

Food Processing

Alabama has a dynamic food-processing industry, highlighted by its No. 3 national ranking in the broiler chicken category for livestock and a No. 14 ranking for egg-laying chickens. The state even ranks No. 3 in quail as a livestock, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In-state, poultry ranks first for agricultural commodities (excluding forestry) with 67 percent of cash receipts.

Catfish sales were second nationally in a recent survey. The annual Alabama Catfish Festival in Greensboro underscores the importance of the industry.

Keystone Foods

The nation's third largest multi-protein supplier has its U.S. Proteins Group headquartered in Huntsville. Keystone Proteins has 10 processing plants, two of which are in Alabama, and four distribution centers. Known for its innovation, Keystone developed a mass production and freezing process for hamburgers known as cryogenics, pioneered the concept of "total distribution" and created the chicken nugget, an industry first.

The Eufaula operation is a fully integrated broiler chicken complex and includes a hatchery, feed mill, grow-out houses, live-haul operation and a further processing plant. The 122,900-square-foot fresh facility processes about 1 million head of live poultry each week and is staffed by about 1,077 employees. The fresh chicken parts and boneless meat products from this plant are sold domestically to the foodservice industry in the United States and abroad. The 81,700-square-foot further processing plant employs 213 and produces 63 million pounds of finished chicken fillets and patties annually.

The 96-acre Gadsden complex includes a 200,000-square-foot processing plant, a 6,000-square-foot waste water facility, and a 71,000-square-foot cold storage building. The 500 employees assist in the production of cooked chicken products for large national and industrial foodservice customers.

The Gadsden facility was awarded 2010 Plant of the Year by Food Engineering magazine, the 2010 Excellence in Construction Award from Associated Builders and Contractors, and the 2009 Award of Merit by the American Meat Institute.

Wayne Foods

The nation's sixth largest chicken processor has a strong presence in Alabama with more than 4,000 employed throughout the state, according to the company's web site. Wayne Foods, based in Oakwood, Ga., has deboning plants in Albertville, Decatur, Enterprise and Union Springs; and a further processing plant (producing marinated, breaded, cooked and individually frozen products) in Decatur.

Barber Dairies (Dean Foods)

Founded in 1934, Barber's is one of Alabama's venerable brands, selling milk, buttermilk, cottage cheese, dips and sour cream through seven distribution facilities throughout the state, according to the company web site. Production facilities are in Birmingham. In 1998, Barber was sold to Dallas-based Dean Foods, one of the nation's largest dairy products companies.

R.L. Zeigler

Legendary Alabama football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant was at one time co-owner of what is now the state's largest seller of hot dogs, bologna and luncheon meats. Today, Zeigler, with more than 300 employees, is the largest privately-owned meat packer in the Southeast, according to the company web site.



Pilgrim's Pride

The second-largest chicken producer in the world is well-represented in Alabama presence with processing plants in Athens, Enterprise, Guntersville and Russellville, according to the company's web site. Pilgrim's operates a prepared food processing plant in Boaz; feed mills in Enterprise, Guntersville and Tuscumbia; hatcheries in Albertville, Crossville, Cullman, Enterprise, Fort Payne Moulton, Ranburne and Russellville. Pilgrim's Pride employs approximately 41,000 people and has capacity to process more than 38 million birds weekly.