

TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD



Western Canadian producers are filling stomachs, helping the environment, and supporting their communities

By Carly Peters

In times of turmoil and trouble, iconic children's show host, Mr. Rogers, urged his young viewers to, "Look for the helpers. You'll always find people helping." The past year has put a spotlight on those in the grocery industry who rose to meet unprecedented challenges, but this is nothing new. Western Canadian food and beverage producers, along with retailers, have long been choosing to be the helpers in places where they were needed most.

The grocery industry has often played a unique role in the fight against hunger and ensuring food security for thousands of Western Canadians. According to non-profit Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC), before the pandemic, an estimated 4.5 million Canadians experienced food insecurity, while the Grocery Foundation cites that, before COVID-19, one in five Canadian children went to school hungry.

One of the foundation's key initiatives is Toonie's for Tummies, where shoppers simply donate \$2 at participating grocery retailers, with 100 per cent of the funds going directly to school breakfast programs. From 2017-2020, Western Canadian retailers helped fund more than 740,000 breakfasts across Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. The 2021 campaign, dubbed #ToonieChallenge2X, is more vital than ever, as twice as many children may be at risk of food insecurity due to the pandemic.

The Grocery Foundation also helps school nutrition programs, whose dollars are stretched even further. With the cooperation of many Canadian retailers and manufacturers, the School Breakfast Program helps student nutrition programs purchase healthy food at reduced costs. To date, this collaboration has achieved \$5 million in savings to student nutrition programs, which represents an additional 2.5 million healthy meals provided to kids across Canada.

Passing along savings is only one way grocery is helping to stave off hunger. The Retail Food Program, part of Food Bank Canada's National Food Sharing System, has been pairing participating locations of national retailers with local community food banks across the country to provide safe, quality fresh, frozen, non-perishable foods, and consumer goods. In a typical year, the program provides local food banks with over 13 million pounds of food.

The program not only helps to ensure that food banks across Canada receive a regular, ongoing supply of essential items, but also helps reduce the cost of food waste experienced by retailers.

This is just one segment of grocery's larger movement to bettering their communities through sustainability. From reducing plastic and one-time use packaging, to fair trade and eco-conscious offerings, grocery is working alongside the purpose driven consumer.

Indeed, grocery retailers have long held a strong com-

mitment to community. Horacio Barbeito, President and CEO, Walmart Canada says "We have a responsibility to give back. Our recent 'Fight Hunger. Spark Change.' campaign raised a record 13 million meals for Canadians in need through Food Banks Canada. The campaign was one of our strongest ever, thanks to the generosity of customers and suppliers and the efforts of our associates".

Similarly, Save-On Foods was Calgary based I Can for Kids' first partner, and for the past five years helped them grow an idea into a thriving organization that feeds thousands of kids in Calgary every summer. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 5 school-aged kids in Canada relied on school-based nutrition programs. Subsequent school closures left many Canadian kids unsure about where their next meal would come from. Since April, that statistic has grown to 1 in 3. So earlier this year Save-On-Foods donated \$500,000 to help feed hungry kids in Western Canada, and invited customers to match that amount through donations at the till and online. Save-On reached their \$1-million fundraising goal!

The commitment to giving back to the community is also firmly engrained among those supplying to the grocery sector.

"Righteous Gelato reinvests 1% of its revenue into national and local organizations each year", says Jennifer Taylor, Director of Marketing. "In our constant & unwavering pursuit for greatness, we are committed to enriching people's lives, one tiny spoonful at a time".

Ayissi Nyemba, Founder and CEO of Emako Foods says Emkao "supports farmers in Cameroon by improving food and income security for the small holder farmers". This extends to "creating jobs, giving access to drinkable water and growing trees".

Elke Waterhouse of The Lump O' Coal Corp. says, "The Lump O' Coal company brings employment and fulfillment to the lives of adults with developmental disabilities through work opportunities and training at selected facilities in the Edmonton area".

Cathline James, CEO and Founder of Wise Bites lives by the motto "giving is not just about making a donation, it is about making a difference." The company delivers food to 3 Detox Centres and 8 Low Barrier Supportive Housing Buildings in Vancouver, as well as donating continually to Richmond Food Bank for the past 8 years.

Carlo Facchin, Chief Executive Officer, Prairie Harvest Canada Ltd. has aligned their company with the values of giving back by donating their Organic Ketchup to the food banks in B.C. and Alberta. And it was substantial! A total of 1,650 cases were donated equalling 19,800 bottles or 33,000 lbs of ketchup.

This ideal of "we" over "me" is at the core of many food and beverage companies; in what follows are just a few of those helpers who are giving back to their communities, their employees, and the planet. ●



Healthy Meals, Good Hearts

BOOSH FOOD FOCUSES ON LOCAL HUNGER

“For it is in giving that we receive,” quotes Connie Marples, founder and president of Boosh Food.

After her own battle with Celiac disease, Marples developed the line of plant-based, fresh-frozen meals to ensure others would have access to gluten-free options that were easy to make and tasted great. Since launching the heat and serve entrees in 2019, the company has branched out from their base in B.C., supplying 300 retailers across Canada. With a new kitchen and warehouse in Cloverdale, Boosh is expanding their offerings with a refrigerated line to give consumers convenience and versatility.



“We want to always be available to lend a hand to our neighbours.”



Even as a relatively young company, Marples says they’ve always believed it was crucial to use their business to fight hunger in their community. Equally as important, was having the ability to offer plant-based, gluten-free comfort food to help serve people with dietary concerns, something that’s not often considered when donating meals.



“All of us at Boosh feel that it’s important to continue to focus our support and donations on local hunger relief organizations. We want to always be available to lend a hand to our neighbours,” she says.

In the last two months, the Boosh team has donated almost 2,200 meals to the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, and Mamas for Mamas, Surrey Chapter, along with supporting Options Community Services, and The Mustard Seed in Esquimalt, B.C.

Marples states through this work the team is getting so much more in return. “My husband and I dropped cases of Boosh Bowls at St Paul’s Hospital at the start of the pandemic to the ICU staff. At such a time of uncertainty for all it was overwhelming to see the appreciation and gratitude coming from those doing so much to keep us all safe,” she says, adding her team have had similar experiences delivering food to front line workers and charities which has inspired them to look for more opportunities to share what they have with the community. ●



Food Fight

FOR KELLOGG CANADA GIVING BACK IS A COMPANY CULTURE

As a global food company, Kellogg is passionate about doing their part to make sure there is enough food for everyone. This dates back to Founder, W.K. Kellogg, who was an early conservationist, and leading philanthropist who focused his efforts on the health and welfare of children. He would be happy to know that, today, through the Kellogg's Better Days global purpose platform, the company he built is committed to creating better days for three billion people by the end of 2030.

A key driver of this is bringing attention to the very real and crushing problem of food insecurity. Since 2015, Kellogg Canada has donated more than \$4 million dollars and 50 million servings to food banks and breakfast clubs across Canada. Staying with W.K.'s vision and legacy of giving back, the company has had a 13+-year relationship with Food Banks Canada, including becoming the founding partner of the After the Bell program, an initiative that provides children who are experiencing hunger during the summer months (when the programs they've come to rely on during the school year close for the holidays) with access to much needed nutritious food. Through their 10+-year partnership with Breakfast Club of Canada they've also provided financial and in-kind food donations to help support more than 257,743 children in almost 2,000 breakfast clubs across Canada.



of volunteer service the company provides a \$100 donation (up to a maximum of \$500/year) to the organization. The new Volunteer with Me initiative gives company management the opportunity to lead by example by participating in volunteer efforts alongside team members in the community. The company is also continuously finding ways for team members to volunteer their time through local food drives, food sort challenges, packing events and more. The company very much led by example during the pandemic. At a time when the need had never been greater, Kellogg turned up its charitable giving efforts to support their longstanding hunger partners. As one of the first to commit food and funds to both Food Banks Canada and Breakfast Club of Canada, the company continued to support third party charitable efforts, including Walmart Canada's Fight Hunger Spark Change, and the Grocery Foundation's Toonies for Tummies campaign. They also introduced the Kellogg's Free Box and Give Back on-pack promotion whereby for every purchase of two boxes of participating Kellogg's cereals and snacks, consumers received a free box for themselves and Kellogg donated \$1 (up to a maximum of \$100,000) to its hunger partners.

In March 2021, the company launched their first-ever social-led donation matching campaign in recognition of National Cereal Day. For every \$1 donated to Food Banks Canada between March 4-7, Kellogg matched the donation dollar-for-dollar up to a total donation of \$100,000. Funds raised supported Food Banks Canada's \$150 million-dollar COVID-19 Response Fund and affiliate food banks, helping improve access to food for those in

need, including a specific focus on Northern and Indigenous communities.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Kellogg has donated more than \$18 million to fund global COVID-19 food relief efforts, including more than \$1 million in food and funds in Canada alone.

W.K. Kellogg would be proud. ●



This includes the Kellogg Canada Adopt-A-School Employee Volunteer Initiative where Kellogg's team members (prior to the pandemic) volunteer their time in the breakfast club three days a week at a school in close proximity to the company's head office.

Giving back is something that runs deep and through the entire company culture. Kellogg Canada team members have the opportunity to take two days of paid volunteer leave each year to give back to the community, and for every 10 hours





A Single Purpose

SODASTREAM ADDS SPARKLE TO DAILY LIFE

SodaStream has been giving Canadians a lot of gas, and that's a good thing for the environment. The make-at-home carbonated water company has seen strong double-digit growth for the past five years, making SodaStream the number one sparkling water brand and the number one SKU in small appliances in Canada.

As the company has grown, SodaStream has continued to expand their sustainability commitment to build stronger communities for the future by eliminating single-use plastic waste. One reusable SodaStream bottle replaces the need for thousands of single-use plastic bottles.

"When consumers make sparkling beverages at home, they're not only saving on trips outside and associated transportation pollution, but cutting down on packaging waste as well," explains Rena Nickerson, general manager for SodaStream Canada, adding that 96.8 per cent of SodaStream Canada cylinders are sold without corrugate boxes.

In 2020, SodaStream sponsored the Great Gulp campaign, their first collaborative project with EcoSchools Canada, to raise awareness in schools, offices, and homes of the importance of drinking water and reducing single-use plastic waste. An estimated 30,000 students, families and community members participated in the Great Gulp challenge across the country.



Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers' reliance on single-use plastics has increased, including an explosion in production of PPE and masks, as well as plastic bags and containers used for take-out. When you combine this with lowered costs of producing plastic due to oil prices, the past year was a perfect storm for global backsliding on plastics, says Nickerson.



This has only strengthened SodaStream's resolve.

In April 2020, the company announced they will be switching all their plastic flavours (including their new bubbly drops) packaging to metal bottles, which should avoid nearly another 200 million single-use plastic bottles globally over the next five years. One bottle of bubbly drops makes up to 12 litres of sparkling beverage. This announcement was supported by the release of the emotional short film, One Home, One Planet. More than 30 million people were reached with its message to stay at home and take better care both of each other and our planet.

For Earth Day 2021, the company has even bigger news. Due to the growing use of SodaStream at home, they can now forecast an avoidance of nearly 78 billion single-use plastic bottles around the world by 2025 (Up 11 billion from their 2025 projection in 2020).

"Since the start of the pandemic, the demand for home hydration systems has only grown. As consumers look to create moments of joy, making their own custom carbonated beverages at home with SodaStream has become a simple and healthy way to add some sparkle to their daily routines," says Nickerson, adding they've had some high-profile help to encourage customers — from campaigns featuring rapper Snoop Dog to Canada's Drag Race winner/queen, Priyanka. "We're excited to continue to develop and share fun, creative partnerships and campaigns that will inspire consumers to make carbonated beverages at home, as the more households that have a SodaStream means less single use plastic use and a healthier planet for us all." ●



Fill Up Your Cup

LEVEL GROUND TRADING IS A CHAMPION OF FAIR TRADE



Biira grows organic coffee at her farm 1,200 metres above sea level in Western Uganda, while Don Israel tends to organic mangos on his land in Vereda Guacana, Colombia. What's happening in B.C. will have an effect on both of them.

Victoria-based Level Ground Trading (Level Ground) started in 1997 buying coffee from Colombia and roasting it at night in a borrowed downtown space. These first Colombian coffee purchases supported a non-profit, Famicafé, and funded education scholarships for the coffee farmers' children.

Since then, Level Ground has directly connected their green coffee purchases from small-scale coffee farmers with desired social impact outcomes in the community, such as access to education for farmers' children and funding for health care. In Colombia this

has resulted in annual scholarships for hundreds of children to attend school, while in Tanzania it has funded hospital access for hundreds of families.

As Level Ground grew, so did the Fair Trade movement. This helped the company not only showcase great coffee, but champion paying fair, and often higher, prices to the farmers who grew this premium grade specialty coffee. It

also drove a desire to open more markets for small-scale farmers prompting Level Ground to expand to tea, dried fruit, and cane sugar.

"We've seen the impact of our trade relationships provide," explains Stacey Toews, co-founder and communications catalyst for Level Ground, pointing to benefits such as more money in farmers' pockets than conventionally traded coffee, initiatives promoting women's rights and leadership in cooperatives, and deployment of agronomists to improve volume and quality of coffee harvest for the farms. "Our Fair Trade difference in 2021 will mean an additional \$250,000 funding to small-scale farming cooperatives to improve their community."

Back in B.C., the company is equally committed to their local community — from sponsorships of little league baseball, donations of Organic/Fair Trade coffees for virtual silent auctions and fundraisers that promote initiatives such as mental health education to the SPCA.

When COVID-19 hit home, they turned their attention to supporting food banks in Victoria, Vancouver, and the GTA through their Buy One Give One campaign, which resulted in thousands of packages of coffee being donated.

They've also taken this time to focus more attention on two of their core values - Always Improve and Uplift Everyone - by re-vamping their website, levelground.com. "We've been able to better inform our customers about the impact of our ongoing Fair Trade initiatives," states Toews. "We're excited to combine the deep knowledge of direct trade, relationships with impressive farmer co-ops, and the expertise of our quality team to elevate coffee for everyone." ●





A Place at the Table

KRAFT HEINZ CANADA SPARKS HAPPINESS

Companies like Kraft Heinz Canada exist to help feed people, but they also have the ability to bring joy.

"That's why we come to work each day. We call it our North Star, which is, 'We will spark happiness at every Canadian table,'" says Nicole Fischer, head of sustainability for Kraft Heinz Canada. "This could be a dinner table, a local hockey rink, a community centre, a school trip or anywhere, anytime Canadians get together. This spirit applies to our business, and to our efforts to give back to the community."



As the country's largest food and beverage producer, the company has the power and scale to help shape the world for good. That is where their new approach to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) comes in. At Kraft Heinz, these efforts line up under three broad pillars: environmental stewardship, responsible sourcing, and healthy living & community support.

One of the key areas of focus for Kraft Heinz under community support is the reduction of food insecurity in Canada. "No one should ever have to wonder where their next meal is coming from," says Bruno Keller, president of Kraft Heinz Canada.

The global pandemic has seen millions of Canadians unfortunately asking themselves that question. In response, Kraft Heinz Canada established a new five-year, \$20-million food donation commitment to Food Banks Canada through a new initiative - Kraft Heinz Pantry Day.



Kraft Heinz Pantry Day occurred on World Food Day, October 16, where Canadians joined the fight against food insecurity by purchasing a participating Kraft Heinz product - ranging from Kraft Peanut Butter, Philadelphia Cream Cheese, Kraft Dinner, Maxwell House Coffee and Heinz Ketchup - at their local grocery store, which was then matched with a product donation to Food Banks Canada. The scope and donation effort of Kraft Heinz Pantry Day made it the largest one-day donation matching event in Food Banks Canada's history.

"Pantry Day will help bring meals to the tables of the 4.4 million Canadians affected by food insecurity across the country," explains Matt Bruce, senior brand manager, community programming and corporate partnerships at Kraft Heinz Canada.

While these initiatives focus on the big picture, the company also likes to take philanthropy to the local level. For over 15 years, Kraft Hockeyville has been one of the company's key community programs. Along with its partners the National Hockey League and the National Hockey League Players' Association, Kraft Heinz Canada has awarded over \$4.1 million to 89 communities, helping to restore and upgrade arenas from coast to coast, while also bringing 13 NHL pre-season games to communities across eight different provinces. Hockey in Canadian communities? That certainly sparks joy. ●



Time to Take Care

FREYBE VALUES MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is good for business. According to Canada's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) when effectively prioritizing and addressing mental health in the workplace the potential bottom-line impacts include higher performance, lower absenteeism, and reduced disability costs. But really, it also just makes people feel good.

After attending a workplace wellness conference in 2018, Karen Hunt, director of people, culture and office services at Freybe, knew she wanted to do just that. As the company culture was evolving, mental health was a perfect fit under



their value of caring. Along with doing their own research and resource sourcing, the company decided to choose a comprehensive program offered by the Canadian Mental Health Association, called Not Myself Today (NMT). This workplace mental health initiative helps companies build greater awareness, reduce stigma, and foster safe and supportive cultures through attention-getting material ("Their mood buttons are still a hit three years later," laughs Hunt), turnkey activities, tools, and 24/7 accessible resources.

Since the launch of NMT in 2019, Freybe has been able to find other CMHA information and initiatives, as well as doing additional reading and sharing of information sourced through a variety of other outlets.

"We have moved from 'here is the program you can access to support your mental health,' to understanding that mental and physical health are interconnected and keeping both supported is essential," she says. "Ultimately, our goal is to not have a one size fits all program, but rather to provide as



many options as possible for them to access."

This education and understanding around mental health has ultimately led to a reduction in the stigma around mental illness and asking for help. This has been more important than ever over the past year, says Hunt.

"When the pandemic hit, we had a team who could discuss the value of mental health and know they needed to be proactive in protecting it and know they were encouraged to reach out if they needed support," she says, adding Freybe is continuing to expand pandemic-related mental health initiatives to include a buddy program to help with isolation and loneliness, as well as keeping the team connected in their community by giving back through volunteering.

"If you talk to anyone on our team regardless of role in our organization, they would all tell you the value of having conversations around mental health. We talk about it every day and they all feel empowered to look after each other and make decisions that improve the quality of life at our organization," says Hunt. "Your mental health can't be turned on and off and our employees all feel like Freybe can be a place where these conversations can be had without judgement. Freybe's commitment to the mental health of our employees is so much more than meeting the demands of running a business. Our business wouldn't be what it is without our team, that's why having these open conversations is important. These things affect us all." ●