus and organic blueberries also draw customer enthusiasm.

"The whole store just screams Michigan cherries," Holloway said of Cherry Fest. "We celebrate Michigan cherries with obviously fresh local Michigan cherries being the highlight and focal point of that event."

Busch's recently launched a new partnership with Applewood Orchards in Deerfield for EcoCertified apples, making the chain the only Michigan retailer currently carrying the sustainably grown designation.

Local profile signs accompany produce displays throughout stores, telling the story of farm partners in a photo and a few sentences. Social media efforts feature farm visits and grower spotlights.

"I think our guests appreciate it," Holloway said. "Busch's is known for supporting local. We have thousands of local products on our shelves. I think guests really appreciate not only supporting Busch's because we're a locally owned, family-owned company, but they like that we, in turn, support local farms."

That local focus serves as a key differentiator in a competitive market. Some products, like Michigan cherries, aren't available at larger retailers because crop volumes can't support their scale.

"The idea behind hyper local is not just simply to support local farmers but be a differentiator within the marketplace," Holloway said.

For Holloway, who spent 15 years with Kroger before joining Busch's, produce remains the most fun but also the most crucial department in any grocery store.

"You can have the most in-stock center store department, but if you're not right in produce, your guests are going to shop somewhere else," he said. "The first impression sets the tone for the shopping experience."







# Strategic sourcing, full-service model key to standards

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

At Busch's Fresh Food Market, the philosophy is simple: never sacrifice quality for price.

That commitment distinguishes the 16-store Michigan chain in an industry where many competitors adjust product specifications to hit promotional price points, according to John Taormina, the company's meat and seafood director.

"Busch's will never sacrifice quality for price," Taormina said. "Whether the item is on sale or not, it's going to be the same item, same high quality."



John Taormina

Taormina, a third-generation grocer with 50 years of industry experience, joined Busch's nearly 15 years ago. His approach to procurement and vendor relationships helps maintain quality and consistency across all locations.

## Procurement, vendor partnerships

Managing perishable inventory for 16 stores requires advance planning and strong vendor partnerships.

"I think 'partnership' is such an important word these days in business, and I think it's essential, knowing that you can reach out to a vendor at any time for support. And the vendor knows they can do the same," Taormina said.

Knowing and understanding movement of product also is important, he added.

"When you're a 16-store chain, it's not like buying four or five cases, you're buying hundreds, potentially thousands, and you don't do that just week to week."

Taormina secures Thanksgiving turkeys in January and relies on historical sales data rather than automated ordering systems used by larger competitors.

"You have to secure that product weeks, sometimes months in advance," he said. "... Basically, you have to have a crystal ball."

Strong vendor partnerships enable flexibility when sales exceed projections or suppliers have excess inventory. The

company relies on reporting processes and historical data to forecast demand, tracking factors like weather events and power outages that affect sales patterns.

Taormina said customer input and feedback is important, especially for new items, which often are launched with promotional pricing.

The company evaluates new products through category reviews, giving items 30 to 90 days to prove themselves with customers before authorizing them chain-wide or discontinuing them.

If the new item isn't selling well, "we will deauthorize it and move on to the next item, because our space is limited and it's very valuable. We want to have on our shelves or in our coolers products that our guests favor and come to Busch's specifically for," he said.

The meat department offers several value-added items, such as kebabs, meatballs and Busch's fresh sausage. Taormina said the value-added items do very well and are "important signature items that create that repeat business."

For beef, Busch's sources 95 percent of its products from Creekstone Farms, a meat packer that primarily supplies fine dining establishments. The premium sourcing strategy differentiates Busch's from competitors.

"Our beef program is very successful. We carry a very high-end beef product," Taormina said.

Despite carrying premium products like Wagyu beef, Busch's maintains everyday pricing competitive with big-box stores through strategic procurement and market timing. Taormina conducts daily and weekly competitive price checks.

"Outside of sale items, we're toe to toe with them on retail pricing," he said. "It's just the art of buying and negotiating for the best cost to be able to provide the best prices for our guests."

## Reviving operations

While big-box retailers abandon full-service meat counters due to staffing challenges, Busch's recently reversed course, switching from self-service back to full-service operations.

"We're kind of a dinosaur in that model," Taormina said. "But we actually have just re-implemented that and switched from self-service to full service so that we could better service our guests."

The model requires skilled meat cutters at each location to handle custom orders. To address the industrywide meat cutter shortage, Busch's developed an apprenticeship program in 2024 to train employees.

"We can take individuals who appreciate being part of the Busch's team and would like to further their career with us. There's an opportunity for them to learn the trade," Taormina said.

The company has just finished developing the program and completed the initial testing. "We're hoping in 2026 that we can be more aggressive with that and start creating our own talent within our buildings," Taormina said.

## Balancing value, quality

As grocery prices fluctuate nationwide, Busch's aims to maintain its hallmark quality while offering fair prices. "Value is a perception," Taormina said. "Busch's guests come to Busch's not because we're the cheapest in town, but they're going to get more for their money, and they know that."

Strategic buying helps keep costs down without sacrificing standards. "We have to make really sound decisions in the procurement arena and do our best to buy at the right price," he said. "It's about choosing the right assortment for the right demographic."

He explained that each of Busch's 16 stores is tailored to its community. "For example, we do a very nice job with our dry-aged beef, but it's currently only in five of our 16 stores, and that's primarily because of the demographics," he said.

Busch's also factors in psychographics.

"Psychographics is knowing more about who the guest is," he explained. "Demographics is more about where the guest lives. Psychographics is about understanding the people."

For Taormina, that understanding – of people, product and partnership – is what keeps Busch's thriving after 50 years. "It's a little tricky," he said, "but it keeps it fun."

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## Partners who go above and beyond

The relationship with D&B Wholesale, based in Westland, Michigan, exemplifies partnerships built on shared values and mutual support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when supply chains collapsed and toilet paper became nearly impossible to find, Busch reached out to Mike Hesano at D&B for help.

"Without hesitation, he found a way to support us," Busch said. "Trucking capacity was extremely limited at the time, so instead of waiting for a shipment, Mike personally loaded my F-150 multiple times to make sure we had product available for our guests."

That action left a lasting impression.

"That kind of dedication – the willingness to step up in a moment of need and put people first – perfectly captures the spirit of what we value most in our partnerships," Busch said. "It's not just about doing business together; it's about supporting each other and our community when it matters most."

## Local success stories

The partnership with Safie's Pickles in Chesterfield demonstrates Busch's commitment to nurturing Michigan-based producers from the ground up.

"This collaboration is especially meaningful because of how it began," Busch said. "Years ago, Mary Safie personally delivered her pickles to our stores – right out of the trunk of her car."

Today, Safie's products are found in major retailers nationwide, including big-box and club stores.

"Yet despite that growth, Mary continues to treat Busch's as if we're her best customer – and we treat her like the dear friend she's become," Busch said. "It's relationships like these

that embody what it means to be a local company with local roots – celebrating Michigan producers, supporting their success and growing together along the way."

## Bringing partnerships to life

Busch's works to ensure customers understand and appreciate these local connections through in-store merchandising, storytelling and special events.

During the company's 50th anniversary celebration at its Main Street Ann Arbor location, Busch's organized what he called "the largest local tasting event in our company history," featuring 28 Michigan-based partners.

"Each tasting station was staffed by representatives from the local companies themselves – many of them the creators and founders of the products our guests enjoy every day," Busch said. "This gave guests a rare opportunity not only to taste exceptional local products but also to meet the people behind them and hear their stories firsthand."

The event also fostered collaboration among vendors themselves.

Busch said they spent time networking and building connections that "will strengthen our local food ecosystem for years to come."

Busch credited Alan Hartline of Kingma's Market in Grand Rapids with inspiring the event, calling it "a true celebration of what makes Busch's special – deep community connections, shared success and authentic local partnerships."

## Evolution through challenge

Vendor relationships have evolved significantly in recent years, shaped by supply chain disruptions and changing consumer expectations.

"When challenges arise, such as the global supply shortages we've experienced in recent years, we've learned to work even more closely with our distribution partners," Busch said. "Together, we assess potential gaps, the duration of impact and alternative options



## 'Local community supermarket' known for supporting many causes

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

For Douglas Busch, corporate director of community development and one of the owners of Busch's Fresh Food Market, giving back to the community isn't just good business – it's a family tradition that started when he first began working in the stores at age 12.

"We see ourselves as the local community supermarket," Busch said. "We came from small-town America, and we care about the communities we serve."

That commitment has translated into substantial support for local communities from the 16-store chain. Since 2009, when Busch began tracking donations, the company has raised more than \$8.6 million in cash and food donations through various programs.

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the company holds two major food drives annually. The Season of Sharing runs for two weeks before Thanksgiving. The second drive,



Douglas Busch

"All aBout Children" – abbreviated ABC – helps food-insecure children during summer months when school meal programs aren't available.

The ABC program began around 2015 after a conversation with a food bank board member opened Busch's eyes to a problem he hadn't considered.

"He says, 'Well, you can you imagine kids in the summer who don't look forward to summer break?'" Busch recalled. "Kids who don't have food, or are food insecure, they don't look forward to it because they lose out on the school breakfast and lunch program.' I said we should probably come up with something."

The company also conducts two milk drives annually in partnership with Michigan dairy farmers, donating 825,983 gallons of milk and \$284,468 in cash for the program.

Beyond these major initiatives, Busch's participates in about 750 local events each year, involving PTOs, PTAs, sports teams, school and church organizations and other non-profits. The company donates water and hot dogs to sell as concessions at high school football games in rural communities, which also serve as social gatherings.

"The whole community pretty much goes to the game,"

Busch said. "So I thought that was a good way to get our name out there."

The company also partners with food banks like Forgotten Harvest and Food Gatherers for rescue programs, donating food that's still safe to eat but can no longer be sold.

One project stands out as particularly meaningful for Busch. About 10 years ago, he helped establish a mini-store within a food bank facility in Farmington Hills, operated by CARES. A friend of Busch's served on the board of directors.

"I got the shelving for him. I put the shelving up myself. Stocked the shelves, tagged the shelves for him," Busch said. "That's probably the most time-consuming thing I've ever done, but also it was the most rewarding."

The facility allows clients to shop with dignity, using SNAP and WIC benefits in the store section while also accessing free items from the food pantry area.

In addition to the large donations and food drives the company sponsors, individual stores also give back to their communities. Busch said each store can select events or organizations to assist each year, along with giving local donations – under \$200 – to community nonprofits asking for food or cash donations. They do not donate to political organizations.

Busch, who worked 40 hours a week during high school to pay his own way through college, has held his title for about 10 years but has been organizing food drives and community initiatives for much longer.

"We only sponsor events that are in the communities in which we serve," Busch said. "We're not as big as a Kroger or Walmart, but we think we can do a much better job on connecting with the community, since they know who we are, and we're a family business."

For vendors and community members who want to help but feel their contribution might be too small, Busch has simple advice.

"If you can give a little, it means a lot," he said. "A couple of cases is great. Or if a person says, 'I don't have money.' I say, 'That's fine, too. How about volunteering?' ... People who don't have the means, they may have the time."



to ensure that our guests continue to have access to the products they need."

But the relationships have deepened beyond crisis management.

"Our distribution partners today do far more than simply deliver products – they've become strategic allies," he said. "They help us identify assortment opportunities, develop programs and create merchandising solutions that strengthen our business and enhance the guest experience."

This collaborative approach shapes what customers see in stores.

"We view our vendors as extensions of our own team," Busch said. "They bring valuable insights, resources and perspectives that often reach beyond our immediate operations. This external viewpoint helps us stay ahead of trends and identify opportunities we might not see from within our own four walls."

The result is an assortment that stands apart.

"These partnerships ensure that what our guests see on the shelves isn't just another grocery assortment – it's a reflection of collaborative effort, shared innovation and a deep commitment to quality and community," he said.

### Looking to future

As Busch's enters its next chapter, the company faces opportunities and transitions in its vendor relationships.

Main wholesaler SpartanNash recently finalized its sale to C&S Wholesale, presenting "new possibilities for collaboration, supply chain innovation and expanded product offerings," Busch said. "I'm looking forward to partnering with C&S Wholesale as we continue to grow and take advantage of the new opportunities their organization may bring."

But the foundation remains unchanged.

"At the same time, we'll remain steadfast in strengthening our local partnerships – the foundation of what makes Busch's unique," he said. "Balancing these larger-scale relationships with our commitment to local producers will ensure that Busch's continues to deliver exceptional quality, variety and freshness to our guests in the years ahead."

As the company celebrates 50 years, Busch – who now works alongside sisters Cristy Hess and Gigi Busch, with his son, Elliott, joining as the fourth generation – expressed gratitude for the partnerships that have shaped the company's success.

"To our partners and vendors, thank you for walking alongside us on this journey. Your collaboration and shared values continue to shape our success," he said. "Together, we've built something truly special – and I couldn't be more excited for what the next 50 years will bring."

