

Manufacturers Have Their Say



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Steve Weil — Rockmount Ranch Wear

"Made in the USA allows us to do what we do best so our retailers can do what they do best."

Randy Watson — Justin Brands

"We insisted that the products be manufactured to our exact specifications, but we found little modifications designed to boost productivity that altered the product just enough so our customers noticed."

Dal Scott — Professional's Choice Sports Medicine

Equine product manufacturers who still make their products in the United States believe their commitment is good for the industry and good for the country. However, the success of a number of companies that produce Western sector products overseas suggests there is room for both.

"We hear from people often who consider it at best hilarious and at worst ludicrous that Western wear comes from China, which is the planet's worst violator of values held near and dear by those who live the Western lifestyle," said Steve Weil of Rockmount Ranch Wear Mfg. Co. in Denver. "Rockmount decided years ago that if we only offer pricing, we would gradually bleed to death. Our strategy is to offer quality, cashe and service that is not possible from cheap imports."

Another of the industry's most vociferous proponents of American-made products is Frank Pagano of Pagano West in Southern California. Pagano says he has watched companies all around the industry go offshore, but for him, the sacrifices are too great.

"Time is the key," Pagano said. "When you go offshore, you lose control of the time it takes to get things produced and brought to market."

For his customers, how fast is more important than how much it costs.

Randy Watson, head of Justin Brands, has similar beliefs. The company makes its boots in three American factories.

"Made in the USA allows us to do what we do best so our retailers can do what they do best," Watson said. "...We can respond to the market, our retailers and the unique individual needs of customers quickly and effectively."

Products manufactured in the United States are the source of innovation, which keeps the industry growing and moving forward, according to Stan Headrick, president of Fabtron Saddlery & Tack in Tennessee.

"The American manufacturer is the one who introduces products to the market that fit the trends of the equine markets," Headrick said. "If it were not for American manufacturers and their knowledge of the market, we would likely see very few innovations, just a lot of the same products over and over."

Although he says he understands why some companies choose offshore manufacturing, Headrick said his company has no plans to follow suit.

"We still believe in America and American products," he said. "If everyone were to give up manufacturing in America and imported all products, we would all become marketers. That would not be good for the equine industry."

Suzanne Drnec, owner of Hobby Horse Clothing Co., takes a different approach. Apparel has a long history of being made overseas. She says her labor costs on a product imported from China are 90% lower than anything she could have made in her home state of California.

"Sure there's huge offsets to that labor in terms of delivery, control and hassle factor, but the savings are still remarkable," Drnec said.

She said about 95% of her line is produced in the United States, but the material is predominantly purchased overseas. She believes that government regulation has hurt American manufacturing.