

Made in Kentucky

Each October, the state's Cabinet for Economic Development celebrates an industry that is perhaps best described in just three words: Made in Kentucky.

It's a phrase known well by many, because few if any states have as diverse a manufacturing base as ours. According to the Cabinet, we have 4,500 factories that employ 260,000 people, or about 13 percent of our total workforce, and our customers can be found in the 49 other states and in nearly 200 countries around the world.

Our best-known manufacturing sector is the automotive industry, which got its start here well over a century ago. Back in 1913, Henry Ford's workers in Louisville were able to put together a dozen Model Ts in a day. Four years later, they were churning out 7,000 a year.

Louisville now has two assembly plants, while Georgetown is home to Toyota's largest plant outside of Japan and Bowling Green is the sole location for the iconic Corvette. Kentucky ranks among the top three states in total vehicle production, and we're first when measuring it per capita.

As big as the auto industry is here, it's a distant second when it comes to our exports. Here, aerospace dominates. In fact, this sector alone shipped nearly \$15 billion worth of products overseas last year, which was nearly half of all Kentucky exports.

Beyond making things for other countries, Kentucky also has a sizable number of factories owned by foreign-owned companies. The Cabinet for Economic Development says they employ 110,000 people and are based in more than 30 nations.

While the auto and aerospace industries are our largest manufacturers, we produce quite a few other products, many of which are made here almost exclusively.

Louisville, for example, is where Reynolds Wrap got its start; Cynthiana makes most of our Post-It Notes; Northern Kentucky is responsible for most of the playing cards we buy; Harrodsburg manufactures much of the glass we have on our smart phones; Southcentral Kentucky is the where the houseboat industry first set sail; Lexington has the world's largest peanut butter manufacturing facility; and until recently, Hopkinsville made most of our country's bowling equipment.

We have some other unique products as well. One is a Nicholasville facility working on parachutes for flying vehicles (you read that right) while just up the road, a Lexington-based pharmaceutical company announced last week that it is investing \$19 million to expand its nasal-spray medications, including one that could prevent or at least limit the spread of COVID-19.

There are many reasons why Kentucky is a top manufacturer, but our ability to get products to their right location quickly is a major one. In the air, major hubs operated by UPS, DHL and Amazon are on track to handle 300 cargo flights a day. We have 20 interstates and parkways, almost 2,000 miles of commercially available waterways and 2,300 miles of railroad track. We're within a day's drive of two-thirds of the country's population, which in effect means no state is closer to more Americans than we are.

Although this year is unlike any other we've seen in modern times because of the pandemic, the good news is that our economy rests on a strong foundation that isn't going anywhere. That silver lining is certainly worth remembering this month as we wait for better days ahead.

Joe Graviss
56th District State Representative