



## Wick's Pies Inc. Recipe for Sweet Success

**Company:** Wick's Pies Inc.

**Address:** 217 Greenville Ave., Winchester

**Telephone:** (765) 584-8401

**Web site:** [www.wickspies.com](http://www.wickspies.com)

**Management:** Michael Wickersham, president

**Employees:** Approximately 90 overall, with 50 at the pie facility, 30 at Mrs. Wick's Pies restaurant and 10 at the glaze plant (Wick's Foods)

### Products:

Wick's offers 65 different pie dough products and nine different pies, including top sellers sugar cream and southern pecan. Within the past year, Wick's turned its attention to the health-conscious, introducing a sugar-free fruit glaze to its line, as well as a palm oil pie shell that contains no trans fat – a substance that can raise a person's bad cholesterol levels. At Mrs. Wick's Pies restaurant, nearly 40 varieties of handmade pies are available daily.

### History:

Company founded by D.E. "Wick" Wickersham has been in the baking business for 60 years. It began with a restaurant in 1944 and soon reputation of its homemade pies grew, leading to pie sales to other restaurants. The pie portion of the business became the larger one and, in the early '60s, the restaurants (three in total) were closed. Near the same time, frozen foods took off and Wick's introduced its frozen pie products. Wick's returned to the restaurant business in 1986, right across the street from the pie plant.

### Turning up the volume:

In the '50s, Wick's was making about 20 pies a day. "Today, when we run pies (which is only a few days a week during off-peak time), we'll produce about 12,000 in an eight-hour shift," Wickersham offers. "Pies are predominantly holiday driven and our largest holidays are Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. In October and November, we'll run pies four to five days a week."

The largest part of Wick's business, however, is pie shells. "For every pie we produce, we'll produce 16 pie shells," Wickersham notes. On average, 30,000 pie shells are produced daily for that use only.

In the last five years, Wick's overall business has continued to flourish, with 10% to 15% growth.

**Key ingredients:**

According to Wickersham, the company's key to success is quality – of its products and people. “My dad always had a philosophy of trying to make the best product possible and using simple, old-fashioned ingredients. He did that and we've maintained that,” he explains.

“The people that put the products together here care about what they're doing, which enhances the quality even more. Really, if you have the wrong people doing the work, you're not going to have a quality product – regardless of the ingredients. We're very pleased with the quality of our workforce.”

**Customer base:**

Wick's pies and pie shells can be found in grocery stores like Kroger, Marsh, Super Wal-Mart and independents throughout Indiana and Ohio. Major wholesale distributors Sysco and Gordon Food Service are also leading customers.

The food service arena is centered on Wick's pie shells, while pies are a strong component of the retail/grocery segment. In terms of dollars, a little over 60% of overall business comes from food service and nearly 40% from retail. “We sell to a lot of restaurants, hospitals, nursing homes and schools, and our reputation for a quality pie shell allows us to do that. Our pie shell is known for being the best pie shell on the market from a food service and a consumer standpoint,” Wickersham states.

Wick's ships its products to 35 different states. However, the majority of its market is the Midwest plus Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia and Texas. (Wick's leases frozen space in public warehouses in Memphis, Atlanta and Dallas for storage and distribution purposes).

**Restaurant and tours:**

For nearly 20 years, Mrs. Wick's Pies restaurant has been a popular breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert destination for Randolph County residents. About one-third of the restaurant is actually a factory outlet with a frozen food case for Wick's pies and crust products.

In addition to the restaurant, the pie plant itself is in demand as a touring spot. It's open twice a week, two times a day in March, April, May, June, September and October for free group tours. “We start taking reservations on the first business day of the calendar year in January. Typically, by the end of that day all of our tours are booked,” Wickersham reports.

Church groups, alumni associations, bus tours and school groups (students must be at least 10 years of age) are frequent visitors for the 30-minute tour.

**Coming attractions?:**

Consumer demand led to limited production of the palm oil pie shell without trans fat and, over the years, the introduction of various sizes of pie shells. What's next? “We are thinking about making a 12-inch pie shell because of requests,” Wickersham says. “If the numbers can match up – if the demand is strong enough – that's something that we would add to our line. However, we just can't go adding items to our line irrespective of sales because we don't have a lot of space to store the product.”

As for a new pie, Wickersham has rhubarb cream on his mind as a possibility. “My mom used to make that, and they don't make it at the restaurant. It's a heavy cream – like a sugar cream with rhubarb in it. It's very tasty. With the (new) pies, we basically kick some ideas around that we haven't put into place.”

**Motto:**

Wickersham's favorite thing to say to people about his company's products is “we try to be second best to homemade.”

“Pie shell making is an art. It takes some creativity and ability. It's not an easy thing to do,” Wickersham attests. “If we can be second best to that person rolling their own at home or in a restaurant, for example, then when they get tired of it or when they get bogged down and can't keep up, then they're going to look to us to buy our pie shells. And, ultimately, that's been the key to our success.”



Wick's pie process from start to finish.