

## All About Wisconsin River Meats Summer Sausage

One of the most popular classes of sausages here at Wisconsin River Meats is our summer sausage. We offer 12 different varieties in several different sizes and shapes.

Summer sausage got its name from the fact that when made the sausage needed little or no refrigeration, thus the sausages could be kept for eating in the usually warmer summer months.

Summer Sausage was made in Europe for hundreds of years (or longer) and immigrants brought their recipes to the new world.

German immigrants were particularly proficient at making fermented sausages and in America some regional variations were developed. Summer sausage which comes from Wisconsin was most popular, although in Pennsylvania "Lebanon Bologna" is well loved. Although called a bologna it is actually much closer to a summer sausage than bologna.

Immigrants from the Glarus region of Switzerland, settling in Green County Wisconsin, brought their own variation. The "Landjaeger". It was in a smaller casing than German summer sausages and could be taken with you to the woods or field to be eaten.

Summer sausage began its journey to Wisconsin River Meats from Germany. Grandpa Louis Hamm settled on the family homestead in Marian Township in 1936. He had been brought up by German Immigrants and he soon set up the farm in that style.

In addition to raising dairy, dairy steers, hogs, poultry, garden crops and feed stuffs they processed a lot of their food including meat. Since there wasn't any electric power on the homestead beef and hogs were usually butchered in the winter. As was Grandpa Hamm's family tradition some of this meat was processed to be consumed later in the year. Grandpa Louis had built a wooden gravity flow smokehouse. Using recipes and techniques learned from his family, he smoked ham, bacon, whole hog sausage and his own summer sausage. Grandpa was well known in the neighborhood for his homemade sausage, especially his summer sausage. As the years went by, the timing and hunts worked out so that he made most of his summer sausage out of venison.

Grandpa made his sausage almost entirely by hand. He would trim and select his meat by hand, and then he would add the spice and cure. Then he would grind it by hand, on the second grind filling the casings. He would hand tie the casings. Then they would go to the wooden racks in his smokehouse. In Grandpa's smokehouse there wasn't any set time. It smoked until Grandpa was satisfied. Summer sausage smoked for days at a time, for ham and bacon it could be weeks.

When Grandpa was finally satisfied, the sausage was pulled and it was ready to be served. The fame and popularity of his sausage grew and it became a traditional treat for deer season and Christmas.

Growing up I got to spend lots of time with my Grandpa hunting, fishing and doing farm work. I watched him clean many fish, process many deer and make lots of homemade sausage. Somehow all of that inspired me to take up a trade in the meat business.

Among my fathers many business ventures over the years, he was the general contractor for building several of the more prominent meat processing plants in southeastern Wisconsin. He also had done a lot of construction work with a large poultry grower and processor in Racine county. We were raising quite a few steers at the time that we were selling to friends and folks so the family decided we would build a meat plant.

At the time I had recently returned from the Marine Corps and I decided I would be a worker at this new business. So in January of 1978 I headed to Southwest Tech in Fennimore, WI to learn about meat processing.

One of my instructors was Mr. Warren Gregory, a master sausage maker who had learned his trade in the New Glarus Style of sausage making. I learned modern sausage making techniques from him and his training was thorough and extensive. I must have learned something because that spring I won a gold medal for some of my sausage in the first contest I entered.

Besides the basics, Mr. Gregory also taught me the fine points of sausage production and how to make several different ethnic sausages including Landjaegers. After graduation I returned to Mauston to work at the family business. Many of the sausages we made used my Grandpa Hamm's original spices and meat formulas. I did have to adjust production techniques so they would comply with food safety laws and modern production techniques.

As the years went by we refined our sausage production, particularly summer sausage. First we added the snack stick casing, and then we started with different flavors, first garlic then all beef. Later here at Wisconsin River Meats we added cheddar, and then cranberry, then elk, buffalo and farm raised venison.

The only slight changes to the original recipe besides the adding of flavors was that I had to quit using whole peppercorns in the sausage. While I, like Grandpa Louis, loved them they make it too hot for some people.

Today at Wisconsin River Meats we make over 100,000 lbs of just summer sausage per year. It is sold and distributed throughout Wisconsin and it remains one of our most popular sausages.