

The Detroit News

“Rubin: A New Bacon (Schmacon!) and the Place to Find It” September 28, 2014

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Schmacon differs from regular bacon in that it's lower in fat, sodium and calories.

It differs from turkey bacon in that it's edible.

You can find it at Hefling's Amish Farm Market in Clinton Township, and I'm glad I went looking, because Hefling's is not the sort of place you stumble into by accident.

Realistically, it's not the sort of place you notice even if there's a backup on Harper Avenue and you're stuck in front of it until the road clears.

It's the plain brown wrapper of food stores, a spot so beige and basic that an actual Amish person would look at it and squint and say, "Y'know, you might want to jazz this up a little."

But as with much of the store's groceries, it's what's inside that counts.

Or, what's not inside.

"No steroids. No antibiotics. No pesticides," says Heidi Junga, a fairly recent employee, but a thorough convert.

Granted, the chickens, pigs and cows in the process wind up in a cooler anyway — but until then, "They are the animal they're meant to be."

Which brings us back to Schmacon, as in, "Bacon, Schmacon." There's no actual animal called a Schmacon, but there are plenty of cows, and it's cows who are giving their all to change breakfast as we know it.

It is sweet and smoky

A quick Schmacon synopsis:

Smoked, flavored, uncured beef slices. Invented by a deli owner from Chicago. No added nitrites or nitrates, no fillers, gluten-free.

As tested in our kitchen (or, as my family calls it, “the reheating room”):

Doesn't peel as easily as bacon, but even shredded strips cook nicely. Flees the oven in only six minutes or so. Far less shrinkage.

Taste-wise, falls on the sweet and smoky end of the bacon continuum. Good, meaty texture.

On the market since last year, and not exactly flying onto the shelves — though at least at [Hefling's](#), it's doing a good job of flying off.

“One of my suppliers told me about it,” says John Hefling, and after a month, he's moving 40 or 50 packages a week.

At [Schmacon.com](#), the cost is \$69.99 for a 10-pound load. As one of only two stores in Michigan to stock it, the other being Harding & Hill north of Kalamazoo in Parchment, Hefling's sells 10-ounce packages for the equivalent of \$7.59 a pound.

Hefling, 77, says he likes it because it's nitrate free and it's different. As he point out, “I've been eating eggs for 77 years.”

No-cootie food for sale

Hefling likes to tell newcomers, “If you want chemicals, go next door.” That would be across the dirt sidestreet to Frank's Pharmacy.

Gerald Hefling built what became the store in 1952 to house his meat wholesaling business. John took over after his died in 1976 and stumbled gradually into what he's doing now.

The key moment came when a supplier accidentally loaded some Amish beef onto a truck in Indiana. As a favor, Hefling sold it for him, and the light bulb came on. Or, more accurately, the gas lamp.

Amish pies came next, then chicken, and now anything he can find without what healthy eaters might sweepingly consider cooties. Properly pristine beef is so hard to find that he imports it from as far away as New Zealand.

The butter comes from Amish farmers in rolls, not sticks. The milk and cream hail from Romeo.

Dealing with Amish businesses can have its challenges. The only contact he has with one farmer comes on Friday afternoons, when the gentleman makes his way to a telephone to take orders.

But Hefling says he's serving 2,000 customers a week in a space so small that most of the actual shopping gets done in the walk-in cooler — and that's with hours as limited as the square footage.

It's 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and don't be late. If he doesn't run out of meat Saturday afternoon, he donates what's left to St. Vincent de Paul.

“We were so busy on the 4th of July there was a cop directing traffic,” he says, which draws a smile from his daughter, Susan, in their Yugo-sized office.

“I think there was an accident,” she says.

If it held things up long enough, someone might have even noticed the store.