



How to Buy American

“We vote every single day with our dollars.”

Roger Simmermaker: *How Americans Can Buy American*

Every time we spend money, we affect the economy and the lives of the people around us. If you live in a small town and you choose to buy a toy at a small toy store owned by a local, you have an impact on that person and the economy of your town. If, on the other hand, you buy a toy at a big-box chain store, chances are that your money will go out of your neighborhood—possibly as far as Europe or Asia. If you want to keep that small-town feeling, you might make the choice to *always* shop at the small local toy store, even if the toys are more expensive. Similarly, to support the American economy, you might choose always (or at least as often as possible) to “buy American.”

This booklet discusses the advantages (and a few disadvantages) of buying American, what it means for an item to be considered made in America (e.g., what if a French company sells an item that was assembled in the U.S. out of parts made in China in a Norwegian-owned store in New York?), and how to find out if a particular item is American-made. It also includes an extensive webliography.

Please keep in mind that this booklet offers guidelines rather than hard-and-fast rules and information. In our global economy, it can be difficult even to define “buying American.” A company that is American-owned today might be European-owned tomorrow, or vice versa. A particular manufacturer might make most of its items in China but certain ones in Alabama. In some cases, different sizes of the same item may be made in different locations. This booklet offers ideas on how to get through this confusion to a relatively simple way of buying American.

Why Buy American?

There are many advantages to buying American:

- Keeping your money circulating in the American economy—and possibly in your own neighborhood.
- Supporting American companies that pay taxes in the United States.
- Keeping jobs in the U.S.
- Motivating companies to bring jobs back to the U.S.
- Enjoying higher quality—and often safer—items.

Also:

- U.S. manufacturing often produces less pollution than does manufacturing in other countries.
- Transportation from an American factory to your local store has a much smaller carbon footprint than transportation from Europe or Asia.
- U.S. labor standards are much higher than those in many other countries.

There are two main disadvantages:

- Less choice
- Some items may cost more

Of course, in individual cases, a non-American item might be of higher quality than an American item, and it is certainly possible that an American item might cost less than a non-American one.

What Does It Mean to Buy American?

Roger Simmermaker, in his thought-provoking book *How Americans Can Buy American* lists four “purchasing choices”:

- Made in the U.S. by an American-owned company
- Made outside the U.S. by an American-owned company
- Made in the U.S. by a non-American-owned company
- Made outside the U.S. by a non-American-owned company

The first is clearly the surest way to buy American. Simmermaker considers the second option to be better than the third, since American-owned companies pay more U.S. taxes than non-American-owned companies, but you might consider “made in the U.S.” to be more important. Of course, something “made in the U.S.” may be assembled from parts made outside the U.S. and vice versa.

But you don’t want to devote your entire life to figuring out whether something is American-made! Luckily, there is an easier way to find out if an item is (at least mostly) made in the U.S.

How Can I Tell if a Particular Item Is American?

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has established a “Made in the USA Standard.” Note that companies don’t have to be pre-approved by the FTC and that label and advertising truthfulness are checked only if there is suspicion of wrongdoing. (For more information on the standard, go to the FTC website at www.ftc.gov.)

- For this standard, *USA* refers to the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.S. territories and possessions (including Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, United States Virgin Islands, and American Samoa)
- With the exception of cars and textile, wool, and fur products, companies are not required to display or advertise the amount of U.S. content. However, if a company does label or advertise the amount of U.S. content, it must do so accurately.
- In order to be labeled “Made in USA,” “American-Made,” or any similar label, the item must meet the “all or virtually all” of the criteria for the standard; this means that all significant parts and processing must be of U.S. origin.
- A company cannot advertise “Our products are made in the USA” unless all or virtually all of the products are indeed made in the USA.
- It is possible for an item to have a qualified “Made in USA” claim. For example, “60% U.S. content,” “Made in USA of U.S. and imported parts,” or “Assembled in USA from Italian and Mexican parts.”
- The Made in the USA Standard specifies that labels and advertising must not use numbers deceptively. For example, it would be deceptive to advertise that a product has “twice as much U.S. content as before” when the U.S. content has been increased from only 2% to a still-negligible 4%.

Yes, buying American can be as easy as reading labels (working on the assumption that the “Made in the USA Standard” is being followed). However, if you want to be sure you are buying from American-owned companies, more research may be necessary. This research can be as simple as calling a company’s toll-free number or utilizing other people’s research.

There are various books and websites filled with the information you need. You can’t necessarily trust them 100%—a particular website might not be updated often enough, or the site developer may have a particular bias. But over time you will probably get a sense of which websites are helpful and reliable and share your values.

Useful Websites

- All American Clothing Co (www.allamericanclothing.com)
From the website: “All of the clothing we carry is made right here in America.”
- Best American Buy (bestamericanbuy.com)
From the website: “We will be continually expanding our product line so that Americans can confidently visit us and find the items that fill their needs while making sure that the quality of those items meets traditional American standards, and that American dollars stay with American manufacturers and workers.”
- Buy American (www.buyamerican.com)
From the website: “BuyAmerican.com makes every effort to verify that the manufacturers and products represented on this site are ‘Made in USA.’ If the country of origin is not clearly stated on the manufacturer’s site, we contact [the manufacturer] directly to ensure that we are presenting the most accurate information.”
- BuyAmericanMart.com (www.buyamericanmart.com)
From the website: “Since 1999, it has been BuyAmerican.com, Inc.’s mission to [provide] information about American-made products and American manufacturers to consumers, organizations and businesses.”
- How to Buy American (www.howtobuyamerican.com/index.php)
This website exists mainly to sell the book *How to Buy American*. The first two chapters can be downloaded for free.
- How You Can Still Buy American (articles.moneycentral.msn.com/SavingandDebt)
This is an interesting article from MSN-Money, which includes information about cars, food, and other items.
- Made in USA (www.madeinusa.com)
This site’s motto is “Recycle American Dollars Through Patriotic Spending.”
- StillMadeinUSA.com (www.stillmadeinusa.com)
From the website: “The purpose of StillMadeinUSA.com is to share with other shoppers some of the great manufacturers, retailers, and craftspeople that I have found who still produce quality products in America.”

- The American List (www.acontinuouslean.com/the-american-list)
This website includes an extensive list of “stylish and cool brands that make their goods in America.”
- U.S. Stuff (www.usstuff.com/index.htm)
Includes detailed information about various products. For example, it specifies that the 2010 Ford Focus 4 Door Sedan is built by an American-owned company, that it is assembled in the U.S., that the engine and transmission are from the U.S., and that it has, overall, 90% US/ Canadian parts.