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MAY/JUNE 2026

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THE POWER OF BRANDS

BRANDS HAVE POWER BECAUSE OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION BEHIND THEM

PASTA AND BEYOND

CANADA'S GROWING APPETITE FOR ITALIAN CUISINE

MERIDIAN FARM MARKET

*Kevin Penner, COO,
Meridian Farm Market.*

WHERE THE PEOPLE MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

HISTORY IS IN THE MAKING

GRIMM'S FINE FOODS CELEBRATES 75 YEARS!

+ THE CANADIAN GRAND PRIX NEW PRODUCT AWARDS — FINALISTS ANNOUNCED!

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* SOURCE: NIELSEN IQ NATIONAL EX
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- L52W ENDING MARCH 28, 2026.

† SOURCE: EXPLORER, PACKAGING
RESEARCH, JANUARY 2025.



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happy you



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health in baking

puratos
Food Innovation for Good

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Cover Photo credit: Phillip Chin



Publisher & Editor, Frank Yeo; Associate Publisher & National Account Manager, Robin Bradley; Western Account Manager, Melanie Houssin; Editorial Production Coordinator, Brennah Doyle; Advertising Production Manager, Marsha Coombe; Creative Manager, Sarra Burton; Circulation Department e-mail: jmartin@mercurypublications.ca; Advertising Consultants: David Bastable, Loren Fox, Edna Saito. Publisher: Western Grocer Magazine is published bi-monthly by Mercury Publications Limited Head Office: 675 Berry Street, Unit L, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 1A7 Tel: (204) 954-2085 Fax: (204) 954-2057 www.mercury.mb.ca • e-mail: fyeo@mercurypublications.ca Associated Publications: C-Store Canada Magazine, Western Hotelier, Western Restaurant News, Western Food Processor and Bar & Beverage Business. Circulation: Western Grocer Magazine serves the grocery and allied non-food industries. Readership includes distributors, brokers, manufacturers, wholesalers, independent grocers, food processors, bakeries, supermarkets, convenience stores, principal food service outlets, food researchers and consultants, government, voluntary groups and co-ops in the four Western Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Northern Canada and the Northwest Ontario area. Subscription Rates: \$45.00 for one year, \$63.00 for two years, \$93.00 for three years; \$5.00 for single copy, plus 7% GST. Canadian rates only. Advertising: Deadline is 25th of the first month. Editorial: The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written consent of publisher. Photo credits not given unless requested in writing along with photo submission.

Publication Mail Agreement No: 40062509. ISSN# 0705-906X. Return Undeliverable Canadian addresses to Circulation Dept. at 675 Berry Street, Unit L, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 1A7 e-mail: jmartin@mercurypublications.ca Printed in Canada



publisher's perspective

An Urgent Call

Every year, Canada wastes 46.5% of its food — \$58 billion worth — and nearly a quarter of that is linked to confusion around date labels. Introduced in 1976, “best before” dates are legally only required on packaged products with a durable life of 90 days or less but are common on shelf-stable products even though they are not an indicator of food safety.

Second Harvest, Canada’s largest food rescue organization, released new research examining Canada’s current date coding regulations and how they compare to global best practices, highlighting opportunities to reduce waste while maintaining food safety and consumer confidence.

While peer countries, such as the UK, Australia, Korea, Japan and several countries in the EU, have identified date coding misinterpretation as a driver of food waste and begun modernizing their labelling system as part of a broader national food waste reduction effort, Canada is falling behind. At the same time, more Canadians are facing food insecurity than ever.

With the release of Second Harvest’s research, “Date Coding and Food Waste Research Report”, the organization has launched a national campaign calling for a food waste reduction framework to be part of Canada’s Food Security Strategy currently being developed by the federal government.

This offers a critical opportunity to strengthen our food system and improve access to affordable food. The strategy will be stronger if it includes meaningful action to reduce food waste:

- Establish national food waste reduction targets and standardize food waste data collection;
- Modernize “best before” date labelling, as date coding accounts for 23% of avoidable food waste from processing to purchasing;
- Commit to sustained investment in the charitable hunger-relief sector so more surplus food can reach communities across Canada.

The non-profit is calling on Canadians to act by writing directly to their Member of Parliament in support of this recommendation. Wasting food while millions go hungry is a problem we can solve, but only if we act together.

Frank Yeo, Publisher & Editor



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Kate Sprack promoted to Director of Trade Marketing, CanPrev (Orange Naturals)

Kate Sprack, based in Victoria, British Columbia, brings nearly a decade of experience connecting brands, retailers, and consumers through strategic trade marketing initiatives. Since joining CanPrev four years ago, she has played an integral role in driving growth across key retail partnerships, with a strong focus on expanding the presence and performance of natural health products within the grocery channel.



Kate Sprack

In her new role as director of trade marketing, Sprack will oversee national trade marketing strategy and support the continued expansion of the Orange Naturals brand across Canadian and international markets. Based in Western Canada, Sprack brings valuable regional insight into evolving grocery trends, consumer preferences, and retailer needs across the market. She collaborates closely with national sales teams and grocery partners to develop and execute retail programs that drive supplement category growth, increase shopper engagement, and strengthen in-store performance across both conventional grocery and health food retail environments.

Puratos Canada Names New President

Puratos has announced a leadership transition designed to strengthen regional alignment and support its next phase of growth. Jelena Vrbaski has been appointed president of Puratos Canada, while Michael Simone has assumed a newly created strategic role focusing on the broader North American region. "Michael's leadership has been instrumental in building a strong, growth-oriented Canadian business," said Andrew Brimacombe, president, North American Markets. "In his new role, Michael will dedicate more time to long-term strategic priorities, including contributing to internal scenario planning and integration readiness efforts that help Puratos prepare for potential future opportunities in North America. At the same time, we are pleased to see Jelena step into the presidency and continue advancing our momentum in Canada."

As president, Jelena will lead the Canadian business with a focus on further deepening customer partnerships, advancing innovation, and strengthening operational excellence. A 15-year Puratos veteran, she most recently served as vice-president of sales for Puratos Canada. "Jelena brings deep expertise in the Canadian market and a strong track record of leadership," added Brimacombe.



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Lactalis Canada

Releases 2025 ESG Report

Lactalis Canada released its 2025 Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Report, highlighting continued progress in delivering sustainable, responsible growth while strengthening its connection to Canadians, communities, and the broader dairy sector.

"In 2025, despite ongoing economic uncertainty, Lactalis Canada remained firmly anchored in our purpose: to enrich and nurture the lives of Canadians through sustainable, responsible growth," said Mark Taylor, president & CEO, Lactalis Canada. "We continued to deliver trusted products, strengthen partnerships across our value chain, and advance our ESG priorities in practical and measurable ways. As we look ahead, we remain focused on building a resilient dairy sector, supporting communities, and advancing ESG priorities in collaboration with our employees, farmers, customers, partners and suppliers."



With more than 140 years of heritage in Canada, Lactalis Canada's products are now found in 94% of refrigerators nationwide, reflecting the strong trust Canadians place in its brands. In 2025, the company reinforced its commitment to local production through Buy Canadian initiatives, including consumer campaigns and expanded use of the Blue Cow logo to help Canadians make informed purchasing decisions.

The company also demonstrated leadership across the industry by becoming the first supplier to formally sign the Grocery Code of Conduct, supporting greater transparency, accountability, and fairness across the grocery supply chain.

Aligned with Lactalis Group's global ESG framework, the report focuses on three pillars of impact: People & Communities; Authentic Products & Heritage; and Land & Resources, underpinned by priorities in Climate, Circular Economy & Packaging, and Animal Welfare.



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Grainfed Beef



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- Grassfed

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BEEF IS STILL ON THE MENU

Averaging \$27.70/kg in February, retail beef prices were up 18% from February 2025, remaining near record high levels. Ground beef was at its highest point on record, also up 18% from a year ago, supported by smaller non-fed (mature) beef production (-9% year-to-date). Domestic retail beef demand for 2025 is projected to be up 8% from 2024, at its highest point since the early 1980's. Beef is in the limelight having its 'protein moment'.



A recent article from Supermarket News found that protein has consistently shown to be more highly prioritized during times of financial constraint compared to starch and produce. While Gen Z shoppers (those born between 1997 and 2012), Gen X shoppers (born from 1965-1980), and Boomers (born from 1946-1964) are more likely to make and

follow a grocery budget, Millennials (born from 1981-1996) put a greater emphasis on health and nutrition.

The rise of GLP-1 drugs are also changing consumer purchasing behaviours. An estimated 6% of Canadian adults are using GLP-1 products; either to manage Type 2 diabetes or for its weight-management benefits. Users note that they are prioritizing protein consumption, looking to get the biggest bang out of the food they eat. And beef is at the forefront, fulfilling consumers' needs.

Equifruit Welcomes Owain Hoefle as Sales Manager, Western North America

Equifruit, North America's leading Fairtrade-certified banana importer and certified B Corp, has announced that Owain Hoefle has joined the company as sales manager, Western North America. Based in British Columbia, Hoefle will be responsible for developing key retail relationships across Canada and the United States.



Owain Hoefle

Hoefle brings extensive experience in produce, floral and grocery to the role. During his 17 years at Pattison Food Group, he rose through the ranks from store-level operations to director of produce, Floral and Bulk, a role in which he developed deep expertise in category management and retail produce programs. He most recently served as key account manager at Rainbow Greenhouses. Having worked on both the operational and commercial sides of grocery retail, Hoefle has a firsthand understanding of what it takes to build and sustain successful produce programs at scale.



Second Harvest

Calls for National Food Waste Reduction Framework within Canada's Food Security Strategy, Following New Research

Second Harvest, Canada's largest food rescue organization, released new research examining Canada's current date coding regulations (such as the use of "best before" and "expiry" dates on product packaging) and how they compare to global best practices, highlighting opportunities to reduce waste while maintaining food safety and consumer confidence.

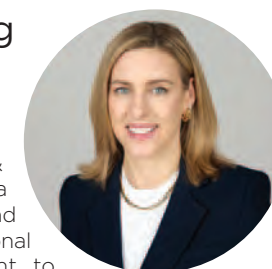
The release of the "Date Coding and Food Waste Research Report" also marks the launch of a national campaign calling for a food waste reduction framework to be part of Canada's Food Security Strategy. The non-profit is calling on Canadians to take action by writing directly to their Member of Parliament in support of this recommendation.

The federal government is currently developing a National Food Security Strategy, which offers a critical opportunity to strengthen our food system and improve access to affordable food. The strategy will be stronger if it includes meaningful action to reduce food waste:

- Establish national food waste reduction targets and standardize food waste data collection;
- Modernize "best before" date labelling, as date coding accounts for 23% of avoidable food waste from processing to purchasing;
- Commit to sustained investment in the charitable hunger-relief sector so more surplus food can reach communities across Canada.

Wasting food while millions go hungry is a problem we can solve, but only if we act together.

PepsiCo Canada CEO Cara Keating Receives Canadian Grand Prix Lifetime Achievement Award



Cara Keating

Retail Council of Canada (RCC) and Food Health & Consumer Products of Canada are proud to recognize Cara Keating, CEO of PepsiCo Canada, with the Canadian Grand Prix Lifetime Achievement Award, in honour of her exceptional leadership, industry impact, and enduring commitment to Canada's retail and consumer packaged goods sectors.

As CEO of PepsiCo Canada, Cara leads more than 12,000 associates across 13 manufacturing facilities and hundreds of distribution locations, overseeing a portfolio of iconic brands such as Lay's, Doritos, Pepsi-Cola, Gatorade, Quaker and bubbly sparkling water. Her 22-year career with the company is a masterclass in earned progression. Under her leadership, PepsiCo Canada integrated its foods and beverages businesses to form Canada's largest CPG company.

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Nature's Path Organic Foods Recognized with The Climate Collaborative's Collective Action Leadership Award

Nature's Path Organic Foods has announced that the Regenerative Organic Oats (ROO) program has been recognized, alongside project partners, with The Climate Collaborative's Collective Action Leadership Award, presented at the Climate Leaders Luncheon during Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, California earlier this March.

Presented annually, the Climate Collaborative's Climate Leaders Awards honour companies and organizations across the food and grocery industry that are driving meaningful, measurable climate action. The Collective Action Leadership Award specifically recognizes initiatives that demonstrate the power of partnership in advancing solutions no single organization could achieve alone.



Foodhero Expands into Independent Food Retailers to Help Reduce Unsold Food Waste

FoodHero is expanding its model to independent food retailers, marking a new phase in its growth and enabling it to better address food waste at the retail level, where a significant share of losses occur. Previously focused exclusively on large grocery chains, the platform is now available to neighbourhood food businesses across Canada, including independent grocers, bakeries, produce shops, cafés and restaurants, helping give a second life to surplus food and broadening its offering beyond traditional grocery.

In Canada, nearly half of all food produced is never consumed. Yet about 40% of that waste is avoidable, representing an estimated \$58 billion in annual losses. A significant portion of this waste occurs at the retail level, where perfectly edible products are removed from shelves.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CHFA NOW September 25-27, 2026

Exhibition Place
Toronto, ON
<https://www.chfanow.ca/>

Retail Sustainability Conference October 27-28, 2026

North Building,
Metro Toronto Convention Centre
Toronto, ON
www.rccretailsustainability.ca

Grocery Innovations Canada October 27-28, 2026

North Building,
Toronto Congress Centre
Toronto, ON
<https://groceryinnovations.com/>

The NGA Show January 31-Feb 2, 2027

MGM Grand Conference Centre
Las Vegas, NV
<https://www.thengashow.com/>

Grocery & Specialty Food West April 20-21, 2027

East Building, Vancouver Convention Centre
Vancouver, BC
<https://gsfshow.com/>

SIAL April 27-29, 2027

Energare Centre
Toronto, ON
<https://sialcanada.com/en/>

Where Rights Take Root Canada's 11th National Fair Trade Conference

On May 1st and 2nd, 2026, Canada's 11th National Fair Trade Conference took place in Winnipeg at the University of Winnipeg and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Participants explored the role of fair trade in defending human rights and democracy, elevating farmers' voices, and shaping a trade system grounded in equity, justice, and human dignity. Under the theme "Where Rights Take Root", conference goes discussed how they could help cultivate a world where fairness is foundational, and rights are nurtured from the ground up.

Fairtrade is an independent certification organization working to embed justice and sustainable development at the heart of trade structures and practices. Fairtrade Canada works directly with businesses, consumers, and campaigners to make trade better for farmers and workers by supporting fairer, more sustainable supply chains for products. Many popular Fairtrade-



(L to R) Michelle Gubbels, Georgia Crump, Equifruit.

certified brands made an appearance, including AWAKE caffeinated chocolate, &Back Coffee, Tony's Chocolonely, Camino, Florists Supply, and Four O'Clock.

One business changing the produce game for grocers is Equifruit, North America's leading Fairtrade-certified banana importer. For a sustainable and ethical supply chain, Equifruit promises a verified, traceable, and measurable social and environmental impact for their producers. Retailers are not wasting their time, Costco, Save-On Foods, and Calgary Co-op have already made the commitment to Equifruit's 100% Fairtrade-certified organic bananas. By paying approximately \$10 for an entire year, customers can upgrade to Fairtrade organic bananas and have a direct impact on farmers being paid a liveable wage, helping feed their families and reinvest in crops to create a better product in years to come. And if that's not enough - under Fairtrade, Equifruit pays an extra \$1 per 40 lbs case, allowing farmers to decide democratically which environmental, economic, and social projects to support with this cash injection. As of May 2026, this Fairtrade Premium has given almost 6 million dollars back to farmers.

On Friday May 1st, the panel Human Rights in Practice Across Fairtrade Supply Chains included a discussion of how Fairtrade contributes to advancing worker's and farmer's agency, with speakers from various Fairtrade businesses such as Vlora Salihi, Tony's Chocolonely, Michelle Gubbels, Equifruit, and Roxanne Joyal, &Back Coffee.

Other panels touched on how Fair Trade supports responsible Canadian supply chains, and shifting international cooperation from aid to Fair Trade, followed by a keynote presentation by Marcos Carol from La Riojana Cooperativa in Argentina.

by Brennah Doyle

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DISCOVERY ORGANICS
www.discoveryorganics.ca

GROCERY & SPECIALTY FOOD WEST



The 2026 Best Booths Awards (in no particular order):

- Single Booth** — Level Ground Coffee Roasters Booth #: 1416
- Double Booth** — Houweling Nurseries Ltd. Booth #: 1108
— Marketed Booth Kraft Heinz Canada Booth #: 715
- Multi Booth** — McCain Foods Booth #: 1021

At 10:00AM, Stewart Samuel of IGD presented “The Next Chapter in Prepared Foods: Winning the Battle for Shopper Attention,” highlighting what is already working today, alongside more forward-looking ideas that are reshaping how retailers compete in this space.

The trade show floor officially opened with a ceremonial ribbon cutting just before 11:00 AM, followed by the official opening, where attendees were eager to explore the wide range of products and services.

Then came the highly anticipated “TOP TEN IN GROCERY AWARDS”! In the morning, editors from leading trade publications, along with a retail committee, voted on their top picks for the “Top 10 in Grocery Awards” chosen amongst the New Product Showcase entries.

The day wrapped with an ‘All Welcome Networking Reception’ at the Insights & Innovations Stage on the trade show floor, followed by an evening reception, Gala Dinner and Awards.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers CFGI celebrated the following Life Member honourees: Independent Grocer Doug Lovsin (Freson Bros.), Industry Partner Jamie Nelson (Pattison Food Group), and Life Partners Brooke & Linda Kynoch (Scotch Creek Market & Safety Mart Foods).

The final day began with a busy conference schedule. A panel discussion, “Grocers at Your Service: The Customer Experience Imperative” with Lauren Redman of Rudy’s Markets; Ron Avery of Calgary Co-op; Brad Fletcher, The Village Grocer and moderated by Emily Crowe, Progressive Grocer, sharing how grocers differentiate through service, local relevance and technology to create shopping experiences.

Dan Chuparkoff, technology executive, AI expert, former technology leader at Google, McKinsey broke down the mystery shrouding AI.

Following the coffee break, attendees chose between concurrent workshops, including: 1) “How Does Your Business Stack Up” with FMS Solutions presented by Joe Sawaged and 2) “2026 Groceryiq Study: The Shopper Pov” with Andie Wright, Sr. research manager for EnsembleIQ, parent company of Canadian Grocer. Next, attendees could choose from another two concurrent workshops: 1) “Cracking The Code!” presented by Brian Bradley, Stong’s Markets, and Giancarlo Trimarchi, Vince’s Market along with moderator Gary Sands, CFGI and 2) “How To Attract Top Talent” hosted by Eric Termuende.

The trade show floor showcased a wide array of products and innovations, with pavilions further highlighting exhibitors that demonstrate the diversity of this trade show. Also featured during trade show hours was the Insights & Innovations Stage sessions. Eric Termuende offered practical ways to improve staff retention and how to keep your diverse staff engaged. This was followed by a session on innovative independents in merchandising, marketing, and customer service and more, presented by Emily Crowe, Progressive Grocer. ●

TOP TEN IN GROCERY

The 2026 winners are (in no particular order):

- BEST DAIRY** — iÖGO Nanö Bubbles
Flavour: Banana Yogurt with Mango Flavoured Popping Bubbles
Booth #: 1015 - Lactalis Canada
- BEST CONDIMENT** — Hellman’s Mayonnaise Sauce
Flavour: Dijonnaise
Booth #: 905 - Unilever Canada
- BEST CONVENIENCE** — Hobbs Pickles
Flavour: Dilly Chips
Booth #: 1906 - Hobbs Pickles Inc.
- BEST DESSERT** — Premium Ice Cream
Flavour: Campfire S’mores
Booth #: 522 - Kawartha Dairy Inc.
- BEST LOCAL** — The Grizzly Paw Soda Company
Flavour: Black Cherry Cola
Booth #: 1744 - The Grizzly Paw Soda Company
- BEST READY TO EAT** — SUN RICE
Flavour: Protein+ Jasmine Rice with Collagen
Booth #: 605 - Libra National Inc.
- BEST CANDY** — BOBALicious Popping Candy
Flavour: Blue Raspberry Blast
Booth #: 1760 - Jimmy Zee’s Distribution Inc.
- BEST FRESH** — Rabbit River Farms
Flavour: Dark Yolk
Booth #: 1308 - Golden Valley Eggs (P&H Foods Inc.)
- BEST FROZEN** — Red Baron Deep Dish Singles
Flavour: Supreme
Booth #: 1314+1315 - Acosta Group (CJ SCHWAN’S)
- BEST SNACK** — Cretors Popcorn
Flavour: Hot Honey
Booth #: 915 - Advantage Solutions



Hits the Mark Again!

From April 21-22, 2026, western Canada’s top grocers gathered at the Vancouver Convention Centre East Building for two days of insights and innovations

The Grocery & Specialty Food West 2026 conference and trade show was a two-day event filled with informative keynotes, innovative technologies and a wide array of new products that will soon make it to the grocery stores.

The event began with breakfast and morning conference at the Vancouver Convention Centre, East Building. Ron Welke, president and CEO of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers (CFG) delivered welcome remarks, followed by “The Health Balancing Act: Navigating Wellness Goals in a Wallet-First World.” This session helped attendees understand the new balance between aspiration and affordability delivered by Carman Allison of NielsenIQ.

Grocery & Specialty Food West will return to Vancouver on April 20 & 21, 2027 at the Vancouver Convention Centre, East Building. www.GSFShow.com

Meridian Farm Market

WHERE THE PEOPLE MAKE THE DIFFERENCE



Meridian Farm Market and full-service butcher shop in Seven Oaks Mall, Abbotsford, BC.

Like so many of the 550-plus staff members who are the backbone of B.C.-based Meridian Farm Market's success, Sarah Sawyer joined Meridian's Tsawwassen store as a teenager, after a friend who worked there gushed about how special the company was among food retailers.

She recalls, "It was a great experience right off the bat. I came from a big box retail environment where relationships among staff and with customers was pretty much non-existent. But despite Meridian being well established, relationships remained a fundamental driver. Plus, my manager was my mentor, which made me feel like I was important and would have a future here."

That was 10 years ago. Sawyer evolved from being grocery manager and produce manager to her current role as Meridian's store manager in Tsawwassen, while her mentor, Bryn Peck, has moved on to become a

district manager. Sawyer now mentors newcomers to the company, and even though she plans to one day marry and have kids, she is confident of her future with Meridian: "They'll have my back, for sure."

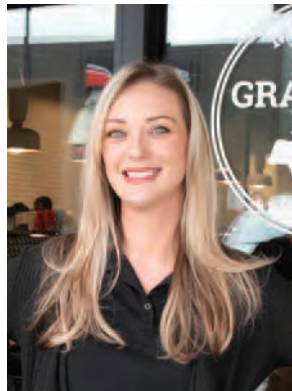
When asked if there was a specific incident that made Sawyer realize Meridian's dedication to staff was genuine, she replies, "When I turned 21 my parents were out of town and I was at work, and my boss travelled from head office to Tsawwassen to give me big '21' balloons and join staff in celebrating my birthday — which I had never told them about. I walked home with my balloons feeling like I was on a cloud."

The 'boss' in question is Kevin Penner, COO of Meridian, whose parents Darrell and Brenda Penner founded Meridian Meats & Seafood in 1989 in Port Coquitlam, B.C. and whose greatest pride in a company that is a gem of a retailer to so many shoppers, is its people.



Kevin Penner, COO, Meridian Farm Market. photo courtesy Phillip Chin

He says, “Customers constantly ask me, ‘Where did you find your staff? They’re so great’ — and I agree. They built Meridian and are singularly responsible for our success. It helps that we’ve all grown up together: I’m 38 and started working for Meridian when I was 14,



Chantel Wright, district manager, Meridian Farm Market. photo courtesy Jeff Malo

so looking out for one another was an inherent part of daily operations, rather than being a company mandate.”

Of course, it helped that Darrell, who for years managed the meat department of a local grocery store prior to launching Meridian, appreciated that good food brings families together. This informed his vision of opening a neighbourhood butcher shop that offered old fashioned style service and quality meats. In addition to he and Brenda managing the first Port Coquitlam store, Brenda’s sister Barbara worked behind the meat counter, and together they made it a point to know

each customer personally.

In this regard nothing has changed, although eight Meridian stores now operate throughout Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, ranging in size from 2,500 to 10,000 square feet and with Meridian Farm Market in Maple Ridge being the head office (augmenting the Meridian business model are three Meridian Meat & Seafood locations, much smaller at ~2,500 square feet but still people-focused and strongly reminiscent in ambience to the butcher shops of Darrell’s youth).

Many of Meridian’s staff spent years hoping to one day work for the Penners. “I thought that every morning when I drove past the Maple Ridge store on my way to work as a meat manager for a big



The bakery department has breads of all kinds baked in-house, and the deli displays a range of smoked, cured, seasoned, and fresh delicacies. photo courtesy Phillip Chin

brand grocery chain,” says Callum Hyams. “I also shopped there, and it was such a warm, welcoming environment, with staff who obviously enjoyed each other’s company.”



Sarah Sawyer, store manager, Meridian Farm Market (Tsawwassen). photo courtesy Jeff Malo

Hyams’ yearning intensified as he plied his trade in what he describes as “a sterile, rigid workplace, typical of big box businesses and hardly something that nurtures skills or inspires loyalty.”

Following his mother’s death in 2019, Hyams, now 30, quit his job and arranged to join another big brand grocer in Agassiz, “but the Maple Ridge Meridian store suddenly popped into my head,” he says. “I applied, explained

my situation to Kevin, and he took a shot on me. After working for so long in retail, I finally found an ideal venue in which I could grow with my colleagues.”

And grow he did. “Callum now runs our busiest butcher shop in B.C. and is helping develop the next group of Meridian leaders,” Penner says.

As a certified meat cutter, Hyams is bullish about Meridian’s dedication to quality: “For example, we’re known for our grass-fed beef, and even in today’s world of high prices and limited budgets, this degree of quality really engages customers and builds loyalty.” So too does the fact that all of Meridian’s meat departments are full-service, old-fashioned style butcher shops, with fresh cuts along with delicacies on display, and special orders and custom cuts fulfilled.

Meanwhile, every bin, basket and barrel in produce is filled with fresh and seasonal fare, with the procurement of locally grown fruits and vegetables (including organic) an abiding priority. The bakery and deli departments exude a traditional ambience, in terms of appearance and function: breads of all kinds are baked in-house, and the delis display a huge range of smoked, cured, seasoned, and fresh delicacies.

But regardless of where in the stores Meridian shoppers gravitate to, friendly and attentive staff are on hand to help. The faces and ages are diverse, but the behaviour is the same: reassuring eye contact, polite discourse, and a seemingly effortless knowledge of all products. Without exception, every staffer speaks in a well-modulated voice — something increasingly uncommon among younger talent.

Sawyer laughs when told of how exceptionally Meridian staff conduct themselves. “Yes, good customer service is hard to come by these days, but new recruits are carefully selected and they’re trained very well. We also try to teach responsibility and allow newcomers to make mistakes and learn from them. This is what encourages a sense of professionalism.”

Hunter Traquair, 21, who as of April had worked for Meridian for four years and was anticipating her new role as manager of the meat department in Port Coquitlam, agrees. “District manager Chantel Wright was part of a job fair at my high school in Mission; I had left my

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The produce aisle is filled with fresh and seasonal fare, with the procurement of locally grown fruits and vegetables. photo courtesy Phillip Chin

job at a fast-food outlet, gave her my resume, and got hired," she recalls. "Like everyone before me, the workplace dynamic encouraged me to learn as much as possible and say yes to everything."

Whether employees such as Traquair were motivated by their environment or possessed can-do traits to begin with, this degree of enthusiasm benefits both employee and company. "Hunter really had no industry experience when she joined us but contributed to a strong culture from day one," Penner says. "We trained her on all aspects of running a meat department, along with leadership. She moved quickly through the ranks and is one of the most genuine people I have worked with."



Hunter Traquair, meat department manager, Meridian Farm Market (Port Coquitlam).

photo courtesy Jeff Malo

The person who hired Traquair, Chantel Wright, has been with Meridian for 17 years, and prior to becoming a district manager she held almost every position within the company. Penner says, "She's been integral to our growth and plays a major role in shaping our culture and how we treat both our team and our customers."

Wright joined Meridian as a 16-year-old high school student. "Back then, it was store owner Josh who explained the company philosophy to me," she says, referring to Darrell and Brenda's eldest son (and Kevin's brother) Josh Penner, who acquired the family business from his parents in 1996 and with his wife Amanda opened a second Maple Ridge store in 2004.



Bikky Thakuri, general manager of Meridian's Farmhouse, the company's warehouse and fulfillment centre for home delivery.

photo courtesy Jeff Malo

Wright continues, "Josh coached everyone on how to treat customers and each other, and it was a simple philosophy: treat everyone as you would family and friends. It created a very nurturing environment and inspired me to stick around."

Despite Meridian being a place not just to work but also forge a career, when Wright turned 24, she left the company to dabble in real estate. "And it was only then I realized how happy I had been at Meridian and how special the company was. So, I returned, determined to give Josh and his colleagues my 100 per cent forever."

Now 33 with a six-year-old son, Wright says, "Show me another place in retail where staff are so respected for their efforts and ideas. In fact, show me a place where their ideas to improve the stores are taken seriously, period."

Meridian's proclivity for fostering skill-building and goodwill even attracts those who could be described as numbers and logistics experts such as Bikky Thakuri; people whose organizational skills have become increasingly important due to the company's evolution (for the record, Meridian's physical growth over the years included Josh's brother-in-law Brody McDermid becoming a partner in 2007; store openings in Langley and White Rock in 2008 and 2010; Kevin joining in the partnership in 2012; and the three brothers taking the business in a new direction with the Meridian Farm Market fresh food retail concept, and by acquiring other local business such as the Fraser Valley mainstay Ralph's Farm Market and wholesaler Canex Foods).

Thakuri is the general manager of Meridian's Farmhouse, the company's warehouse and fulfillment centre established four years ago as a micro fulfillment centre for home delivery. Today, Farmhouse is the hub for the delivery of groceries seven days a week, from West Vancouver to Abbotsford. "This part of the business has grown quickly, and Bikky has played a major role in that success," Penner says. "Farmhouse also acts as a central distribution point for our private label products to our retail stores."

Nepal-born Thakuri, 34, moved to B.C. in 2023; his wife Anita joined Meridian while he worked towards obtaining his MBA, learning the intricacies of warehouse processing from the ground up.

Although it may not have seemed obvious to outsiders, Thakuri's passion for logistics matched perfectly with Meridian's people-centric philosophy. "Anita recommended me to Farmhouse, and I quickly realized that Meridian's core values are mine in terms of management and focusing on continuous improvement."

"The Meridian team had trust in me from the beginning, and in turn I give trust to others who join Farmhouse, which employs about 80 people full time. Improvement, trust, allowing individuals

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All of Meridian's meat departments are full-service, old-fashioned style butcher shops, with fresh cuts, delicacies on display, special orders and custom cuts fulfilled. photo courtesy Phillip Chin

to own our processes: all of this makes me confident that within a year we can double our home delivery growth as a fulfillment centre. Our demand for home delivery is increasing, so this is an exciting time to help Meridian shine with this particular service.”

Meridian's plans for the immediate future are the same as they have always been: to expand methodically, recruit new people, and bring out the best in them. “We are opening two new stores next year, and there's still plenty of opportunities for further openings in Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley: up to 20 new stores, for both Meridian Farm Market and Meridian Meat & Seafood,” Penner says.

While the ideal size of a Meridian Farm Market is about 5,500 square feet, Penner stresses that in today's competitive real estate market on the West Coast, “It's important to be flexible, so we'll work with a wide range of sizes. Regardless, it's the people who have given us the ability to grow, and they'll make any new venue a success.”

Hunter Traquair puts it another way: “I'm only 21, but Meridian's owners have shown me that anything is possible — so I'm eager to see where the flow takes me.”

Callum Hyams adds, “Wherever Meridian goes, I'll follow — gladly.”

Chantel Wright concludes, “Frankly, if my six-year-old son expressed an interest to work for Meridian when he gets older, I think it would be great: I know his best interests would be taken care of, and that he in turn would help take Meridian to the next level.”

Curious about working at Meridian? Apply in-store or at meridianfarmmarket.ca ●



Callum Hyams, store manager, Meridian Meats & Seafood (Coquitlam). photo courtesy Jeff Malo



By Alexei Rudolf

Australian Meats Make Gains in Canada



A Q&A with Henry Vega and Kirsty McCormack

Canada is a growing market for Australian beef and lamb, with more product showing up proudly on menus and retail shelves alike. There are a lot of factors driving the growth, and in looking more closely, there are no signs of a slowdown. The good news is there is room in the supply chain for more retailers and restaurants to take advantage of the opportunity that sourcing from Canada presents. We spoke with Kirsty McCormack with Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), the trade body representing that country's producers of beef, lamb and goat in markets around the world, and also with Henry Vega of Congressum, a Canadian market access expert who helps importers navigate the nuances of the Canadian market. There's a lot to learn, and implications for operators across North America.



Kirsty McCormack, North America marketing development manager, Meat & Livestock Australia.

What have you seen happening in Canada with Aussie beef and lamb?



Henry Vega, Canada trade & market access lead, Congressum Consulting Inc.

[Henry Vega] We've seen a lot of growth for Aussie proteins — lamb consumption in particular has doubled in the last five years. What's especially notable is that Australia as the country of origin has become a value signal. One of our biggest retailers, Loblaw[AR1], calls out Australian Lamb across its banners under the President's Choice (PC) and PC Free From private-label programs. That says a lot about where Australian lamb sits in the minds of Canadian consumers, and also reinforces it. It's a premium product that's worth it. We are witnessing how quality and a consistent eating experience deliver.

[Kirsty McCormack] “Beef and lamb producers in Australia have found a great partner in Canadian retail. As MLA is the farmers' marketing arm we are invested in helping buyers here find success, and so far the results have been fantastic.”

What about in the restaurant space?

[HV] That same dynamic holds, where Aussie lamb earns a callout on the menu as a signal of value and premium. If we switch to beef for a moment, I would add that Wagyu is king right now — we are a beef loving nation, in most comparisons second only to the US per capita — and have discovered that we love Wagyu especially! It's another category where showing those details of Australian origin and even marble score is important to the guest.

[KM] Our Canadian Chef Lambassadors and Beef Mates have been really helpful in foodservice. They've gone to Australia, seen production up close, and come back and shared their stories with their peers. Being able to tell the provenance story, talk about quality, care and red meat production “done right” brings other chefs and buyers on board.

Culturally, how are Australian meats showing up on Canadian tables?

[HV] Grilling is a very big deal here in the warmer months, and in the wintertime braises and dishes like lamb shanks are an anchor dish. Between the West Coast, Ontario, and Quebec there's also a wide range of culture and food trends at play. In Vancouver Asian dishes like sticky lamb ribs are a hot item, and in the big cities here the picanha cut is quickly becoming a favorite.

[KM] Yes! We just worked with Summerhill markets to launch an Australian Wagyu picanha cut at their stores, it's amazing. There's definitely an appetite for at-home steakhouse indulgence as an affordable luxury. I'd add that for lamb especially, the halal certification that most Australian products carry has been really helpful in Canada.

How can readers see if an Australian programme is right for their market?

[KM] Definitely reach out to us here at MLA — we are in-market and motivated to help you find sources of supply and bring them to market successfully. ●



Alexei Rudolf, principal, Foodservice Connections.

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SIAL Canada 2026

A 23rd Edition Crowned with Success on Québec Soil

An exceptional mobilization of Canadian and international agri-food sector stakeholders that reinforces SIAL as the leading trade show in North America

SIAL Canada, North America's largest professional trade show dedicated to the agri-food industry, took place from April 29 to May 1, 2026, at the Palais des congrès de Montréal. It brought together more than 850 exhibitors and 26,000 professionals for the largest edition ever held in Montreal. The 2026 edition stood out for the quality of the business meetings it generated and for showcasing the innovations currently transforming the food industry here and abroad.

More than 90 countries were represented among visitors, and over 55 among exhibitors. The show

recorded a record presence of Canadian exhibitors, along with strong international participation, marked by the return of several countries (South Korea, Spain, the Philippines) and the significant presence of delegations such as Italy, the United States, Greece, Turkey, Poland, and Indonesia. More than thirty partners supported the event, contributing greatly to the vitality of this edition.

"This record-breaking edition in Montreal, with more than 105,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space, highlights the resilience of the Canadian agri-food sector and the appeal of this market for manufacturers from around the world. Buyers and exhibitors share a common goal: diversifying their client and supplier portfolios to conquer new markets, both in Canada and internationally. As the number of countries represented increased this year, it is important to underscore the dynamism of Canadian manufacturers, up 30% compared to last year," explains Stéphane Thuillier, CEO of SIAL Canada.

After an opening day marked by speeches from key figures such as Heath MacDonald (Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food) and Donald Martel (Quebec's Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food), delivered before an audience of roughly forty ambassadors and consuls, more than 30 conferences, workshops, and discussions took place, directly connecting visitors with professionals from across the agri-food industry. Among the program highlights, two conferences drew particular attention: Canadian Agri-Food Chain: Optimizing Interprovincial Collaboration, supported by MAPAQ and Investissement Québec International, and CPG Trajectory: 5 Key Signals to Take Command of the Future, presented in collaboration with LG2.

Once again this year, SIAL Canada continued its commitment to fighting food waste through the SoSIAL program, which collects and redistributes food products locally at the end of the show for the



capsules. New this year: a Retailers' Choice Award, which was given to the Lion's Mane Mushroom Steak from Lion's Mane Mushroom Steak Co.

The 2nd edition of the Canadian Best Cheesemonger Competition showcased the skill and expertise of the country's cheese artisans. Six finalists from Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia faced off live in four technical challenges. In partnership with Fromagerie Yannick, the Quebec Dairy Industry Council (CILQ) and Grocery Business, and with the support of Dairy Farmers of Canada as the title presenter, the competition awarded a \$3,000 prize to winner Anne Gauvreau-Sybillé of Fromagerie Anne et Frères in Montreal's Villeray neighbourhood, enabling her to represent Canada on the world stage in France in 2027.

The Startup Pitch Competition recognized three promising young companies in the agri-food sector, in partnership with NielsenIQ, Pigeon, and the Canadian Food Innovation Network. In the Seed CPG category (0 to 3 years), which highlights early-stage consumer-goods startups, the award was presented to Nasdraw. The Scale CPG category (4 to 6 years), aimed at growth-stage companies ready to expand across the North American market, crowned Les Brutes du Soya. Finally, the FoodTech Award, which celebrates technological innovations transforming the industry, was presented to Maia Farms.

The show will return to Canada from April 27 to 29, 2027, at Toronto's Enercare Center. This year, SIAL will also take place from October 17 to 21 in Paris. Additional shows will be held in Ho Chi Minh City, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, and Mumbai, offering international audiences the opportunity to discover flavours and innovations from dozens of countries, and providing Canadian manufacturers with new market opportunities. The show will return to the Palais des congrès de Montréal from April 19 to 21, 2028.

photos courtesy Bénédicte Brocard



benefit of Moisson Montréal. As revealed during the International Networking Cocktail, presented by Lantic Maple, a total of \$46,000 was donated to Moisson Montréal, with support from FCC through the Drive Away Hunger program and the contribution of Lantic Maple. More than 1,600 lbs of food were collected during the show.

During the show, the SIAL Innovation competition, held in partnership with L'Actualité Alimentaire, Western Grocer and NielsenIQ, highlighted the most innovative consumer and foodservice products launched since January 2025. The Gold Award was presented to Kunana's Unsweetened Banana Milk, the Silver Award to La Terre du 9's Black Garlic Sauce (soy-sauce style), and the Bronze Award to Les Beurrés for their range of flavored butters in aluminum



BRANDS
HAVE POWER
BECAUSE OF THE VALUE
PROPOSITION BEHIND THEM

THE POWER OF BRANDS

When one thinks of major “power brands”, they are usually associated with multi-nationals in the United States or Europe, or, if Canadian, produced in the industrial heartland of Ontario. The Western Canadian provinces are hardly given a second thought.

Western Canada, however, is home to some of this country’s top brands. Many of these have had decades long staying power or have gone on to be bought up by large multi-nationals (as in the case of formally Winnipeg based Pizza Pops). Many are leaders in their category nationwide such as Old Dutch, SunRype, Chemo, Nature’s Path, Ocean Wise or Elman’s.

Western Canada’s iconic brands have been getting a boost because of consumers’ desire to buy local. A new survey conducted for Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) found that Canadians are inclined to buy locally produced goods and services and are willing to pay a

HERE ARE THE KEY PILLARS OF THE VALUE PROPOSITION FOR BRANDED FOOD:

1 Trust and Safety:

Consumers often feel safer with a known brand because it offers assurance of quality, safety, and consistent taste. Trusted brands provide security in safety standards and, increasingly, transparency in sourcing (e.g., organic, non-GMO).

2 Emotional Connection and Lifestyle:

Branded foods often evoke fond memories and comfort, linking products to personal traditions, childhood, or culture. Premium brands allow consumers to express identity or enjoy indulgent, luxurious experiences. Identity Alignment: Brands like Ben & Jerry’s or fair-trade coffee connect with consumers who share specific social, environmental, or ethical values.

3 Consistency and Reliability:

A key value is knowing that the product will taste the same every time, which reduces the mental effort required to make a purchasing decision.

4 Convenience and Practicality:

Branded foods often emphasize ease of preparation or portability to help consumers save time and effort. Dietary Compliance: Brands often excel at providing specialized, reliable options for specific needs (e.g., gluten-free, vegan).

5 Differentiation in a Saturated Market:

A brand tells a story, uses distinct visuals, or provides a unique formulation that sets it apart from commodity products. Strong brands enjoy higher recognition, allowing them to remain the “default” choice despite competition from lower-cost alternatives.

premium to get them. The BDC survey of more than 1,000 Canadian consumers, conducted by Ipsos, indicates that 45% of respondents had made a specific effort to buy Canadian in recent months. Additionally, 24% said they had made an effort to buy goods made in their province. More than half of respondents (55%) rated buying from local stores as a key selection factor, while 41% said buying local products was a key selection factor. These two criteria topped a list of social factors motivating buying decisions.

Brands have power because of the value proposition behind them. They offer consumers trust, consistency, and emotional connection in a crowded marketplace. While private-label (store) brands compete on price, branded products leverage brand equity to command higher loyalty and premium pricing by promising a superior, reliable experience.

Brand manufacturers, of course, must navigate challenges posed by retailers that often prioritize their own private-label products, especially as continued economic uncertainty drives consumers to tighten their budgets. But their resiliency will always ensure a prominent place on shelves.

In what follows, we feature some of these top Western Canadian brands and what makes them great. ●





Okanagan Icon SunRype Shines On

SunRype: the brand evokes sunshine, freshness, and great taste

— appropriate images, given that the company’s roots date back to 1946, when fruit growers in the Okanagan created BC Fruit Processing Ltd. to utilize the region’s abundant apple crop. SunRype pure apple juice was the first product, and its popularity led to many other fruit and vegetable creations bearing the familiar sunrise logo.

By the mid-1950s the brand was a household name in Western Canada. Today, Sun-Rype Products Ltd. maintains brand prominence by staying true to its original values of “crafting delicious, feel-good products that families love to share,” says Barb Grant, vice president, marketing – snacks North America. “We’re consistently recognized as one of Canada’s most trusted juice and snack brands in national consumer trust awards.”

The SunRype team recognize that brand success typically inspires imitators, thus intensifying the need to create new offerings. So, while the flagship Blue Label 100% pure apple juice remains a family favourite across the West, the Slim fruit beverages offer a lighter option on trend with consumers looking for less sugar and calories. Slim is available in five flavours, each with just 1 gram of sugar and only 10 calories.

Product expansion is also important to maintaining brand power. Fruit to Go, the cornerstone of SunRype’s snacks portfolio, now comes in a wide range of flavours and formats including strips, fun shaped bites, easy-peel strips, sours, and more – all made from the same fruit puree produced from fresh apples at the company’s Kelowna facility.

Grant says, “Today’s consumers are reaching for lower-sugar, clean-label options and looking for functional benefits like added protein and fiber. Demand for gluten-free, nut-free, and vegan snacks continues to grow as well. Canadian families want convenient, wholesome choices they can feel good about – and that’s exactly where SunRype shines.”

Caroline Miron, vice president, Beverage Marketing and Innovation, is confident that the SunRype brand is resilient enough to withstand the cost pressures and other challenges facing food manufacturers. In fact, the company is growing market share, with momentum building in Central and Eastern Canada as more families discover what the brand is all about.

On the product side, consumers’ appetite for plant-based, allergen-friendly, and functional snacks opens doors for innovation beyond the company’s traditional 100 percent fruit snack lineup (a recent launch of SunRype Good Bites Superseed Oat bars is a great example, bringing grains and superseeds into the mix).

Miron concludes, “We have products that fit well with families seeking clean-label, allergen-friendly options along with the shift toward lower-sugar, natural, and functional products. SunRype fits naturally in the environment consumers are looking for – our commitment to simple, wholesome ingredients and better-for-you innovation keeps us moving in the right direction.

“Looking ahead, we’re growing our beverage and snack portfolios, deepening national distribution, and staying close to what consumers want next.”

SunRype fits naturally in the environment consumers are looking for—our commitment to simple, wholesome ingredients and better-for-you innovation keeps us moving in the right direction.





By Robin Brunet

Identity Building

BRANDING IS VITAL AT A TIME OF SKYROCKETING PRICES

If developed with persistence and a clear objective, branding builds long-term loyalty by allowing consumers to know what to expect from the company it represents.

More than ever, it is vital to the Canadian grocery sector: at a time of skyrocketing prices, products bearing familiar, reassuring logos tend to be put into baskets, while less recognizable alternatives risk staying on shelves.

Taylor Johnson, senior vice-president – retail sales of Edmonton-based Cheemo, reports that his company (which was launched in an 800 sqft strip mall in 1972) is going gangbusters: it is represented by every major retailer nationally, and inroads are being made in western U.S. The product driving this success – and something that made Cheemo an indelible brand – is deceptively simple: perogies.

Cheemo controls 75 per cent of the perogy market in Canada, thanks partly to a patented extrusion method invented by founders Walter and Eileen Makowecki that produces three million of the dumplings daily.

Cheemo has arguably achieved the pinnacle of brand success in that the brand and the product are inextricably linked; and it all began with the Makoweckis' determination to provide time-starved local families with a healthy, affordable product that is easy to make.

"During the early days of Cheemo's growth, when it was gaining exposure in regional fares throughout Canada, one aspect that was the cornerstone of the brand was the claim that our perogies could feed a family of four for under five dollars – and that remains the intent of the company today," Johnson says.

Cheemo has stayed true to its Canadian roots, sourcing from a supply chain within the country and strictly adhering to basic ingredients. "Being flour-

"THE CORNERSTONE OF THE BRAND WAS THE CLAIM THAT OUR PEROGIES COULD FEED A FAMILY OF FOUR FOR UNDER FIVE DOLLARS – AND THAT REMAINS THE INTENT OF THE COMPANY TODAY," JOHNSON SAYS.

and potato-based and cooked in boiling water, perogies are not only appealing to busy families but also to consumers who don't want to put ingredients they can't pronounce into their bodies," Johnson says.

The simplicity of Cheemo's offerings also encourage increased basket sizes, as shoppers seek sour cream, fresh onions, bacon bits, sausage and other stuffings for their perogies.

The growth of the Cheemo brand has resulted in



product diversification: 14 skus in total with packaging ranging from 745 grams up to 2 kilograms. True to the Makoweckis' original intent, the pricing ranges from \$2.77 to \$4.50 per box (even the large 2kg packages sell for only \$8.49). Correspondingly, the company has grown physically too: it is in its fourth Edmonton production location, with the Makoweckis' son, Joe, the president and CEO.

An abiding sense of pride infuses operations, and although Cheemo has elevated the humble perogy far beyond its origin as an ethnic food, Johnson says there is still room for growth. "There are plenty of opportunities to attract new consumers, especially in Ontario and Quebec," he points out.

However, one thing that won't change is the branding, especially the famous red and white Cheemo logo. "In fact we have no plans to change anything," Johnson says. "Fifty-five years ago, the Makoweckis launched Cheemo based on the goal of affordability, and we feel very fortunate to be so widely recognized. So, like the old saying goes, 'if it isn't broken, don't try to fix it.'"

As any experienced food manufacturer will attest, quality products alone don't guarantee success. Branding helps differentiate businesses from their competitors, builds customer loyalty – and opens the door for expansion into new markets. As economic uncertainty continues to influence consumer purchases in the food sector, failing to build a robust and consistent brand presence is simply not an option for either new or established manufacturers. ●



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Taylor Johnson, director of national sales, Heritage Frozen Foods.



By Robin Brunet

Keep Buzzing On!

BEE MAID – THE ONLY CANADIAN HONEY COMPANY THAT SOURCES ALL ITS HONEY FROM ITS OWNERS.

Virtually all big brands stem from a good idea that is brought to fruition over time, but some brands are helped along by the inherent uniqueness of their business operations – and that applies to Bee Maid Honey.

Bee Maid Honey is the only Canadian honey company that sources all its honey from its owners: more than 300 beekeepers across the Prairie Provinces who are members of the Manitoba and Alberta honey co-operatives. It markets and distributes honey products (branded as BeeMaid) from two packing facilities located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Spruce Grove, Alberta. Another uncommon aspect of the company’s business model is its in-house blow molding capability at the Alberta plant: here, custom plastic honey bottles are manufactured.

Shannon Bowden, senior brand & communications manager for Bee Maid Honey, says of the blow molding facility, “It gives us ultimate control, from product concept to production.”

Bee Maid’s origins are noteworthy: it commenced operation in 1954 when the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Honey Co-Operatives agreed to market all their honey jointly. In 1961, the Alberta Honey Co-op joined with the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Co-ops to form Bee Maid Honey, which today accounts for about 10 per cent of Canadian honey processing.

The BeeMaid brand was fortified by a series of achievements over the decades, including supplanting other brands (in the 1970s it acquired the Beekist brand name from the Ontario Honey Producers Co-operative, and replaced Clover Crest of Manitoba, Sasko of Saskatchewan, and Alta Sweet of Alberta); delving into television advertising in the 1980s; and, in 2024, opening a new plant in Winnipeg and significantly expanding the Spruce Grove facility.

Bee Maid has also benefited from the consumer trends of ‘knowing where your food comes from’ and



A selection of Bee Maid’s honey products including pure liquid honey and pure creamed honey proudly owned by Canadian beekeepers.

Capping all of these initiatives is a steady release of new products, and Bowden says of 2026, “BeeMaid has introduced two hot honey products that are gaining strong traction with foodservice and private label customers, with additional hot honey flavours currently in development. Later this year, we will also introduce an innovation within our Raw Honey lineup; we can’t say too much about it yet, but it will enable consumers to enjoy our Raw Honey in a new and easier way.”

As for how Bee Maid is faring during this era of unprecedented high prices in grocery stores, Bowden says, “We don’t really share sales data, but I can state that strong honey production from Bee Maid Honey’s members has positioned the company to continue growing in both domestic and international markets.”

Bowden concludes, “The Bee Maid brand has been a staple in the Canadian marketplace since the 1950s. Our logo has stood the test of time and has become synonymous with quality 100 per cent Canadian honey – so there are no plans to change it.” ●



Shannon Bowden, senior brand and communications manager for Bee Maid Honey.

“STRONG HONEY PRODUCTION FROM BEE MAID HONEY’S MEMBERS HAS POSITIONED THE COMPANY TO CONTINUE GROWING IN BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS,” BOWDEN SAYS.

‘buy local’; and the evolution of its brand into something instantly recognizable on store shelves has been facilitated by close business relationships, which Bowden says includes “Working closely with our retail and foodservice partners to provide a full lineup of honey products tailored to their operational needs, customer preferences, and merchandising goals.”



Canadian Grand Prix New Product Awards

New Product Awards Finalists Raise the Bar on Function, Convenience, and Value

Retail Council of Canada (RCC) is excited to reveal the finalists for the 33rd Annual Canadian Grand Prix New Product Awards. This year’s finalists represent 88 of the most impressive food and non-food products launched into the Canadian market in 2025 across both private label and national brands.

Across food and non-food categories, four priorities are defining the next wave of innovation: convenience without compromise, functional benefits, accessible premium quality, and embedded sustainability.

The 2025 food finalists are increasingly delivering restaurant-quality results in simplified formats, while embedding functional benefits such as protein, probiotics, and reduced sugar into everyday items.

Wellness, sustainability, and targeted functionality continue to shape development across home care, personal care, and household essentials with non-food category finalists offering premium features at accessible price points, using advanced materials and technologies.

“This year’s submissions reflect a grocery sector

that is highly responsive to changing consumer expectations. Products are being developed to deliver meaningful benefits, whether that's improved nutrition, greater convenience, or more sustainable solutions," said Kim Furlong, president and CEO, Retail Council of Canada. "What stands out most is the ability of retailers and manufacturers to bring together quality, functionality, and value in ways that resonate with Canadians' everyday lives."

Long recognized as the industry's hallmark of product excellence, the Canadian Grand Prix New Product Awards are raising the bar in 2026 with an expansion designed to make the program an even more powerful driver of category growth and shopper engagement.

Three strategic additions will take effect for the 2026 awards cycle:

Product Ratings & Reviews in Partnership with Caddle

All winning products will now receive third-party ratings and reviews from Caddle's receipt-verified 100% Canadian consumer panel, providing brands with feedback from real purchasers and in-market performance insights.

New Finalist and Winner Seals for Packaging

A new visual identity launches with distinctive seals that brands can leverage on packaging, in-store displays, and marketing materials.

Expanded Judging Panel

New jurors have joined the evaluation process from Canadian Living, Postmedia, and BuzzFeed, bringing deeper expertise in lifestyle and consumer categories.

This year's jury is chaired by Chef Poyan Danesh, an award-winning culinary leader with deep roots in Canada's food innovation landscape, currently serving as culinary director at Ocean Mama Seafood and competition chair for the Chefs' Table Society of British Columbia. The Canadian Grand Prix jury of 30 food and grocery industry experts evaluated products based on innovation, taste, texture, consumer value, and packaging. The rigorous evaluation process required that to become a finalist, a product needed to receive an overall score of at least 70 per cent. ●

THE COMPLETE LIST OF FINALISTS IS NOW POSTED ON THE CANADIAN GRAND PRIX NEW PRODUCT AWARDS WEBSITE.

Winners to be Announced on June 3, 2026

The winners of the key categories and five specialty awards will be announced live at the 33rd Canadian Grand Prix New Product Award Gala Dinner on June 3, 2026 at the Toronto Congress Centre. The Gala will mark the closing celebration of RCCSTORE26, RCC's premier retail industry conference.

Tickets for the Gala are available at RCCGrandPrix.ca



FINALISTS FOR THE RETAIL COUNCIL OF CANADA CANADIAN GRAND PRIX NEW PRODUCT AWARDS

FOOD FINALISTS

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CONSUMER PACKAGED GOODS



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 WF BAR DOWN BLAST
 WF FULLY COOKED KOREAN STYLE PORK BACK RIBS
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 WF OH! CANADA KETTLE COOKED POTATO CHIPS

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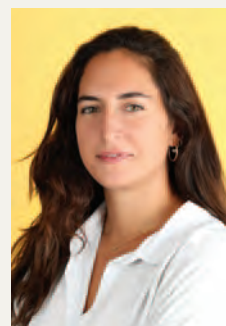


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TRUST YOUR GUT: HOW TO HELP CONSUMERS NAVIGATE THEIR WELLNESS JOURNEY

A study by Activia noted that over half of Canadians want to improve their digestive health but don't know where to begin.

This is where science-backed and credible education on digestive health becomes essential to help consumers make the right choices for their needs and navigate the sea of misinformation on gut health, explains Melisa Bayrav, senior brand manager with Activia Canada.



Melisa Bayrav,
senior brand manager,
Activia Canada.

"Retailers are essential partners in helping consumers make informed and accurate choices about their digestive wellness," she says, noting, for example, it's a common misconception that all yogurts contain probiotics and that they are all made equal.

Brands can offer the science — Activa's shopper campaign, the Activa Gut Health Challenge, for example, connected evidence-backed knowledge with simple, actionable habits — but retailers must make it understandable at the store level.

CHFA research shows that while many Canadians are open to brands' wellness claims, only about 48 per cent say they somewhat trust them. Lynsey Walker, VP of Marketing & Communications with the association, says

retailers can help close that gap by making products easier to navigate, whether that's through clearer signage, organizing by benefit like gut health or immunity, or simple messaging that helps shoppers quickly understand what a product is for.

Reframing how products are presented and placed can also reduce barriers to understanding benefits and being put in baskets.

The team at The Noble Bean Team notes that tempeh often gets lost in the vegan bunker. To fix this, the brand is focusing on in-store education and staff advocacy.

"If we move the conversation from 'meat alternative' to 'real fermented whole food,' we can reach a much larger demographic," they note. "We'd love to see retailers group tempeh with other 'real food' items like kimchi and sauerkraut. Even though we're in the freezer, having signage or "shout-outs" near the refrigerated ferments helps bridge that gap and reminds customers we're part of that same gut-health family."

Along with a heavy emphasis on in-store demos — "It's about moving from 'What is this?' to 'I can cook this tonight' in seconds" — Noble Bean is putting a major focus on retailer staff education.

"We want the people working the aisles to know exactly why tempeh is a gut-health powerhouse. When staff can confidently explain that it's a whole-bean ferment, they become our best on-the-floor salespeople and better equipped to help customers with their gut-health needs."

kefir as part of what "I eat in a day for a healthy gut" trending social content.

All this is driving a boom in fermented foods, prebiotics, and probiotics. According to Innova Market Insights data, there has been a 42 per cent global rise in beverage and food launches with digestive claims. It also noted gut health was identified as the second leading industry trend behind "powerhouse protein."

"We're seeing some of the biggest growth in beverages, snacks, and everyday food categories — especially products that make wellness feel convenient and approachable," says Lynsey Walker, VP of marketing & communications, CHFA.

Walker points to functional beverages as a great example. Kombucha has been a staple in the category for quite some time, but brands like Gingerbug are experimenting with bold flavours, including spicy and botanical profiles, while companies like Happy Gut are bringing products like water kefir into more everyday beverage formats.

According to Grand View Research, North America's kombucha market reached \$2.1 billion in 2025. Canada represents roughly 15 per cent of the sales



courtesy shutterstock.com

A survey by Activia revealed that 93 per cent of Canadians consider gut health in their food choices.

— around \$315 million in 2025 — growing at 13–14 per cent annually. It's also showing up in moments that used to belong exclusively to coffee, soda, or alcohol.

Functional sodas are also showing up in these areas of consumption, and are challenging kombucha for the top-contending, gut-health beverage.

"The growth we've experienced together and the genuine relationships behind the brand, truly feels like growing alongside a family business"

What really stands out to me [about Living Alchemy] is the uniqueness of the products and the exceptional quality you can feel in every formula. The growth we've experienced together and the genuine relationships behind the brand, truly feel like growing alongside a family business—there's an organic, supportive partnership that's rare to find.

Teresa D'Addario
Co Founder, Director of Supplement
and Health and Beauty
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SURVEY SAYS

Last year, a first-of-its-kind network was launched to help Canadians better understand the health benefits of fermented foods and even make them part of national nutrition guidelines. The Canadian Fermented Foods Initiative (CFFI) brings together Canadian and European scientists, chefs, health professionals, and food producers to share research, recipes, and science-based expertise on fermented foods.

In one of their first reports, the group surveyed more than 4,000 Canadians about their knowledge and consumption of fermented foods:

- The report found fermented foods are already widely consumed. On average, Canadians regularly consume about 11 of the 18 most common fermented food types, which include yogurt, kefir, cheese, sour cream, miso, tempeh, soy sauce, other fermented soy-based products like gochujang, fermented vegetables (e.g., sauerkraut, kimchi), kombucha, vinegar, and fermented meats, fish, and fruits.
- Yogurt and cheese were the most commonly eaten, followed by foods such as soy sauce, sauerkraut, sour cream, and vinegar.

On average, Canadians regularly consume about 11 of the 18 most common fermented food types.

- Of those consuming fermented food, they did so mostly for taste rather than health.
- About two-thirds of Canadians said they would be open to trying new fermented foods, but taste and smell were cited as major barriers.

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PRODUCT SHOWCASE

BRANDS YOU SHOULD HAVE ON SHELF

Activia

Arguably the most well-known, gut-healthy name in Canadian grocery, Activia yogurt is the #1 family doctor-recommended probiotic food and beverage brand. Made with real fruits and exclusive probiotics, Activia products are proudly prepared in Canada and serve as a source of other essential daily nutrients. Building on over 35 years of global science and experience, Activia is constantly driving innovation to support Canadians' needs and benefits for their digestive health. Stay tuned for more to come from the brand in 2026.



The Noble Bean

Unlike ultra-processed plant proteins that are engineered in a lab, The Noble Bean's tempeh is a traditional whole food. By fermenting the whole bean, all that natural fibre stays intact while the fermentation process makes the nutrients much easier for the body to absorb. It's real food that actually does what it's supposed to do. The brand is currently in the R&D phase for a pre-marinated tempeh line, with flavours such as savoury Teriyaki. The goal is to keep a clean label while cutting down prep time for busy families.



Brightside Organics

Food is most nutritious when it is in its natural form. That's why Brightside created Natura Fibre, an all-natural fibre boost that lets the wholefood and organic ingredients do what they do best — nourish the body. Made with the clean goodness of psyllium husk, ground flax, dandelion root, burdock root, and fenugreek seed, the blend boasts insoluble fibre, soluble fibre, and the added benefits of the herbs, for full gut health benefits. Natura Fibre can also be easily mixed into everyday — whether in smoothie or on oatmeal, sprinkled on salads or soups, or baked right into homemade goods.



According to Grand View Research, in 2025, the Canadian prebiotic and probiotic soda market generated USD 20.7 million in sales and is projected to reach USD 37.0 million by 2030. Top brands like Poppi and Olipop are being touted for their gut-health, along with being lower in sugar compared to traditional sodas, making daily enjoyment and health benefits an easy sell.

There's also a similar shift in snacks and convenient meal solutions. Walker points to B.C.-based company Crumblz, for using pulses to create meat-free protein products with prebiotic fibre, and Nuts for Cheese, which are incorporating fermentation into plant-based staples,



courtesy shutterstock.com

making it easy for consumers to work those benefits into their everyday routines.

"What makes brands like this stand out is that they're delivering functional benefits in formats that still feel fun, flavourful, and familiar," says Walker. "That's really what's driving momentum across these categories."

Interest in wellness, including gut health, isn't going anywhere. What's changing is how consumers make decisions, notes Walker, adding people are becoming much more intentional about what they buy; reading labels, comparing products, and looking for claims they can actually trust. "That means the opportunity today isn't just about innovation — it's about clarity and credibility. The brands that stand out will be the ones that make wellness feel easy to understand, relevant, and trusted to incorporate into everyday life." ●

By: Lynsey Walker, VP Marketing & Communications, CHFA

The Greenhouse at CHFA NOW Toronto 2026

A NEW DESTINATION FOR RETAIL DISCOVERY

Retailers come to CHFA NOW Toronto for one reason above all: product discovery. It's where new trends emerge, innovative products launch, and the founders shaping the future of natural, organic, and wellness (NOW) take their first big steps into the market. This year, CHFA is making that experience even more powerful with the debut of The Greenhouse — a reimagined, expanded destination on the trade show floor designed to spotlight what's new, next, and noteworthy.

Retailers may remember Incubator Alley from past shows — The Greenhouse is the next evolution of that well-known space. CHFA builds on its success by expanding the footprint, creating more room for founders to grow and giving retailers more space to discover innovation.

At its core, The Greenhouse is about connection — connecting retailers with founders, stories, and products that are just beginning to shape the Canadian NOW landscape. Within the space, retailers will find a thoughtful mix of Seed-Stage brands, those in the earliest phases of launch, and Scale-Stage brands, which are gaining traction and ready to expand into new markets. This combination offers a unique opportunity: discover hidden gems before they break out, while also identifying emerging brands that are primed for retail shelves.

What we're most excited about? Only Canadian brands are eligible to exhibit in this space, reinforcing CHFA's commitment to strengthening the domestic



For retailers, sourcing Canadian brands supports stronger storytelling, more agile partnerships, and a deeper connection with customers. The Greenhouse makes it easier to tap into that opportunity.

Beyond product discovery, The Greenhouse is designed to spark meaningful connection. Retailers meet founders face-to-face, hear the inspiration behind their brands, and build lasting relationships that extend beyond the show floor.

The Greenhouse makes its debut at CHFA NOW Toronto at Exhibition Place from September 25-27, 2026. As Canada's leading trade show for the natural,



ecosystem. By elevating homegrown entrepreneurs, CHFA is not only supporting individual businesses — it's fostering a more resilient, connected, and competitive industry across the country.

This focus matters. Canadian consumers continue to prioritize shopping local, with 41% actively looking for "locally made" claims — the top claim identified in CHFA's Trust, Transparency and Tradeoff study followed by natural ingredients and "free from" claims.

organic, and wellness industry, CHFA NOW continues to be where innovation comes to life — and where retailers discover what's next. We look forward to welcoming retailers to The Greenhouse to discover the next generation of Canadian brands shaping the future of wellness. ●

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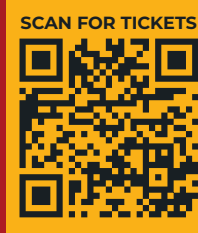
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ITALIAN FOODS

By Karen Barr

Pasta and Beyond

Canada's Growing Appetite for Italian Cuisine

Google Trends data show that Canada ranks among the top countries worldwide for searches for Italian recipes. The Canadian pasta market alone is expected to grow from \$3145.53 million USD in 2025 to \$4125 million USD by 2035, according to Market Research Future's analysis. Deep Market Insights statistics show the Canadian pasta sauce market stood at USD \$1,096.27 million in 2024 and is expected to grow to USD \$1,506.65 million by 2033. Based on data gathered in 2024, tomato-based sauces were the most in demand.

Yet, there is so much more to Italian food than pasta and sauce. What are some key products, merchandising methods, and special events that can help keep grocery store basket counts high?

Gigi's Italian & Specialty Foods is a family-owned Italian and specialty food retailer in Victoria, British Columbia, founded in 2022. Within its small 2,000-square-foot space, it offers specialty meats, cheeses, ready-made meals, and pantry items such as olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and pasta.

The ready-made meals are popular with seniors and empty nesters looking for single or double servings. Busy families seeking to put high-quality, ready-to-enjoy meals on the table after a long workday also shop this section for convenience. "Our top-selling meals in this section include meat or vegetarian lasagna, frozen Neapolitan pizzas, and stuffed pasta," says Genna Purcel, spokesperson for Gigi's Italia & Specialty Foods.

As for desserts, Purcell points to classic cannoli, an almond-lemon cake known as Torta Della Nonna, and tiramisu, all crafted by Bindi in Milano, Italy.



Gigi's Italian & Specialty Foods in Victoria, BC, carries a large selection of imported, Canadian and local specialty items, with a focus on Italian cuisine.



Genna Purcel, spokesperson for Gigi's Italian & Specialty Foods.

Note to grocers: Food Network experts chose tiramisu as the dessert of the year in 2026. There is plenty of opportunity to capitalize on this trend. Look beyond traditional flavours to include something different for customers, such as chocolate, pistachio, Limoncello or pumpkin.

"We offer in-store sampling three to four days a week. This is typically managed in-house and focuses on items that are easy to prepare, such as specialty cheeses and spreads," Purcell explains. "We also have an olive oil and balsamic vinegar tasting bar where customers can sample a curated selection of our favourite products. After customers taste the products, they tend to sell exceptionally well."

When it comes to merchandising, Purcell says, "We use shelf talkers that

educate customers about select products, how they can be used, and what makes them special. Many contain QR codes linking directly to curated recipes." Then, she continues by saying, "Ongoing product education empowers the team to share their knowledge confidently, strengthening trust and enhancing customer satisfaction. Many customers shop with recipes in mind, often searching aisles for specific ingredients."

ROHIT SARAM

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aws

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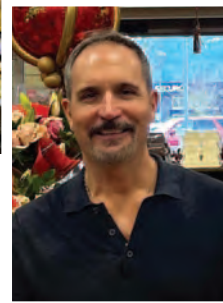


Michael Myers, the merchandising specialist for Country Grocer, the family-owned grocery store chain with 11 locations spread across Vancouver Island and Salt Spring Island, talks about visuals. “When I merchandise the Italian section for the stores, I block products in groups starting with what is most affordable for the customer, through to mid-range, and then higher-priced items.”

Keeping innovation up is key when merchandising. “A couple of years ago, I came up with the idea of having a cooler in the middle of the Italian section.

Normally, it can be a bit boring to have boxes of food lined up, but with a lit-up cooler and fresh pasta, customers stop and take notice. We rolled out the idea in two stores, but now almost all of our stores have one.”

About cross-merchandising, Myers says, “In the bakery section, near the bread racks, I’ve had cabinets built to hold pasta, jarred pasta sauces, and basil for a complete meal. The items on display are always changing, but it’s helpful for customers looking for a quick dinner. Everything they need is right there.”



Michael Myers, merchandising specialist, Country Grocer.

When it comes to Italian dessert selections, Myers points to the in-house-made tiramisu trifle with real whipped cream or the baked lemon ricotta from the Italissima brand.

Next, Myers names two big trends in Italian food. “Fresher sauces like Italian cherry tomato sauces and bronze die-cut pastas. This pasta is definitely my preference, for colour, with some of the semolina still apparent, and taste and chew factor. It’s real pasta from Italy.

Most mass-produced pasta is made with Teflon dies, producing noodles that are smooth and shiny. Yet it doesn’t hold sauce well. Bronze-die pasta, sometimes called bronze die-cut or al bronzo, is created by pushing dough through bronze moulds, known as dies. This not only shapes the pasta but also gives it a rough and porous texture.

As for upcoming promotions, Myers says, “We are having a big Parmesan wheel cutting event in the stores, in which we will wrap and sell all the rough-cut Parmesan afterward.”

Italian food is definitely a crowd pleaser across all demographics. Shoppers are increasingly looking for authentic ingredients, convenient meal options, and high-quality imported products that bring restaurant-style flavours home. By stocking the shelves, coolers, and freezers with classic and on-trend products and presenting eye-catching visual displays and special events, grocers can boost sales on all things Italian. ●

The Puratos Canada Bakery School



Providing Quality Education & Opportunities for Graduates

Earlier this year, Puratos, a global leader in supplying innovative ingredients for the bakery industry opened their first Canadian bakery school. The program was created to help address a clear shortage of skilled labour in the Canadian baking industry, while also reinforcing a commitment to education, workforce development, and long-term industry sustainability.

“At Puratos, we believe that investing in education is one of the best ways to empower people and communities, and to make a tangible impact on society,” says Julie Istead, VP, research & development at Puratos Canada.

The program is designed to support local high school students, specifically those in grades 10-12, who are interested in careers in baking, pastry, chocolate, or the broader food-service industry. It places a strong emphasis on underserved communities and inclusive education pathways, with neurodivergent students expected to make up approximately 50% of participants.

“The focus on neurodivergent students came about from a conversation with one of our key customers who expressed concerns over the high unemployment rate among Canadian youth, particularly those with learning differences, based on her family’s experience,” Istead explains.

Students often face barriers such as limited access to hands-on, industry-relevant training, lack of early career exposure, youth employment gaps in underserved communities, and insufficient inclusive pathways for neurodivergent learners. These challenges can make it difficult to gain the skills, confidence, and professional connections needed to enter the industry.

Today, the Puratos Bakery School program operates 15 schools across 11 countries, with ambition to expand even further in the coming years. In 2025 alone, the Foundation had 480 students enrolled, 166 graduates in one year, and nearly 700 graduates since the beginning.

The Puratos Canada Bakery School is developed in partnership with the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and operates near Puratos’ Mississauga facility at Father Michael Goetz Catholic Secondary School. This allows students to engage directly with industry professionals through guest speakers, mentorship, and program support through close collaboration.

Students follow an intensive program of around 1,600 hours of training, combining technical expertise with essential life and professional skills. The curriculum provides hands-on training in bakery, patisserie, chocolate and complementary culinary skills. Students develop food safety and food hygiene knowledge, communication and teamwork skills, financial and digital basics, and exposure to real industry environments.

In addition, Puratos has received verbal commitments from key customers who want to support the program and use it as a future talent pipeline. Each year new students will join the program, creating a larger group of Puratos Canada Bakery School graduates.

“Many students entering high school next year have already reached out to the DPCDSB to inquire on how to register for the program,” Istead adds.

Employers recognize the quality of the training, creating long-term value not only for students, but for the industry as a whole. Another school opening is planned this year in Dominican Republic. By 2030, their goal is to reach 20 schools and 1,000 students per year, while continuing to connect graduates with job opportunities in the bakery sector. ●



Julie Istead, VP, research & development, Puratos Canada.

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S'mores!

COOKIES

By Ronda Payne



Sweet Indulgences to Savour

The power of cookies certainly isn't crumbling given new flavours, seasonal offerings, mini bites and less waste

A lunch-box staple or an indulgent treat, Canadians love their cookies. While belts may be tightening during the weekly shop, consumers aren't likely to give up one of their favourite pleasures when it comes to keeping costs down in the basket.

That isn't to say there won't be change. Shoppers may make different choices, such as turning to new size formats, new flavours or options with less packaging to get their sweet fix. They may also bounce between grocery-aisle and bakery section cookie choices.

Canada's cookie category growth has been relatively flat in units sold in 2025 over 2024 according to Lisa Zdunich, Canadian sales and marketing manager with Walker's Shortbread, who referred to end of 2025 data from AC Nielsen. Nielsen also indicates Western Canada's cookie category is worth about \$313 million and is bucking the flat-line national trend with modest growth of about 3.5 per cent.

"It's an extremely fragmented category with a lot of brands and lots of skus," says Zdunich. "Not to mention the substantial private label presence in Canada."

She says Nielsen reports private label cookies are one of the larger segments within the category at 12 per cent, but this is not a source of growth. Branded cookies are leading the way, and one segment of this is mini cookies, which have grown 17 per cent over last year.



Lisa Zdunich, Canadian sales and marketing manager with Walker's Shortbread.



Products available across Canada. For more information, contact us directly at 250-546-0311 or info@okfrozendough.com





A selection of cookies available at Pepper's Foods, including double chocolate, oatmeal raisin, chocolate chip, and ginger molasses.

Walker's Shortbread has taken advantage of the trend in minis with its recent launch of the Shortbread Mini Easter Egg Bag which is already planned to return in 2027. Also, mini tins are scheduled to be out this summer in three designs.

"These tins make perfect little everyday gifts for special occasions and will be a great collectible tin for consumers to use afterwards," Zdunich says. "A great in/out opportunity for stores to add some variety to their offering."

Julie Therrien, business development director with Groupe Leclerc says mini cookies is definitely having its trending moment.

"Many companies play in this space of mini cookies," she says. "It's a segment of the category that is growing."

Leclerc launched mini Celebration cookies in 2025 with four flavours and added a fifth, caramel, to the lineup this year. She says some companies have entered the mini space with a pouch of cookies. Leclerc has gone with a cello-wrapped tray, which mirrors the company's change of packaging across all product lines to eliminate the outer box and reduce waste.

"We wanted to reduce our carbon footprint," she says of the new celebration packaging. "We reduced our tray to fit the exact size of the cookies. It's the same amount of cookies in the tray, but it is smaller. It allows us to have more cases to a pallet and reduces the cost of transport."

Another important segment of the cookie category is imported cookies, says Zdunich.

"These cookies sell well, often without the need for much price reduction and contribute lots of margin to the retailer," she says. "Walker's Shortbread is an anchor brand for these sections."

In terms of hot and growing flavours, Therrien says churro flavour is seeing double-digit growth in North America, similar to the pumpkin spice phenomenon of a few years ago.

"The Churro flavour Celebration cookie will be an in-and-out option in May," she says.

In the grocery aisles at Pepper's Foods Victoria, Scott Zaichkowsky, grocery manager says the pre-packed cookies are generally displayed on shelves within the cookie section without much fanfare. This changes when there are seasonal

options like the Christmas holiday flavours or special editions or bringing attention to Celebration cookies for s'mores in the summer. At these times he may make up an end-cap or other out-of-aisle display to draw attention.

"It seems like what we have is pretty consistent for people," he says. "There's people who want cheaper cookies for school or an event. Those ones would just kind of fall within the actual grocery aisle."

Those that are baked in-store that might be destined for dessert platters, a personal treat or special events are found in the bakery department. There are often one or two flavours of these types of cookies on special in the flyer and featured in a high-profile bakery area.

"Our bakery would bake them off and bag those ourselves," he says.

There may also be pre-baked and frozen cookie varieties that are thawed in-store and put in clamshells near other baked goods.

Premium store-baked cookies are an option for retailers who want the smell of fresh baked cookies drawing their customers in. The cookie line from Okanagan Frozen Dough gives retailers the desirable smell and the ultimate in flexibility with numerous flavour options but without the mixing or portioning says Randy Keir, bakery specialist and head of product innovation.

"Our full lineup of frozen cookie pucks is designed to be baked in-store and sold fresh," he explains. "The cookie space is no longer defined by centre aisle packaged goods. Today's shoppers want elevated, experiential and globally inspired flavours."

He's seen growth in special limited time flavour options that fit holidays or seasons and suggests retailers make use of flavour rotations in the "treat yourself" impulse purchase space that can be driven by the baking aromas. These thick, soft-baked cookies are a different experience from pre-packaged cookies and need to be merchandised differently.

"Small, frequent batches create the aroma-driven impulse purchases and keep displays looking fresh," Keir says. "Display cookies alongside muffins, pastries and fresh baked bread. Adding 'fresh baked in-store' messages increases trust and perceived quality."

The premium cookie formats, like OK Frozen Dough's line, are seeing significant growth in many markets, he says. This comes from core flavours like chocolate chip, peanut butter chip and salted caramel as well as specialty flavours like eggnog cream, lemon chocolate blondie and white chocolate matcha.

Cookies are a Canadian staple that are seeing shifts in flavours and formats, but still hold strong demand when consumers are seeking both the familiar and something new. Ensuring a mix of premium in-store baked options as well as grocery aisle pre-packaged options will ensure all customers have access to the solution to their cravings. ●



Randy Keir, bakery specialist and head of product innovation, Okanagan Frozen Dough (OKFD).

HISTORY IS IN THE MAKING

By Ronda Payne



Grimm's Fine Foods Celebrates 75 Years!

When brothers Henry and Jacob Grimm opened a small butcher shop in East Vancouver in 1951 called BC Fancy Sausage, they did so with the knowledge and skills that harkened back to their European roots. Both men had completed their Master Sausage Maker apprenticeships in the 1930s. And both men were eager to use those skills in their own butcher shop on East Georgia Street in Vancouver.

European Tradition

Word spread about the brothers' butcher shop and BC Fancy Sausage quickly became recognized for its high-quality products and service. Henry and Jacob took advantage of their success by following their customer base into the growing neighbourhood of South Vancouver in the early 1960s, where they opened two delis.



Congratulations Grimm's Fine Foods

on 75 years of providing quality meats to the Canadian market
We wish you many more years of success



In 1975, the Grimm brothers decided to move beyond the deli counter. They opened their own manufacturing plant in Richmond and put their family name on the building. And thus Grimm's Fine Foods was born.

The new manufacturing facility allowed the brothers to produce the same



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traditional European sausages, cured meats and deli products that had fueled their success thus far. More important, it enabled them to sell their products beyond their own two delis.

Today, manufacturing continues to be a core component of Grimm's Fine Foods' operations. The company now has manufacturing capabilities spread across different sites.

From 1975 through to the early 2000s, Henry and Jacob (and their respective sons) managed to preserve their European craftsmanship inherent in their company while also adapting to changing consumer trends.

CONGRATULATIONS TO GRIMM'S FINE FOODS ON
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The 1980s saw increased competition from the east, with many Western-based producers being purchased by their larger Eastern-based counterparts. The brothers, however, remained one of a few truly Western Canadian producers.

Having the hands-on experience of both Henry and Jacob proved instrumental to the company's success. The two led the transition of Grimm's Fine Foods into new product categories, like meat snacks and pepperoni. Their sons carried the tradition through to the company's national growth in the early 2000s, before retiring themselves.

Here and Now

Today, Grimm's Fine Foods' core deli and sausage lines still trace back to the brothers and their original recipes. In fact, some of the company's traditional deli items are currently still available. They also still follow the very same time-honoured recipes.

And, in an age where more and more people have developed food sensitivities, Grimm's Fine Foods has continued to provide prepared meats that are gluten-free, soy-free and made without added MSG.

A significant selection of the company's products are also lactose-free.

The Grimm's Fine Foods plant in Saskatoon, SK

Grimm's Fine Foods also guarantees that its products contain no fillers or by-products.

The company has also prioritized the need to balance food processing with the well-being of consumers.

Major Milestone

This year marks the official 75th anniversary of the founding of Grimm's Fine Foods. There is no doubt that the company has come a long way from the small butcher shop on East Georgia Street. Along the way, Grimm's Fine Foods has remained true to its core values of providing quality products made only with the finest ingredients.

Grimm's Fine Foods kicked off its celebratory anniversary by way of a special partnership with Make Happy Tummies (formerly known as Toonies for Tummies). The donation-matching campaign began in February of this year and ran for 75 days.

Grimm's Fine Foods will also celebrate its milestone achievement with the two limited-edition product launches that both tantalize the taste buds while paying homage to its roots: a beer bratwurst made with real gluten-free beer and a Beer Stick designed to pair with a beverage of choice.

Also on the menu will be a summer-wide celebration in-store, as well as a consumer contest — complete with numerous collaborations with the company's long-time retail partners. ●

75 years of craft worth celebrating

To celebrate our 75th anniversary, Grimm's is launching limited edition Beer Bratwurst and Beer Sticks this Spring, a nod to our European sausage making roots.

GrimmsFineFoods.com

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Happy Munch Factory Introduces New Lineup of Gluten Free Products



Happy Munch Factory is delivering a new standard with its lineup of Gluten-Free products.

With something to offer for everyone from Pecan & Coconut Nuggets to Yogurt Clusters, each flavour is crafted to offer bold, addictive taste profiles while maintaining a focus on quality ingredients and clean-label transparency.

With retail-ready packaging, Happy Munch Factory is well-positioned to support retailers and distributors looking to differentiate their snack offerings. The brand is actively expanding distribution across Canada and international markets, making it an exciting addition to shelves in 2026.

For more information: dk@happymunchfactory.com

Foothills Creamery's Latest Innovation Is Fueling Joy by Crafting Traditional Ice Cream with High Protein

Foothills Creamery's latest entry is a high-protein ice cream that has 30 grams of protein per pint and contains 50 per cent less sugar. Foothills Creamery Protein Ice Cream is the first high-protein ice cream in Canada and comes in 500 mL Coffee Bean and Chocolate Peanut Butter.

"It's an exciting time for our team at Foothills Creamery," says Bill McKenzie, CEO of Foothills Creamery. "We have a very dedicated team that constantly comes up with new ideas that I believe will make the Canadian dairy industry more exciting, and our new Protein Ice Cream is leading that charge in 2026. As far as we know, this could be the first true ice cream, not a frozen dairy dessert, in North America that's also high in protein. Refusing to compromise on the Foothills Creamery standards of excellence was a key goal when we set out to make this ice cream."

The new high-protein ice cream is just the latest in a series of new butter and ice cream products.

For more information: www.FoothillsCreamery.com



Ferrero Rocher Chocolate Squares Launches in Canada

Ferrero Rocher chocolate squares are a new global innovation and a modern twist on the brand's iconic, gold-wrapped praline. To drive awareness and trial during the launch window, the brand is rolling out a fully integrated program spanning experiential, social, influencer, and retail touchpoints.

A made in Canada product, Ferrero Rocher chocolate squares are available in four varieties — Milk, Dark, White, and Assorted — in 105g bags at major grocery and convenience retailers across Canada.

For more information: www.ferrerorocher.com



Kicking Horse Introduces New Blend

Introducing Kicking Horse Coffee's newest blend: Cool Mule. Kicking Horse's first blend crafted for iced coffee and available for a limited time only this summer. A medium roast with balanced acidity, notes of juicy peach, milk chocolate, and syrupy nectar — bold, bright, and unapologetically wild over ice.

Cool Mule is crafted and formulated to shine over ice, with tasting notes that come through beautifully in the roasting process and are best experienced cold.

For more information: kickinghorsecoffee.ca

Hobbs Pickles To-Go Pouches a Hit

When Hobbs couldn't find a good tasting pickle anywhere, he decided to start his own pickle company. In 2017, he opened the world-famous Pickle Tasting Bar at Granville Island in Vancouver, BC — all to ensure he'd always have access to the best-tasting, refrigerated, New York-style deli pickles. Introduced a convenient, easy-to-pack pickle snack for road trips, flights, school lunches, and life on the go. That's when Hobbs To-Go Pouches were born. Available in two flavours — Dilly Chips and Sweet Horseradish Chips.

For more information: chris@hobbspickles.com



Smart Sip Cream Co. Introduces Innovative Shelf-Stable Powdered Creamer

Smart Sip is a coconut-oil based powdered creamer with chicory root fibre in it. It is sugar-free, gluten-free and in ever 25 calorie tablespoon serving you are getting 3g of fibre. Customers love its convenient 2-year self-life and the fact that they can use it daily. Smart Sip also mixes well into oatmeal, yogurt, smoothies, matcha and pudding so no one misses out. There are currently 3 indulgent tasting flavour — Classic Cream, Vanilla Ice Cream and Caramel Cloud with more on the way.

For more information: www.smartsipcreamco.com



Keurig Dr Pepper Canada Brings Bloom Sparkling Energy Beverages to Canada Through Exclusive National Partnership

Canada Dry Mott's ULC., doing business as Keurig Dr Pepper Canada ("KDP Canada"), has entered into an exclusive agreement with Nutrabolt Distribution LLC. for the sale and distribution of Bloom Sparkling Energy. Bloom Sparkling Energy will debut in Canada through a phased retail rollout:



initially available at 7-Eleven locations across Ontario and Western Canada, and at Alimentation Couche-Tard banners across Québec and Atlantic Canada. This market entry reflects KDP Canada's approach to building emerging brands with focus and precision, prioritizing the convenience channel, where energy beverages are most frequently purchased and where new products gain traction quickly through immediate consumption occasions.

For more information: keurigdrpepper.ca

KidStar Nutrients StarMulti Kids' Multivitamin

KidStar's StarMulti Kids' Multivitamin is a chewable tablet for kids aged 3 years and up. It has 20 essential vitamins and minerals plus organic fermented whole foods. The fun, astronaut-shaped chewables are coloured with blue spirulina, a powerful antioxidant, and have delicious, natural strawberry and raspberry flavours. KidStar's products are zero sugar and contain no artificial colours, flavours, or sweeteners. KidStar believes that nutrients should contain only the ingredients needed and nothing more.

For more information go to kidstarnutrients.com



BERTOLLI Introduces New Format

Bertolli, recognized as Canada's most trusted brand in Olive Oil by BRANDSPARK, is reaffirming its leadership in the category, building on 160 years of Mediterranean heritage and expertise.

Bertolli has introduced the new Dress & Drizz format, featuring an innovative design in 100% recycled plastic that makes it easier than ever to dress, finish or enhance meals with its signature Olive Oil. The format is crafted to support a wide range of culinary uses, from salads to grilled vegetables, pasta and more, bringing trusted quality and versatility to everyday cooking.

For more information: <https://bertolli.ca/>



Sunii Energy Gum Brings a New Take on Everyday Energy

Sunii Energy Gum is introducing a simple, on-the-go way to get an energy boost: no drinks, no waiting. Made in British Columbia, each piece delivers 50 mg of caffeine with B-vitamins in a small, easy-to-carry format. It's designed for real life: the mornings that start early, the afternoons that drag, the plans you almost cancel but don't. Sunii fits into the moments where energy needs to be quick, easy, and just work. As more consumers look for convenient options that match their pace, Sunii offers a practical alternative to traditional energy formats, built for everyday routines across convenience and grocery.

For more information: www.suniienergy.com



Rustica Officially Launches Two New Stuffed Crust Pizzas Across Canada

Rustica has launched its two highly anticipated Stuffed Crust pizzas — Spinach & Cheese and Pepperoni & Bacon — now available in major grocery stores across Canada. Following an exciting teaser earlier this year, Canadians can finally experience these indulgent new additions in the frozen aisle. Crafted to deliver the perfect combination of bold flavour and satisfying texture, Rustica's new Stuffed Crust pizzas feature a crispy, golden crust filled with rich, melty cheese, paired with premium toppings and the authentic taste that has made Rustica a household favourite.



For more information: www.rusticafoods.com

New Zealand's Popular Diaper Brand, Kiddicare, Arrives in Canada

Kiddicare is now available in Canada. Designed and owned by New Zealanders, Kiddicare is chosen by parents for its balance of softness, absorbency, comfort and everyday value. The brand launches nationally with its diaper range at more than 450 retail locations across Canada.

Made for delicate skin, Kiddicare Ultra Dry Diapers are designed to keep babies dry, comfortable and protected day and night. The Tri-Fold Fit creates a snug, flat fit to help minimize leaks, while the fast-wicking core,



leak-locking design, and five-layer absorbent core help pull moisture away quickly and lock wetness in for up to 12 hours of leak protection. Kiddicare's innovative technology locks in dryness in just 60 seconds and the wetness indicator helps babies stay drier and more comfortable.

For more information: kiddicarebaby.ca

CELSIUS Launches Limited Edition ELECTRIC VIBE Flavour to Bring the Summer Energy to Canada

CELSIUS, has announced its new limited edition flavour for summer, CELSIUS ELECTRIC VIBE. The bright and uplifting Sparkling Tropical Freeze flavour fuses tangy pineapple, vibrant orange, refreshing cherry, and smooth grape into a bold rush that hits from the first sip. CELSIUS ELECTRIC VIBE will roll-out to retailers just in time to bring the energy to championship soccer host cities Toronto and Vancouver, engaging shoppers around the excitement of the iconic soccer tournament with a chance to win a flyaway trip to the Major League Soccer (MLS) Cup.



For more information: celsius.ca

Velocity Logic Group and Paytronix Partner to Extend Loyalty Engagement to Every Pump Transaction

Velocity Logic Group ("VLG") and Paytronix, an Access Group company, have formed a strategic partnership that extends loyalty engagement into the fuel and in-store transaction layer. Through the integration of VLG's cloud infrastructure with the Paytronix platform, convenience store operators can now engage guests at the pump and in-store regardless of whether the guest uses a proprietary program, partner program, major fuel brand program, or no program at all.

The result is a unified view of guest behaviour across fuel and in-store, powered by the engagement, segmentation, and campaign tools that Paytronix operators already rely on to drive visit frequency and spend across their businesses.

For more information: vik@velocitylogicgroup.com

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A WORD FROM ISABELLE MARQUIS, Co-President of the SIAL Innovation Jury, Nutritionist and Senior Food Strategy Expert

"The 2026 edition of the SIAL Innovation competition is one of the most interesting I have seen since I began co-chairing this jury, both in terms of the number of entries and the way it reflects the major concerns of today's consumers. Health is omnipresent this year, in all its forms. Sustainability is also a recurring theme — sometimes at the very core of what defines a product — which speaks to a genuine evolution within the industry. Finally, the world is making its way onto our plates more than ever, through the meeting of flavours, cultures, and savoir-faire."

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