

# Regional appeal

Nancy Anne Volin and her pampered pet, Danny Boy.

*Did you know that not all Costco warehouses carry the same products? In fact, each offers a number of locally sourced regional items. The following pages offer a snapshot of some of the regional suppliers that Costco buyers work with in order to give every shopping experience that treasure-hunt quality members know and love.*

by Katie Coleman, Will Fifield, Christina Guerrero, Dan Jones

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he small businesses highlighted here—one for each of Costco’s eight U.S. regions—showcase the diversity of our members’ tastes and demographics across the country. What all of these regional suppliers (and Costco) have in common is the desire to support their communities and make products that appeal to our members.

—Katie Coleman

## PAMPERED PETS USA

**Location** San Diego, California

**Products** Peanut Butter Dog Treats (Item 1689294)

**Availability** San Diego region

Nancy Anne Volin, president and founder of Pampered Pets USA, baked her first batch of homemade dog treats nearly 30 years ago—a simple oatmeal-based biscuit baked with a soft, light airy texture. She says, “I have chef training, so I came up with a soft, human-grade treat that my family dog would enjoy.”

The feedback from friends and fellow pet lovers was so great that a local pet store started carrying them. In 2008, Volin reached out to Costco and asked about becoming a vendor. “They recommended that I do a [Special Events] roadshow to see how my products sell,” she explains. “The member response was fantastic, and we sold out!”

While Volin would agree that tasty treats are vital to her business, so is their environmental impact. She notes, “We source our packaging from recycled plastic bottles. Our treats are made in an American bakery that’s entirely solar-powered.”

“I love selling at Costco,” Volin says. “Members and their pets love our items, so it’s a wonderful match.”—KC

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### ALMA DE CATTLEYA WINES

**Location** Rohnert Park, California

**Products** Alma de Cattleya Pinot Noir Rose (Item 1185359)

**Availability** Bay Area region

Alma de Cattleya is a labor of love for company owner Bibiana González Rave. Having studied viticulture and oenology in Cognac, France, González Rave worked in six French regions before coming to California's wine country in 2004. "I got fascinated by Sonoma County and knew this is where I wanted to start my own label," she says.

Since producing a single barrel in 2011, González Rave's small business now sells more than 560 barrels (about 168,000 bottles) per year through three different company labels. The Alma de Cattleya label that is now sold in Costco warehouses in California's Bay Area caught the attention of Costco wine buyer Mark Kalkbrenner in 2018.

"Even though my production is small, I really think it's a testament of [Costco's] commitment to bringing extraordinary wines at a great price point," Gonzalez Rave says.—*KC*

### CHARLESTON COFFEE ROASTERS

**Location** Charleston, South Carolina

**Products** Two-pound bag of Organic Signature Blend whole-bean coffee (Item 536961)

**Availability** Southeast region

Since Lowell Grosse launched Charleston Coffee Roasters in 2005, the company has slow-roasted carefully selected beans to create what he says is a coffee experience as rich in flavor and character as the city of Charleston itself. "We are passionate about the quality and consistency of every roast so you get a perfect cup of coffee, every time," says Grosse, whose company became a Costco supplier in 2011.

Grosse learned the coffee business through a 17-year career as an importer, traveling to coffee-producing countries, meeting coffee



Clockwise from top: Bibiana González Rave at her wine facility; Cacique Queso Fresco; Dean Packingham and his kids, Mike and Jen; Lowell Grosse at a Costco opening.



COURTESY OF CHARLESTON COFFEE ROASTERS

farmers and discovering the intricacies that go into growing quality coffee beans.

His 32-employee company is committed to partnering with farmers who take care of the Earth and look after their people. "We only source beans from farmers who practice sustainable farming and pay a fair wage to their workers," Grosse says. The company is also lead sponsor for the Nutritional Care Program at the South Carolina Aquarium, located in Charleston and home to 200 sea turtles that are well cared for through local donations to its program.—*Will Fifield*



CHRIS ANDRE

PHOTO CREDIT



COURTESY OF CACIQUE FOODS

### CACIQUE FOODS

**Location** City of Industry, California

**Products** Rancho Queso Fresco (Item 1333088)

**Availability** Los Angeles, Northwest and San Diego regions

Gilbert de Cardenas had only \$1,500 in his pocket after immigrating to the U.S. from Cuba with his wife, Jennie, and children in 1971. A cheesemaker, Gilbert began producing *queso fresco*, which translates to "fresh cheese," in 1973 and Cacique Foods was born.

His children grew up learning the family business, and his son, Gil, stepped into the role of CEO when Gilbert and Jennie retired in 2011.

Cacique's Rancho Queso Fresco is a mild, buttery cheese made from cow's milk. "Because of the texture and the flavor, it is so easy to use and versatile," Gil says. "You can crumble it over salad [or] tacos. It's a great stuffing, like in enchiladas."

Next year, Cacique Foods will celebrate its 50th anniversary. "We're thrilled that we're getting to 50," Gil says. "We're thrilled to [be a supplier for Costco], and we're really thrilled about how many tables we're currently being invited to. Really, it's the soul of our business."

—*Christina Guerrero*

### MIKE & JEN'S COCOA MIX

**Location** Duluth, Minnesota

**Products** Mike & Jen's Hot Cocoa Mix 40-oz. Bag (Item 1556610)

**Availability** Select Minnesota warehouses

In 2012, while preparing hot cocoa for his daughter, Jen, Dean Packingham noticed that the ingredients list on the cocoa mix he had on hand was extensive, with many unfamiliar, complicated names. An epiphany occurred: Packingham, who was a meteorologist at the time, was determined to make "the best cocoa mix in the world," he recalls saying.



BELOW AND RIGHT: RYAN BONOS



COURTESY OF PACIFIC SEAFOOD

Clockwise from far left: Seasoning Route 11 potato chips; Frank Dulcich of Pacific Seafood; Karbach's brewery operations and this year's stocking stuffer.

With the help of his best friend, Amanda Cunningham, Packingham created a cocoa powder with just five simple ingredients: whole-milk powder, pure cane sugar, confectioner's sugar, cocoa powder and sea salt.

Packingham began selling Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix (named for his now-grown children) to the public via a food truck, then local shops. Shawney McMillan, an assistant general manager at the Duluth Costco, discovered the drink at a coffeehouse, and worked with Packingham and Cunningham to bring the cocoa to Costco in 2021. Mike & Jen's can now be found in 13 Costco warehouses in the Land of 10,000 Lakes. —Dan Jones

**ROUTE 11 POTATO CHIPS**

**Location** Mount Jackson, Virginia

**Products** Various potato chips, including Kettle Cooked Lightly Salted (Item 1453050) and a variety pack featuring Lightly Salted, Barbeque, Dill Pickle and Sour Cream & Chive (Item 1587477)

**Availability** Virginia area and select Pennsylvania and Maryland warehouses

"We make a kettle chip that has a nice crunch, but that isn't tooth-breaking hard," says Sarah Cohen, owner of Route 11. "It's got to have the right crunch." Costco buyers who sampled the chips at a small deli near Sterling, Virginia, were impressed with that crunch, and reached out to Cohen in 2010.

Route 11 potato chips are made in small batches, kettle-style and seasonally organic, with a variety of flavors.

The business began in 1992 as a two-person operation at a feed store in Middletown, Virginia. As Route 11 grew, Cohen and her business partner, Mike Connelly, invested in a new, state-of-the-art facility, in Mount Jackson, Virginia in 2008.

With just under 50 employees the company is focused on being as waste-free as possible. Potato peelings and chip rejects help feed a local herd of cattle, while the factory's white membrane roof reflects summer heat to reduce energy use. The facility is also 100% powered by renewable hydroelectricity.

The end result is great chips, made responsibly. —DJ



PHOTO CREDIT

**PACIFIC SEAFOOD**

**Location** Clackamas, Oregon

**Products** Wild Dungeness Crab Meat, 16-ounce tub (Item 30709); Fresh Wild Pacific Cold Water Shrimp, 2-pound container (Item 60056)

**Availability** Northwest region

In 1941, Frank Dulcich Sr., and his son, Dominick, opened Pacific Fish & Oyster, a fish shop and local distribution center in Portland, Oregon, which Dominic still operates today. Dominic's son Frank, became CEO in 1985 of what is now known as Pacific Seafood, and saw the opportunities on the international side and the production side.

"We started growing the business from that point in time," Frank says.

Costco began carrying Pacific Seafood products in XXXX. Their Dungeness crab, native to the West Coast, is steamed and shaken from the shell to retain the most flavor. The sweet-tasting shrimp are a perfect ingredient for salads, chowders

and shrimp cocktail, and are certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, which verifies sustainable fishing processes. —CG

**KARBACH BREWING**

**Location** Houston, Texas

**Products** Karbach Brewing Stocking Stuffer (Item 1541601)

**Availability** Texas region

Costco members in Texas can buy a fun stocking stuffer this season, but they'd better have very large stockings. The Houston-based Karbach Brewing Company's item at Costco is an 18-pack collection of craft beer—ale, IPA, lager, Irish red and a malt-based cocktail.

According to Texas regional buyer Cecil Lewis, Costco has been working with Karbach, which employs 200 locals, consistently for about six years. "We always look for local suppliers to work with and support," Lewis says.

Karbach Brewing was launched in 2011 by beer-industry veterans who wanted their brand to be welcoming to all. "We noticed that the craft beer space here in Texas was becoming a bit of a cool kids club, with its own lingo and not especially friendly to customers unfamiliar with the many beer styles and terms," says David Graham, Karbach's director of marketing. "We wanted more accessible space here, kind of a come-one, come-all kind of brewery." —WF



"It's got to have the right crunch."

— SARAH COHEN  
Owner of Route 11  
Potato Chips

