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publisher's perspective

In-Store Technology Failing to Live Up to Expectations



SOTI, a Mississauga-based mobile platform provider, recently conducted a survey of 1,000 Canadian shoppers that revealed the in-store experience isn't living up to expectations of seamless in-store interactions, personalized recommendations, and instant access to inventory online and in-store to ensure their continued loyalty.

Their report uncovers three key areas where retailers are falling short and the obstacles they need to overcome to improve and achieve their in-store digital transformation goals: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the consumer experience, supply chain optimization and security.

The study found that while 92 per cent of Canadian consumers have used in-store technology, many believe these devices make the shopping experience worse. Canadians cite challenges in-store such as a lack of staff to assist with issues relating to self-serve machines (73 per cent of users), while as many as 31 per cent stated that, despite visiting a store to buy goods, retail staff members had to order the item online using the store device regardless.

The report suggests that consumer expectations have risen, largely due to the sophisticated personalization and seamless processes available online, which in-store technologies currently fail to match.

Supply chain optimization in the retail industry is critical, as Canadian shoppers now demand real-time information, efficient product availability and rapid delivery in-store and online. The report reveals that:

For those with an omnichannel approach, strategic investment in in-store infrastructure will enable AI and automation to optimize supply chain processes, identify technical issues, enhance inventory visibility and aid in forecasting, while reducing waste. As a result, they can ensure a harmonized and efficient retail experience that will replicate the seamlessness consumers expect from online shopping.

Security is a significant concern for Canadian consumers as well. More than three-quarters (78 per cent) expressed concerns about entering personal details online or through in-store devices, indicating a pervasive lack of trust in the data collection and payment technologies used by retail organizations.

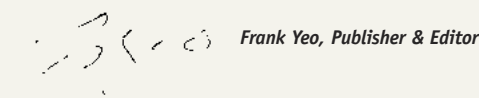
While Canadian consumers continue to expect change and see value in technology to enhance their interactions with retailers, gaps in expectations and reality continue to jeopardize brand loyalty and sales.

On Our Cover

18 Old-Fashioned Values with Modern Business Strategies

Associated Grocers delivers success to independents across Western Canada.

Photo credit: Don Molyneux



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NEW NAME, SAME GREAT TEAM: Save-On-Foods Celebrates Grand Re-Opening of Kindersley Store



The sun has set on Buy-Low Foods Kindersley, to rise again as a new Save-On-Foods, joining the fleet of nearly 180 Save-On-Foods stores throughout Western Canada. Both grocery banners are part of the Pattison Food Group, a 100 per cent Canadian-owned company.

The same fantastic team will run the store, led by store manager Justin Overand. Along with familiar faces and the same great service they're used to, customers at Save-On-Foods Kindersley will find more ways to save on their

groceries every week, as well as products and services unique to Save-On-Foods, including:

- Darrell's Deals, which offer customers a hot price on one of company president Darrell Jones' favourite products each week
- Darrell's Price Lock Promise, which locks in low prices on hundreds of everyday items
- My Offers digital coupons, which customers can load straight to their More Rewards cards via the Save-On-Foods app or on www.saveonfoods.com
- Hundreds of high-quality products under the Western Family name
- Online shopping, where customers can order groceries online or via the Save-On-Foods app and select the curbside pickup time that works best for them.

"Since 2018, we've been committed to our customers and the community in Kindersley, and that doesn't change as Save-On-Foods," said Store Manager Justin Overand. "We are thrilled to join this company and offer our customers a little extra and even more ways to save." "We are so excited to welcome the team and customers in Kindersley to the Save-On-Foods family," said Darrell Jones, president of Save-On-Foods' parent company, the Pattison Food Group. "Justin and his team offer the best grocery shopping experience in town and we can't wait for our customers to see all we have in store for them."

Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef Releases Second National Beef Sustainability Assessment

The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) released its second and highly anticipated National Beef Sustainability Assessment (NBSA) and Strategy report. The assessment reflects three years of in-depth scientific analysis and highlights the Canadian beef sector's progress between 2014 and 2021 on sustainability indicators like greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity, carbon storage, people's health and safety, animal care, economic contributions and more. The report also includes accompanying sustainability strategies that identify areas for continuous improvement.



The report was completed as part of over \$2.8 million in funding for the CRSB under the Government of Canada's AgriAssurance Program - National Industry Association Component, an initiative under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

Key environmental Improvements include a 15 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to produce 1 kg of beef (boneless and consumed) since 2014. This improvement is largely attributed to increased efficiencies of cattle growth, leading to a smaller overall carbon footprint as fewer resources (e.g. land, water and feed) are required to produce the same volume of beef. "It's exciting to see the 15 per cent reduction in GHG emissions intensity, which puts us on track to achieve the 33 per cent reduction 2030 goal that the industry has set," says Ryan Beierbach, chair of the CRSB and Saskatchewan beef producer.

The report also shows that land used for beef cattle production is estimated to store 1.9 billion tonnes of soil organic carbon, and with overall loss of habitat, Canadian beef farmers and ranchers play an important role in preserving intact critical habitat wildlife need for reproduction and feeding.



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M'LORD FINE FOODS UNVEILS EXCITING BRAND RE-POSITIONING

M'LORD Fine Foods, a leading name in the realm of culinary excellence, is thrilled to announce a significant milestone in its journey. With an unwavering commitment to innovation and quality, M'LORD has undergone a comprehensive brand re-positioning, complete with refreshed logo and a striking redesign of its product labels.

As a brand synonymous with quality foods, M'LORD has always prided itself on offering exceptional gourmet experiences to its discerning customers. With this re-positioning, M'LORD seeks to reinforce its dedication to excellence while enhancing the overall brand experience.



The updated logo represents a modern interpretation of M'LORD's rich heritage, reflecting its commitment to tradition while embracing contemporary tastes and preferences. It encapsulates the essence of sophistication and quality that has defined the M'LORD brand for generations.

Furthermore, the complete redesign of product labels reflects M'LORD's passion for culinary craftsmanship and attention to detail. The new labels not only showcase M'LORD's premium offerings but also provide a more immersive and engaging experience for consumers.

"We are thrilled to unveil our new brand identity," said Annie Ménard, brand manager for M'LORD. "This re-positioning signifies a dynamic shift for our brand, aligning with evolving consumer trends and targeting an updated demographic. While M'LORD boasts a storied history, this transformation underscores our commitment to staying ahead of the curve and proves that our brand is anything but old-fashioned." M'LORD Fine Foods is owned and distributed by the I-D Foods Corporation.



DREAM. GROW. THRIVE.

Carlton Cards Promotes Brittany Ford to Director of Sales

Brittany Ford has been promoted to director of sales at Carlton Cards. Her previous position was senior account executive.



Brittany Ford

Brittany joined Carlton Cards as an account manager in 2016 and has been recognized with several awards including the Rising Star Award from the Star Women of Grocery.

Her professionalism, dedication, and ability to develop partnerships with internal and external stakeholders have made her an asset to Carlton Cards.

BC Farmers' Markets Contribute a Record \$233M to BC Economy

The newly released BC Farmers' Market Economic Impact Study reveals that direct sales at BC's farmers' markets were \$155 million, contributing to \$233 million in overall economic impact for the provincial economy. "In addition to an increase in the amount spent per shopper," explained Heather O'Hara, executive director, BC Association of Farmers' Markets, "in 2023 we had more markets open than ever before, on more days of the week, with an increased number of vendors." Annual attendance at BC farmers' markets increased from 4.4 million in 2012 to five million visits in 2023, with tourists and day-trippers accounting for 17 per cent of visitors. Local shoppers were found to be loyal supporters, with 67 per cent visiting a farmers' market at least once per month.

NEW SURVEY REVEALS CANADIANS LOVE FROZEN VEGGIES

Nortera, a North American leader in vegetable processing, has released the results of a survey on Canadians' relationship with frozen vegetables. The survey revealed that 85 per cent of Canadians enjoyed these convenient, nutritious options over the past year, and nearly half (48 per cent) say they purchase them at least once a month.

Christian Malenfant, vice-president strategic initiatives, corporate communications & ESG at Nortera says "When you purchase frozen vegetables, you're getting locally grown produce that's harvested at its peak freshness and flash-frozen to preserve their essential nutrients."



Among the main factors motivating the purchase of frozen vegetables:

- **Long Shelf Life:** 51 per cent of respondents appreciate the fact that frozen vegetables last for several months in the freezer.
- **Convenience:** 37 per cent of respondents purchase frozen veggies for their practicality, helping to save time in the kitchen.
- **Year-Round Availability:** 34 per cent of respondents primarily buy frozen veggies as they are available even out of season.
- **Saves Money:** 27 per cent of respondents say they buy them primarily to save money, as the price of frozen veggies remains stable throughout the year.
- **Reduces Food Waste:** 23 per cent of respondents say they primarily purchase frozen veggies because they help reduce food waste.
- **They are just as nutritious as fresh** (17 per cent) and **tasty** (five per cent).

Faced with soaring food prices, a third of Canadians (33 per cent) who have previously purchased frozen vegetables say they are now buying them more frequently because of the increase in grocery costs. This trend is statistically more marked among 18-34-year-olds (42 per cent), respondents who have children at home (42 per cent) and 35-54-year-olds (38 per cent).

Green peas are the most commonly purchased frozen vegetable in Canada, accounting for 14.2 per cent of all frozen veggies purchased. These versatile green veggies not only top the charts but are a culinary canvas for a variety of easy, delicious recipes from soups to pasta dishes. The next most popular choices are corn, mixed veggies and broccoli.

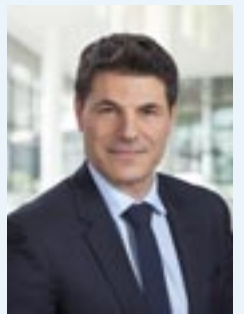
EXECUTIVE CHANGES AT NORTERA

NORTERA CEO DANIEL VIELFAURE IS RETIRING IN JUNE 2024 AFTER 24 SUCCESSFUL YEARS WITH THE ORGANIZATION.

"In my years at Nortera, I've had the privilege of working with dedicated individuals who are passionate about the agri-food industry, a sector of which I am particularly fond," says Daniel Vielfaure. "I thank the members of the Board for their confidence, unwavering support and collaboration, as well as all of our team members at headquarters and our plants, without whom our achievements would not have been possible."

After a careful and diligent search, the Board is thrilled to announce the arrival of Hugo Boisvert as Nortera's CEO.

Boisvert had until recently been president of Perdue Farms' prepared foods division in the United States, where he managed all aspects of operations, sales and marketing. Prior to Perdue Farms, he served as CEO of Maxi Canada and vice-president and general manager of pharmaceutical manufacturer Pharmascience. He also spent more than 18 years at L'Oréal in a variety of Canadian and international leadership positions.



Hugo Boisvert

Cimcorp End-to-End Automation for Fresh Food Distribution

Cimcorp, a pioneer of intralogistics automation specialized in fresh food handling and tire-handling solutions offers a comprehensive range of automated storage and order picking systems, specifically designed to optimize fresh and perishable food distribution for grocery retailers, bakeries, and dairies.



Cimcorp helps grocery retailers transform warehousing operations through efficient product handling. Cimcorp's modular systems combine gantry robots, intelligent software, AS/RS, AGVs, conveyors, shuttles, palletizers, and more to optimize operations from end to end, boost productivity, and improve overall performance. Additionally, Cimcorp offers continuous maintenance through its Success Services —including spare parts, training, and 24/7 support — to help customers secure a lifecycle of 20 years or more for their automation technology.

Cimcorp has been highlighting its flexible, modular solution for retrofitting existing distribution centres with automation. The solution enables rapid installation in any existing facility footprint and allows grocery retailers to introduce automation modules based on present needs, with the ability to scale as business grows.

BEL CANADA GROUP EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS

MARIE-ÈVE ROBERT IS NOW VICE-PRESIDENT OF MARKETING & CSR

Marie-Ève Robert joined Bel Canada Group in 2013. Since her arrival, she has held several positions on the marketing team and has been vice-president since 2020. An active member of the management committee, she is responsible for business objectives related to brands such as Babybel, Boursin and The Laughing Cow. Robert heads up the marketing team, which includes managing communications and public relations for the brands as well as the corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit which is at the heart of the business. She is passionate about CSR initiatives and works daily to bring the Bel Group's mission to life: offering healthy and responsible food for all.



CHANTAL PELLETIER IS NOW BRAND MANAGER, GOGO SQUEEZ

With over 20 years of experience as a marketing manager in Quebec and Canada, including three years as brand manager at Bel Canada Group, Pelletier embodies a real passion for creating innovative strategies and reaching business objectives for the brands she manages. Her exceptional talent for building high-performing teams and her action-oriented strategic vision define her leadership. As part of Bel Group Canada since 2015, she has significantly contributed to the growth and evolution of the company and the brands she managed. She will now be responsible for the growth of the GoGo squeeZ brand in Canada, after her contribution to the success of Boursin and The Laughing Cow.



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Tree of Life Canada ULC Acquires Legacy Distributors, Bolstering Market Presence

Tree of Life Canada ULC, Canada's distribution leader in the grocery and foodservice industries, announced has the successful acquisition of Legacy Distributors, an Ontario-based distributor specializing in bakery and home meal replacement (HMR), ultra-fresh, and bulk commodities.

"We're elated to welcome Legacy and their vendor partners to the Tree of Life family," stated



Lisa MacNeil

Lisa MacNeil, president of Tree of Life Canada. "Our portfolio continues to grow, and the Legacy addition further satisfies the unique selection of food and beverages that we bring to Canadian consumers. It also expands our reach to consumers with Legacy's existing third-party logistic (3PL) capabilities."

The acquisition of Legacy Distributors aligns seamlessly with Tree of Life Canada's overarching strategy to strengthen its market presence and enhance its capabilities in the dynamic food and beverage distribution landscape.

Legacy will continue to operate independently out of their Woodbridge, Ontario facility. "This change is a positive for all of us," said Tony Ntentes, president of Legacy Distributors. "We eagerly anticipate the prospect of collaborating with the Tree of Life team and are excited about the opportunities that this promises to bring forth."



Tree of Life Canada Appoints Patrick Heffernan to Chief Operating Officer

Tree of Life Canada announces the appointment of Patrick Heffernan to chief operating officer. Heffernan brings over 25 years of experience in various executive positions in retail & foodservice including Sobeys, Metro, Rexall & Recipe Unlimited. In his new role, he will oversee sales, operations, foodservice, brand Development, and IT as the company continues to expand within the Canadian market. He will continue to report directly to Lisa MacNeil, president of Tree of Life Canada. MacNeil says this change will allow the company to remain focused on its strategic vision. This includes the expansion of its Mississauga DC which will provide close to 800,000 sq ft of warehouse space in Canada, supporting its National Foodservice Broker Partnerships, onboarding the recent acquisition of Legacy Distribution which significantly expands Tree of Life's presence in Fresh and 3PL, along with implementation of SAP's S4/Hana platform scheduled for early 2025.



Patrick Heffernan

SOTI Research Finds Frustration Growing with Data Security and Consumer Service Gaps

The retail industry is facing a critical juncture where Canadian consumers are experiencing a disconnect between their shopping expectations and the in-store reality. As the Canadian retail markets continue to evolve, the industry grapples with challenges rolling out in-store technology and integrating advanced AI technology, while continuing to optimize the supply chain and address ever-growing security concerns.

According to SOTI's new global retail report, Techspec-tations: Consumer Demand for Digital Transformation in Retail, which surveyed 1,000 Canadian shoppers, retailers are confronted with the heightened expectations of consumers anticipating seamless in-store interactions, personalized recommendations, and instant access to inventory online and in-store to ensure their continued loyalty.

While consumers crave technology to improve their in-store shopping experience, those offered by retailers do not always meet expectations. The study found that while 92% of Canadian consumers have used in-store technology, many believe these devices make the shopping experience worse. Canadians cite challenges in-store such as a lack of staff to assist with issues relating to self-serve machines (73 per cent of users), while as many as 31 per cent stated that, despite visiting a store to buy goods, retail staff members had to order the item online using the store device regardless.



The report suggests that consumer expectations have risen, largely due to the sophisticated personalization and seamless processes available online, which in-store technologies currently fail to match. To address this, retailers must invest in AI-driven solutions and device management to provide consistent, personalized, and convenient shopping experiences in both physical stores and online.

Supply chain optimization in the retail industry is critical, as Canadian shoppers now demand real-time information, efficient product availability and rapid delivery in-store and online. The report reveals that:

- 46 per cent of Canadian consumers expect to be able to pick up an item ordered online from a physical store on the same day.
- 41 per cent will look elsewhere if delivery or pick-up of an item is more than two days.
- 77 per cent of consumers expect to always know the status of their orders, highlighting the need for efficient supply chain visibility.

"Retailers have been focusing on how to maximize AI's impact for the online experience without fully replicating these benefits in their physical stores where it can address many of the pain points Canadian consumers are facing today," said Shash Anand, senior vice-president of products at SOTI. "For those with an omnichannel approach, strategic investment in in-store infrastructure will enable AI and automation to optimize supply chain processes, identify technical issues, enhance inventory visibility and aid in forecasting, while reducing waste. As a result, they can ensure a harmonized and efficient retail experience that will replicate the seamlessness consumers expect from online shopping."

Security is a significant concern for Canadian consumers. More than three-quarters (78 per cent) expressed concerns about entering personal details online or through in-store devices, indicating a pervasive lack of trust in the data collection and payment technologies used by retail organizations. Security concerns extend to fraud, with 41 per cent of consumers worrying about becoming a victim of financial fraud and another 42 per cent expressing concerns about identity fraud.

Additionally, the report emphasizes on the importance of in-store device security. Canadian consumers have concerns using in-store devices due to mistrust of retailers, including the potential exposure of personal details (40 per cent) and the risk of the next user seeing personal information (25 per cent). Despite this, 43 per cent of consumers view in-store devices as tools to enhance shopping convenience and speed. This highlights the need for retailers to balance convenience and security while building trust among those making purchases in the retail space.

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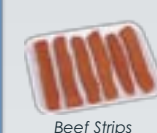


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**CANDY AND SNACKS:
WHAT'S IN STORE FOR GROCERS?**

The biggest challenge is the ongoing pressure on income. While the rate of inflation has moderated throughout 2023, current food and beverage prices are much higher than pre-pandemic. Combined with everything else that has become more expensive, many consumers are making changes to how they shop. This includes the amounts they buy and what and where they shop. Price and promotions have become much more important and everyday value formats are reaping the benefits.

That said, the current market is not a race to the bottom, and there are many reasons why consumers are willing to spend more. The top three are 1) holidays and celebrations, 2) personal indulgence, and 3) brands that have earned their loyalty. For this reason, confectionery and snacks have a unique advantage. This explains why chocolate, candy, and snack items have experienced very strong sales over the last few years.



Candy and snacks provide a unique opportunity for retailers to differentiate, delight, and convert. The Sweets & Snacks Expo is one of the best places to discover the latest and greatest innovations. You can always discover items with new ingredients and flavours, both domestic and international. It's amazing to watch these new trends appear. Sweets & Snacks Expo is where they're first discovered.

Innovation in candy and snacks are a preview to flavour and ingredient change in other categories, like bakery. Sweets & Snacks is a great place to see what's on the horizon. There's inspiration galore, and that's what we need to prompt new ideas and shoppers' interest.

Sweets & Snacks Expo is the premier business-to-business event for the confectionery and snack industries. It was specially designed for retailers and distributors and is unrivaled in new product launches, business-building solutions, and innovations in merchandising. Sweets & Snacks features the latest and greatest in the candy and snack industries.

The show will be held May 14-16 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Don't skip the pre-show day, May 13, for the Most Innovative New Product Awards Ceremony and the Supplier Showcase, a chance for attendees to see innovations in packaging, machinery, ingredients and more. You can learn more at [SweetsAndSnacks.com](https://sweetsandsnacks.com).



**Flow Beverage Corp. and BioSteel Sports Inc.
Enter into 3-Year Manufacturing Agreement**

Flow Beverage Corp. and BioSteel Sports Inc. have entered into a manufacturing agreement whereby Flow will manufacture and package BIOSTEEL-branded sport hydration beverages in the Tetra Prisma format. Flow has been a manufacturer of BIOSTEEL-branded beverages since 2020.

"It's very exciting to be entering into this new partnership with BioSteel Sports, co-packing one of the most innovative brands in sports hydration and working closely with its new owner. Having also recently added BeatBox Party Punch alcoholic beverages and Joyburst energy drinks as co-pack partners, our Aurora production facility is scaling to meet

this increased demand from brands and their consumers for premium and functional beverages offered in an environmentally conscious manner. The growth in our co-pack business is expected to contribute to ongoing improvements to profitability that have also included our restructuring, a transition to third-party logistics and the addition of a fourth production line in Aurora," said Nicholas Reichenbach, founder and chief executive officer of Flow.



**CALENDAR
OF EVENTS**

April 23-25, 2024

**CPMA Convention +
Trade Show**

Vancouver Convention Centre
Vancouver, BC
[Convention.cpma.ca](https://www.cpma.ca)

April 2 - April 5, 2024

**CHFA Now
Vancouver**

Vancouver, British Columbia
<https://www.chfanow.ca/vancouver/>

April 22-23, 2024

**Grocery & Specialty
Food West**

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

May 14-16, 2024

**The Sweets &
Snacks Expo**

Indiana Convention Center
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA
<https://sweetsandsnacks.com/>

May 15-17, 2024

SIAL Canada

Palais des Congres
Montreal, Quebec
<https://sialcanada.com/>

June 9-11, 2024

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May 29, 2024

Executive Changes at Carlton Cards

Rod Sturtridge, president of Carlton Cards, has retired and Paul Werynski, formerly general manager, has succeeded Sturtridge as president.



Rod Sturtridge

Sturtridge joined Carlton Cards 41 years ago in the sales division and held various roles within the company before his appointment to president in 2011. Through his guidance and vision, Carlton Cards continues to be the Celebrations Destination in Canada.

Paul Werynski, who joined the Company in 2016 as director of sales for Western Canada, has served in numerous leadership roles and has extensive experience in sales and marketing. Most recently, he served as general manager of Carlton Cards.



Paul Werynski

Shoppers Drug Mart to Operate 103 pharmacy Care Clinics Across Alberta by End of 2024

As part of an overall minimum capital investment of \$77 million in the province since 2022, Shoppers Drug Mart will be opening 44 additional locations in 2024.

Shoppers opened its first pharmacy care clinic in Lethbridge in June of 2022 with great success. This announcement will bring



the total number of Shoppers clinics to 103 by the end of the year.

The new locations slated for 2024 include Okotoks, Sherwood Park, Calgary, Edmonton, Stony Plain and Spruce Grove, among others, and will have a new look and feel to improve the patient experience.

"We're pleased to announce this record milestone with the government of Alberta today – 103 pharmacy care clinics across the province by year end – in a jurisdiction that proudly welcomes investment and innovation for the benefit of the province. We're grateful to partner with a government who understands the valuable role pharmacists can play in the delivery of primary care and are proud to be doing our part within the broader public system to make sure patients are able to get the care they need, when they need it," says Jeff Leger, pharmacist and president of Shoppers Drug Mart.



Lactalis Canada Announces New Sales Leadership Appointments

Lactalis Canada, the Canadian dairy leader behind iconic brands like Cracker Barrel, Black Diamond, Balderson, Astro and Lactantia and a subsidiary of France-based Lactalis Group, has appointed four new leaders to its customer sales team. These new appointments follow an enhanced commercial structure focused on improving internal efficiencies and building stronger customer partnerships.

"One of Lactalis Canada's corporate goals is to be the easiest dairy company to do business with, and over the last 18 months, our team has been building an enhanced commercial structure to deliver just this," said Tom Szostok, senior vice-president, sales at Lactalis Canada. "Together, with these new leaders, we look forward to continuing to further elevate our customer partnerships and experience."

Mark Kreckler has been appointed senior director, customer development – Sobeys



In this role, Kreckler will be responsible for overseeing enterprise-wide business development for Sobeys with the exception of fluid milk and deli cheese. He brings over 25 years of CPG sales experience to Lactalis Canada, most recently serving as sales director at Kimberly Clark where he led the sales team in Australia and was responsible for all customer teams, national field sales, shopper marketing and vendor replenishment planning.

Kate Simmie has been appointed director, customer development – Walmart



Kate Simmie will oversee enterprise-wide business development for Walmart with the exception of fluid milk and deli cheese. Simmie's key priority will be to leverage the full scale of the team at Lactalis Canada to drive mutual growth as a value-added strategic partner for Walmart. Simmie brings over 15 years of sales experience to Lactalis Canada. She was most recently director, sales planning & strategy at Riverside Foods.

Kelly Backer has been appointed senior director, customer development – Costco & All West Grocery Retail



Kelly Backer will be responsible for leading enterprise-wide business development for Costco and all West Grocery Retail for all business segments with the exception of fluid milk and deli cheese. Backer brings over 20 years of sales and marketing experience to Lactalis Canada from various CPG organizations, most recently at Wonderbrands where she served as vice-president, marketing & category development. Prior to this, she spent six years at Weston Foods in multiple senior sales roles and six years at McCain Foods in various brand marketing roles.

Paul Cuaso has been appointed director, corporate marketing



In this role, Cuaso will be responsible for driving alignment, consistency and excellence through all marketing processes and projects, and harnessing strategic and developmental insights to drive marketing best practices and tools across Lactalis Canada.

CLEAN AND CONVENIENT PROTEIN



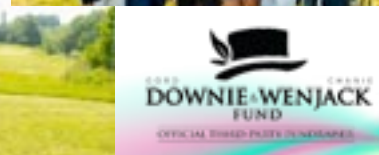
Give your customers what they want. A Canadian-made, high-protein meat bar that is delicious and natural. Made with pasture-raised Wagyu beef from our 4th generation family ranch.

THE SIRLOIN OF SNACKS – THRIVE PROVISIONS

ALL-NATURAL	CRUELTY-FREE	SUSTAINABLE	GRAIN-FREE
NO FILLERS	13 TO 14 GRAMS OF PROTEIN IN EVERY BAR	PREMIUM QUALITY	KETO FRIENDLY



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Discovery Organics is an independent and BC owned importer/wholesaler of certified organic produce, serving Western Canada since 1998.

With over 400 certified organic fresh produce items, Discovery Organics can help retailers increase sales in the industry's strongest growth areas - organic and fair trade.





GROCERY REDEFINED

WESTERN CANADA'S LEADING GROCERY CONFERENCE + TRADE SHOW
APRIL 22-23, 2024
 VANCOUVER CONVENTION CENTRE EAST BUILDING



COME TO WESTERN CANADA'S LARGEST GROCERY EVENT!

Attend the **ONLY** western-focused grocery conference + trade show – April 22 & 23, 2024 during the GROCERY WEEK in Vancouver! Retailers, Grocers, Wholesalers, Mass and Convenience from across Canada will converge in Vancouver, BC this spring!

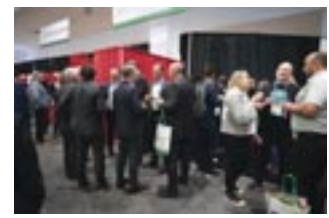
GROW YOUR BUSINESS

Network and build your business with the industry throughout the two days at industry cocktails, onsite meetings and discussions.



CONNECT

With the show app, make dedicated one-to-one retailer meetings, attend free networking cocktails and events to network.



DISCOVER

Explore new innovations and products/services at various pavilions (Buy BC Pavilion, Choose Ontario, Sustainability Sentral, First Timers).



TO EXHIBIT ROLSTER TAYLOR: RTAYLOR@CFIG.CA
 EVENTS/CONFERENCE: EVENTS@CFIG.CA

Grocery's Biggest Western Event Promises More Innovations and Ideas

THE 35TH EDITION OF GROCERY & SPECIALTY FOOD WEST – GROCERY REDEFINED, TAKING PLACE APRIL 22-23, IN VANCOUVER, B.C., WILL BE THE PLACE TO BE FOR GROCERY THIS SPRING! IT'S THE PREMIUM ONE-STOP GROCERY EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE IN WESTERN CANADA.

Attendees will be able to experience the newest innovations and hear from experts in the constantly changing grocery sector. This year's Grocery & Specialty Food West will feature innovations across all categories, products, services, technology, equipment and more. It's here where grocery gathers annually to grow and redefine the business. GSF West's new pavilions feature regional and global offerings this year include Sustainability Sentral, Canada Connect, Buy BC, First Timers, and Choose Ontario.

Leading to the entrance, check out all the latest innovations in the hall of New Product Showcases. The Top 10 in Grocery innovation winners will be selected on Monday to highlight the latest goods in grocery. On the floor, be sure to catch the education sessions and sampling session on the Insights and Innovations Trade Floor Stage.

Business to business meetings are available throughout the two days. Download the GSF Show App and connect with grocery professionals on site at exhibitors' booths or in the dedicated area on the trade floor for meetings. There's plenty of business networking events at GSF. Sunday opening reception at the Vancouver Convention Centre East Building welcomes all attendees to mix and mingle with colleagues. On Monday, there is a trade floor cocktail reception by the Insights and Innovations stage followed by the gala dinner and entertainment in the West building Summit Room.

The event will also provide expert insights starting with

morning sessions and workshops that are filled with ideas to help your business. From the U.S. grocers panel to hearing about the latest and exclusive western data for independents from NielsenIQ and Carman Allison, the morning sessions are a must-attend event for all. On Tuesday, there are workshops covering a broad range of topics from Progressive Grocer's Editor in Chief, Gina Acosta, to Ex-Googler Rachel Loui on hacking international growth through data big and small.

There will also be economic data important for your business from FCC's Chief Economist JP Gervais, as well as Amanda Lai, McMillanDoolittle, providing key trends and winning concepts shaping the industry that will keep independents competitive in the grocery game.

For CFGI Retailer Members, don't miss the Sunday Industry Tour and sign up early as spots are limited!

Visit the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers' booth in the entrance to the trade show and find out how the association can assist your business goals.

Be sure to download the comprehensive GSF Show App! It will allow you schedule business meetings and network with attendees. ●

To exhibit: Rolster Taylor - RTaylor@cfgi.ca;
 Questions: Events@cfgi.ca



Brody Powell, general manager, Associated Grocers

Photo credit: Don Molyneaux

Old-Fashioned Values with Modern Business Strategies

ASSOCIATED GROCERS
DELIVERS SUCCESS TO INDEPENDENTS
ACROSS WESTERN CANADA



Almost 100 years ago, in 1927, a small group of independent grocers banded together to create a pool warehousing buying and distribution system operating out of a 2,000 square foot warehouse in downtown Calgary. Today, continuing its legacy of being “Home of the Independent”, Associated Grocers (AG) is the leading grocery wholesale company in Western Canada, servicing over 650 independently owned grocery retailers across British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan with distribution centres in Calgary and Surrey, British Columbia, and a produce facility in Langley, British Columbia.

Associated Grocers was purchased in 1989 by the Jim Pattison Group of Companies and is today a division of Pattison Food Group Ltd. a privately-owned company in Western Canada.

Dan Bregg is the president of wholesale operations for the Pattison Food Group and has executive responsibility for the oversight of the wholesale operations of the entire group, including Associated Grocers. He is a member of the executive and other committees that oversee the strategic vision of the

Pattison Food Group with his focus primarily on how that vision relates to or affects wholesale operations.

“As it has been since 1927, the goal of Associated Grocers is to provide the depth and breadth of goods and services that independent grocers need to be successful in their operations,” said Bregg. “Independent grocers are a critical piece of food security for remote, rural, and indigenous communities in Western Canada and without the support of a strong wholesale partner many of them would find it difficult to serve the food needs of their communities. In my experience, when a community loses its grocery store, the community begins to fade away.”

Proud to call itself “Home of the Independent,” Associated Grocers pledges consistent, ongoing support to foster the growth and development of profitable partnerships with the independents they serve. As General Manager of Associated Grocers, Brody Powell takes the pledge into every aspect of the business. “It’s my responsibility first and foremost to ensure our 650+ amazing independent retail family members are looked after to the best of our ability. This includes getting the best quality products at competitive prices to go along with our first-in-class marketing programs we offer to ensure they can compete in each of their diverse marketplaces.”



PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS

“Although AG is part of the overall Pattison Food Group, it operates separately from the other wholesale operations and the retail operations of the Pattison Food Group,” said Bregg. “This enables AG to leverage the strength of the Pattison Food Group at large in many areas to get the best cost of goods and access to services to support our customers. As well, we can offer them access to other services, supports, and advice that they

Front: (L-R) Rick Geirnaert, general manager, wholesale sales, Peter Hellum, manager, bakery and HMR marketing, Liz Austerman, office manager, wholesale

Back: (L-R) Brody Powell, general manager, wholesale, Tanner Ames, manager, produce sales & marketing, Kelly Rohatinsky, manager, AB transportation, Kirk Harrop, manager, AB distribution centre, Alex Goodman, manager, wholesale sales, Brad Allen, manager, AG meat / deli / seafood marketing, Darrah Hadden, manager, independent marketing & advertising, Seanna Jones, pricing manager, wholesale

need but could not afford on their own.” Alex Goodman, newly appointed wholesale sales manager for Associated Grocers, sees becoming part of the Pattison Food Group as an example of how Associated Grocers is always evolving to stay on top of changing markets. “By

strengthening our synergies with our sister companies in the Pattison Food Group, we have improved our purchasing, logistics, and sales force. As well, our team of sales representatives has a vast amount of knowledge and experience that they take into each store they visit, guiding stores

on how to properly merchandise products, suggesting improvements to increase sales, and training store employees.”

Associated Grocers can assist in evaluating the feasibility of new site locations and renovations, offer expertise in store design, fixture layouts, and décor packages, and quote complete equipment packages using new, used, or reconditioned equipment at competitive pricing. If an instore bakery or deli is a consideration, they can offer assistance choosing the right equipment and employee training.



Christina Marshall, grocery merchandiser/buyer

“OUR TEAM OF SALES REPRESENTATIVES HAS A VAST AMOUNT OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE THAT THEY TAKE INTO EACH STORE THEY VISIT, GUIDING STORES ON HOW TO PROPERLY MERCHANDISE PRODUCTS, SUGGESTING IMPROVEMENTS TO INCREASE SALES, AND TRAINING STORE EMPLOYEES.”

GETTING THE RIGHT PRODUCTS

“I work closely with every department manager at Associated Grocers to ensure our sales team is updated with current market reports and other relevant information that can be passed on to our customers,” said Goodman. “I also provide store feedback to department managers to ensure we have the right selection of products available, continue to have competitive pricing, and relay any quality or supply concerns so they can be addressed quickly and efficiently.”

The knowledgeable staff in the Independent Wholesale Meat department help customers place orders for the many fresh meat, deli, seafood, and packaged meat items carried in the AG warehouses. The Independent Wholesale Produce team offers an extensive selection of available produce items including conventional and organic offerings, packaged salads, and seasonal items.

As Manager of Produce Sales and Marketing, Tanner Ames oversees all produce-related marketing for independent programs and customers and guides a team of sales professionals to achieve target outcomes. “Our dedicated team of produce sales specialists will help customers find what they need and be their exclusive contact for anything produce-related. Produce is ever-changing, and we work with our supplier partners

to identify new trends. Our greatest challenge is the many variables that can affect the fresh produce industry such as exchange rates and weather.”

Associated Grocers offers a line of Private Label products with the Western Family™ and Only Goodness™ lines. Western Family™ products meet or exceed that of national brands and all products carry a 100 per cent money back guarantee.



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Brody Powell,
general manager



Alex Goodman,
wholesale sales
manager



Dan Bregg, president of
wholesale operations,
Pattison Food Group



Darrah Hadden,
marketing and
advertising manager



Tanner Ames,
manager of produce
sales and marketing



FROM THE LARGE DISTRIBUTION CENTRES IN CALGARY, ALBERTA AND SURREY, B.C., THE FLEET OF TRUCKS OFFER OVERNIGHT DELIVERY TO CENTRES FROM THE SASKATCHEWAN-MANITOBA BORDER TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN.

Only Goodness™ is a range of organic and free from products made with only goodness without compromising taste, quality or affordability. We also have an exclusive line of breads and buns produced by Canada Bread under the Venice Bakery™ label. Associated Grocers have also partnered with M&M Food Market Express to bring a further line of products to independent grocery retailers.

Grocery orders are received twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, testament to the promise that customers of AG come first.

Within the Associated Grocers Transportation Department, twenty-five owner-operators with their temperature-controlled trailers travel the highways of

Western Canada delivering products for their customers on time and in a safe and efficient manner. From the large distribution centres in Calgary, Alberta and Surrey, B.C., the fleet of trucks offer overnight delivery to centres from the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border to the Pacific Ocean. They can also help to arrange orders with their direct-to-store vendor partners to be cross-docked through their warehouse.

Goodman said, “Supply and logistics challenges are always an ongoing problem in our industry. From weather disruptions,

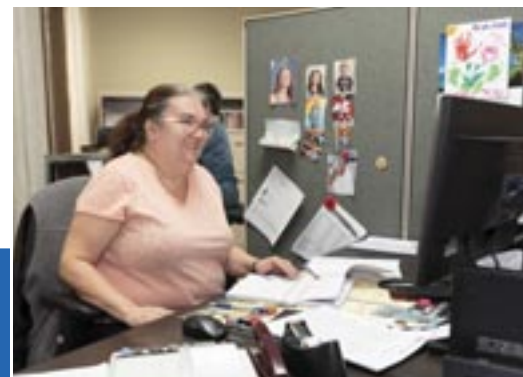
trucking disruptions, product recalls, and unpredictable shortages, we are always looking for different ways to keep our supply chain running smoothly with a high fill rate.”

GETTING THE WORD OUT

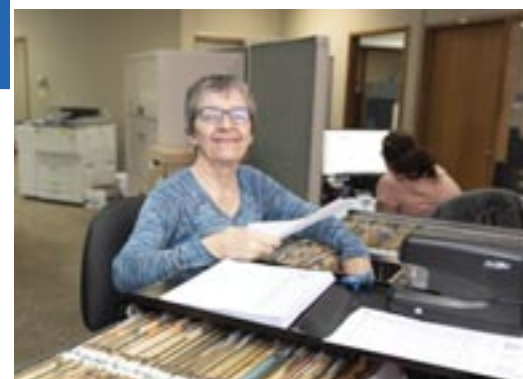
“At Associated Grocers, we offer multiple levels of marketing programs to best suit individual independent retailers’ needs,” said Powell. “Our independent retail family is a diverse group, and we support stores ranging from 3,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet located anywhere



Roxanne Jones, credit supervisor



Carla Sedore, credit claims



Donna Rathgeber, credit claims

from rural locations deep in the north of Western Canada with little to no competition to urban locations such as our friends at Stong’s Market in Vancouver who have competition on every block. No matter the size, location, or competition facing the store, we have a marketing program to suit each independent retail location.”

Marketing and Advertising Manager, Darrah Hadden describes herself as the filter that all the information needs to go through. She helps channel it in the correct direction, dealing directly with vendors looking for ad space or looking to drive sales with a hot deal or signing up for one of AG’s legendary events. “We often get special requests from our independent

customers, and it can take a few departments to put our heads together to find a solution that works for everyone.” Hadden also takes on a few creative projects such as working on store signage packages and managing social media for the AG Foods banner.

The marketing team includes two lead marketers working with vendors to create advertising programs and two support staff behind the scenes. “Five graphic designers in the advertising department bring our programs to life, creating flyers, in-store posters and signage,” said Hadden.

“Our in-house print shop produces documents for internal use as well as small flyers for stores to send out.”

Associated Grocers offers two major flyer banner programs: AG Foods, geared towards full-service grocery stores and AG Hometown Market program for smaller grocery locations with options for frequency of participation and fresh or processed-only meat. Hadden said, “We also have non-flyer programs for stores that want to put together their own flyers or advertising, usually with their local paper or for those who are looking

We’d like to extend a big

THANK YOU!

to the entire team at
Associated Grocers
for their continued partnership
and collaborative relationship.

We look forward to reaching new heights and celebrating the milestones we accomplish together as a team for the years to come!



KraftHeinz



for digital copies of the flyers and their own custom marketing that they can push out to their customers on social media.”

Hadden noted that it’s easier than ever before to create unique content and reach customers online via social media but that

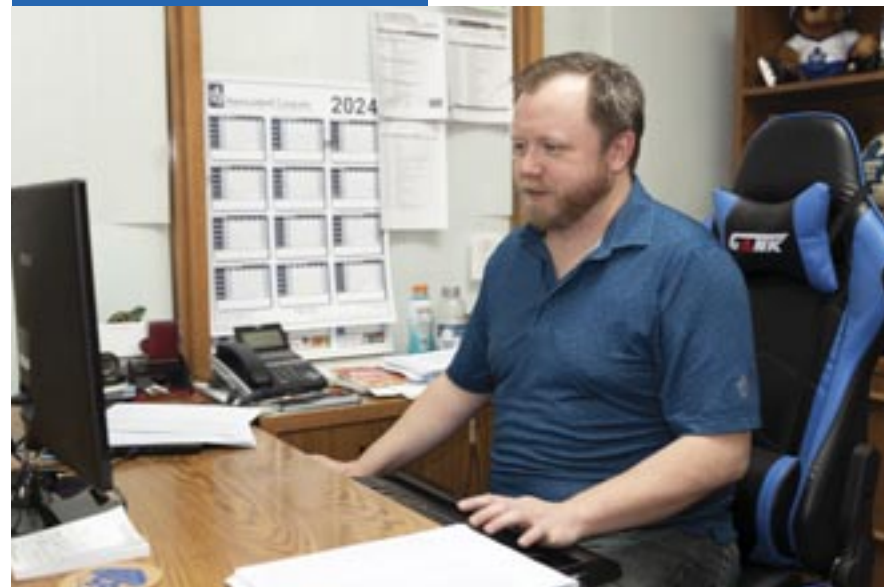
“AT ASSOCIATED GROCERS, WE OFFER MULTIPLE LEVELS OF MARKETING PROGRAMS TO BEST SUIT INDIVIDUAL INDEPENDENT RETAILERS’ NEEDS.”



Gord Grayson, coordinator, independent wholesale marketing

takes time, which most retailers don’t have enough of, and that’s where her marketing and advertising team can help. “We look at the big picture for the store and find out how their customers want information. It’s often a matter of reassurance that they don’t need to be afraid of trying out new ways of reaching customers and can look at their own staff, usually the younger generation, and let them get involved.”

“As much as the grocery landscape has changed over the last few years, it’s also the same as it ever was — providing groceries at a fair price to families that are just trying to put dinner on the table every day.”

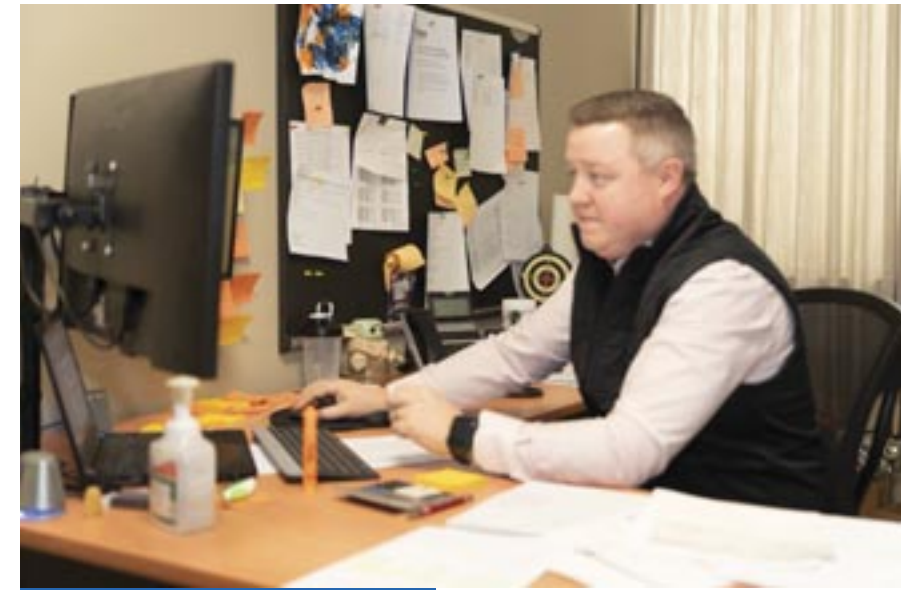


Patrick Brown, coordinator, independent wholesale marketing

FUNCTIONALITY IN DESIGN AND EQUIPMENT

The AG Sales and Operations team offers support through sales specialists in all areas of store operations including fresh departments, Point of Sales (POS) systems, back office, and more. In partnership with the marketing and advertising team, everyone works together to make sure every store is looking and performing at its peak to improve retail sales and profits.

A highly experienced team of trained individuals can assist with operational, merchandising and management issues, offering expertise in store design, fixture layouts, and décor packages. Working



Brad Allen, manager, AG meat/deli/seafood marketing

EVERYONE WORKS TOGETHER TO MAKE SURE EVERY STORE IS LOOKING AND PERFORMING AT ITS PEAK TO IMPROVE RETAIL SALES AND PROFITS.

evaluations, purchase, lease, installation and operation. To streamline store processes and create added value for their brand and their members, AG provides the latest technology, integrating the right solutions for the independent retailer.

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS

“To be honest, I don’t look at our independent customers as ‘customers’ — they are partners and they are family,” said Brody. “At Associated Grocers, we still do business the old-fashioned way, building relationships with not only our retail family but also our Consumer Packaged Goods

with size and site constraints, marketing techniques, and operator preferences, the Retail Services department can design store shelf layouts that are functional and eye catching.

POS system services provide assistance in every phase, whether it be point of sale or other applications such as computer



Jin Yoon, meat marketing/buyer/translation specialist

WISHING YOU CONTINUED SUCCESS!

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(CPG) vendor family. We have events throughout the year like our annual Fairmont Fundays Conference where a group of 250+ folks made up of AG staff, our retail family, and our vendor family meet once a year to network and build relationships and learn from each other.

Or there's our annual Adventures in Retailing Conference. We take a group of independent retailers and our valued CPG vendor partners on an amazing trip to relax and build our relationships. The retail grocery industry is hard work and everyone needs a break, so why not take it and have some fun in the sun with friends and family in the industry?"



(L-R) Mark Muller, owner, Country Food Mart, Diamond Valley, Brody Powell, general manager, Associated Grocers

AS IT HAS FOR ALMOST 97 YEARS, ASSOCIATED GROCERS WILL CONTINUE TO INNOVATE AND SERVE ITS FAMILY OF VENDORS AND CUSTOMERS INTO THE FUTURE.

For all program member stores AG provides membership, free of charge, to the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers — a collaborative community, equipping and enabling independent and specialty grocers for sustainable success.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Powell said, "Over the past few years, we have seen a few key leaders move into retirement. Ian Dickson and Larry Chmielewski were amazing mentors to me personally and had been the face at AG for many years. As well Rick Geirnaert, general manager of sales, has

hung up his grocery apron after 48 years of incredible service. Although we have some new faces leading Associated Grocers, our direction will stay true: we will always put our 650+ independent customers first. We remain committed to building relationships the old-fashioned way.

The challenges that our great independent retailers are facing today are truly unprecedented, but the main challenges are the rising costs of food products due to inflation as well as the increased costs of doing business retailers are seeing post-Covid. Fortunately, the value and service we can offer our independents is also unprecedented now

that we are part of the Pattison Food Group. This relationship has enabled us to overcome challenges and facilitate efficiencies in procurement, helping reduce overall expenses, and in turn, helps us keep our independent customers competitive."

As it has for almost 97 years, Associated Grocers will continue to innovate and serve its family of vendors and customers into the future. Bregg said, "We are proud that we continue to grow and add new customers across all three western provinces and expect to continue to do so through to our 100th anniversary in 2027 and well into the future." ●

The End of a Long and Meaningful Career

RICK GEIRNAERT RETIRES FROM ASSOCIATED GROCERS

Rick Geirnaert of Associated Grocers is leaving behind a lifetime of serving the independent grocers of Southern Alberta for some well-earned time with his family and friends.

Forty-eight years ago, young Geirnaert first worked part-time at one of the six Allwest Supermarkets in Calgary, owned by Associated Grocers. Over the course of the next fourteen years, he took on different positions in each of them. "I was a produce manager for a time," said Geirnaert, "and finished my career as a store manager when an opportunity came up with wholesale to go into the office, I applied, and that's how I ended up on the AG Independent side."

For many years, Geirnaert was one of the guys on the road, calling on the independent retailers across his territory. "Our territory reps, all our people going out are experienced in all aspects of the grocery store and they are all available to our independents, working in the stores to train staff or help them with their store operations."

"All our people are ex retail; we have empathy for what the independents are going through and we also have the business know-how. We offer our services. It's not about going in and selling ten cases of Tide: We'll sell them two cases of Tide and show them how to sell more."

When Geirnaert took on the role of general manager of Independent Wholesale Development about five years ago, he didn't leave behind those strong connections with the independent retailers scattered across the rural Alberta landscape. They all know him as someone they can turn to for help and advice, no more than a phone call away. He will be missed.



"AG has always been like family, and it has some of that feel even now with all the changes over the years. There are still quite a few people who started back when I did, and this tells you something about the company. It's a great place to work, and we all love what we're doing."

Changes Past and to Come

"One of the biggest shifts happened with COVID-19," said Geirnaert. "That forced a lot of change in our business. The development of online shopping, offering pick-ups and delivery services. It had been talked about for years, but with COVID-19 it was pushed to the forefront. When you look on the corporate side, they have multiple stores they can spread across the cost, but unless we can put something together for the independent, it's much more difficult. I think most people still like to shop in person, touch, feel, and see things, but online and delivery is definitely growing and here to stay."

"I've seen so many changes in this business. I remember standing at the back of the checkout on a busy Saturday, packing groceries, asking if the customer wanted a carry-out. It was all full-service. The independents do offer a lot more customer service, and although for a segment of the population price is everything, there are still a lot of people who enjoy the service, the quality, the relationships."

What's Next

"AG has always been like family, and it has some of that feel even now with all the changes over the years. There are still quite a few people who started back when I did, and this tells you something about the company. It's a great place to work, and we all love what we're doing."

Geirnaert and his wife are planning a winter trip to Arizona, and then back to his family roots in Calgary to tackle some of the projects he's had waiting for years. But he admits there are some very mixed emotions about leaving behind his work, his friends and colleagues at Associated Grocers. ●

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By Deb Draper

CARE: Customers are Really Everything

HOW TWO INDEPENDENT STORES IN B.C. ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Brooke Kynoch started in the grocery business in 1977 as a grocery clerk and has stayed there ever since. It wasn't until many years later when vacationing in the Shuswap Valley in B.C. with his wife Linda, that he went one step further to become one of four partners in ownership of Safety Mart Foods in Chase. "We kept buying out the other partners until we were the sole owners," said Linda, "and I fell right into the business since my background is accounting."

Four years later, the enterprising couple purchased their second store in Scotch Creek 28 km away. Linda says, "The owners of the Scotch Creek Market wanted to retire but it was important to them that it go to people who are community-minded. They approached us to see if we were interested, and of course, we were."

The stores are full service with carry out, bakery, deli, fresh produce, and a full kitchen in the larger store. "We have 60 employees at the Chase store, about 36 at Scotch Creek this time of year, more in summer," said Brooke. "We close only four days of the year: Christmas,

"We've been with Associated Grocers since the beginning. To be honest, it's more like a really good friendship than a business relationship."

Boxing Day, New Year's Day, and Family Day because we feel it's important to show that we live in the community side by side with everyone else."



Brooke Kynoch & wife Linda with some Scotch Creek Market Staff and members of the North Shuswap Lions Club with freezers.

This couple takes being part of the community to heart in every way. In 2010 they added 9,000 sq ft to the store in Chase that sits alongside the community hockey rink, then decorated the inside of the new part to look like a hockey rink with Penalty Box Café, bathrooms disguised as Dressing Rooms, and photos of retired employees with their name and number of years at the store on the back of hockey sweaters.

"We've been with Associated Grocers since the beginning," said Brooke. "To be honest, it's more like a really good friendship than a business relationship. We're on their flyer program; we give them our ideas, and they listen. They don't handcuff us in any way because they realize how important it is to our community service to buy locally."

"During the wildfires of 2021 when everything around us burned to the ground, I saw so many freezers and fridges standing at the end of driveways, we decided to buy some freezers to give away. With the help of our suppliers, we got 100 freezers, and Associated Grocers used their trucks to pick them up. It was a rough time for a lot of people, but everyone pulled together. That's how our motto "Shuswap Strong" got us through" and Associated Grocers was right there with us all the way." ●

The stores are full service with carry out, bakery, deli, fresh produce, and a full kitchen in the larger store.



Congratulations
Associated Grocers
 on being the home of the
 independent for nearly 100 years!



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WE ARE PROUD TO BE YOUR RETAIL SOLUTION PROVIDER.

By Deb Draper

Keeping Tradition and History Alive in Modern Times

THE SUCCESS STORY OF ASKEW'S FOODS

There are five Askew's Foods grocery stores in B.C. serving Sicamous, Armstrong, Enderby, and two in Salmon Arm where Dick Askew opened the first of the line in 1929. The five stores range in size from 10,000 to 22,000 retail square-feet with a total of 350 staff across the chain.

Dave Wallace, general manager of all five Askew's Foods stores began his career as a grocery clerk 40 years ago, and he has seen the value of the Askew's tradition firsthand. "Our stores follow the Askew's Foods modern day grocery store layout first established in 1969 with fresh meat departments, deli, produce, and a bakery in every store. We do things the old-fashioned way, like grinding our hamburger and cutting meat daily on site."

Askew's Foods has always been about fresh and local and are happy "whenever we can back local suppliers," said Wallace. "Our staff and managers all live in the communities where they work, and we try to support local organizations as much as possible." Each Askew's store gives to the local food bank, donations and support to local



On a regular basis, the Associated Grocers team visits our stores, asking where they can help. Associated Grocers is just a phone call away.



Dave Wallace, general manager, Askew's Foods

organizations, and community sponsorship where needed.

"As independents we can stand out by being able to pivot very fast as the industry requires," said Wallace. "This came to the forefront when the flooding in 2021 knocked out local roads to the lower mainland. We were able to keep produce on our shelves by accessing suppliers to the east while local dairies in North Okanagan supplied milk and dairy products until the roads were repaired. Associated Grocers played a large part in that, always ready

to help out in times of need."

Wallace noted that Askew's Foods has been dealing with Associated Grocers as long as he can remember. "When we're setting up new stores, the Associated Grocers team is on site merchandising products, helping set up shelving, all the way to IT support at the back end. On a regular basis, the Associated Grocers team visits our stores, asking where they can help. If we need support with advertising programs, whether it's our weekly flyer, customer appreciation days, or special events in the communities, Associated Grocers is just a phone call away.

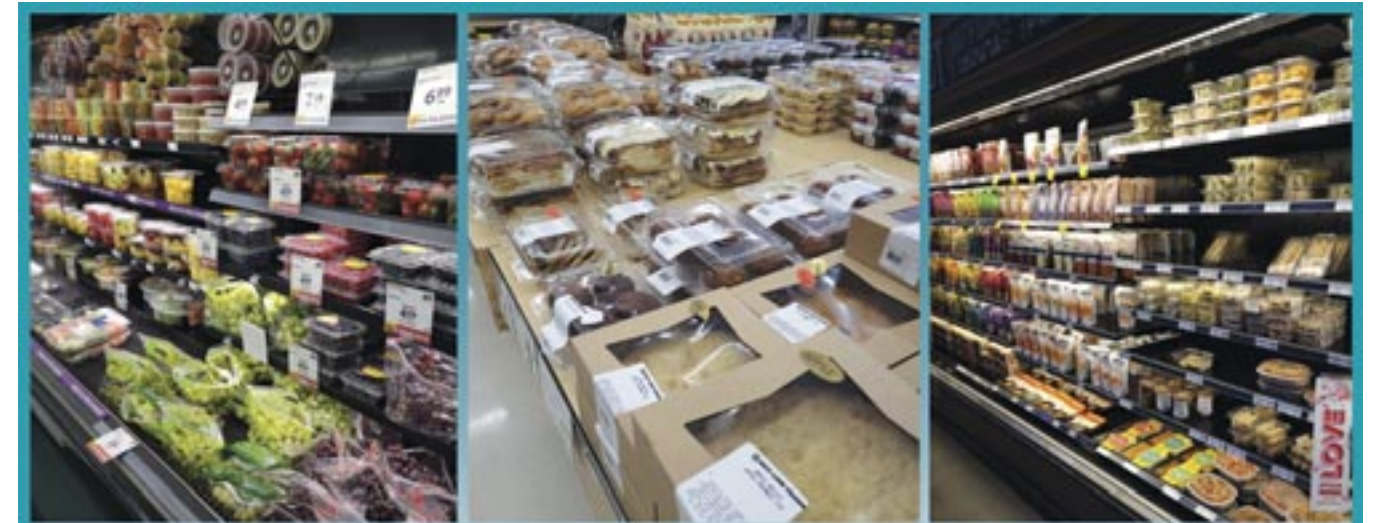
"With the world going towards bigger is better, Associated Grocers has been very supportive of the small- and medium-sized grocery chains in Western Canada, and we are very appreciative of their help, especially with the competition in the grocery market these days." ●

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By Deb Draper

Full Service and Commitment to Community

LIBERTY FOODS STAYS TRUE TO ITS ROOTS AND GROWS INTO THE FUTURE

Liberty Foods is so much more than a full service, independent grocery store in the heart of the village of Fruitvale, B.C. Since 1957 when Dick and Susan Dar ventured to purchase a small store on the outskirts of town and later partnered with Susan's brother, Dennis, to relocate it to its current prominent position on Main Street, Liberty Foods has grown and changed to become a central part of the Beaver Valley community.

Liberty Foods has been giving back to the community since its inception, supporting everything from food drives to youth sporting tournaments, and hiring from the community. This means staff and customers are also friends and neighbours.

Today, Derrick Dar, the son of Dick who passed away a few years ago, acts as managing director of Liberty Foods, continuing his family's commitment of service to the community. "Our store is relatively small at 10,000 sq ft, but it's been a full-service grocery store from the beginning," said Dar. "We have a lot of variety, selection, all fresh produce, in-store meat cutters — things you wouldn't normally see in a small rural store."

Liberty Foods has been working with Associated Grocers for almost 40 years. "They are a big part of our business; we probably buy about 75 per cent of our products from them."



Although Dar has lived in Vancouver for the past 15 years and doesn't get too involved in day-to-day operations, he watches for food trends in lower mainland Vancouver and opportunities to get products that are available only in the big city back to the small community store.

"For example, we bring in a lot of products for Chinese New Year and we carried natural organic products long before they were in vogue," said Dar. "We also try to buy as much as we can from local producers. Often their issue is that it is too expensive and difficult to get their products to us, but we're slowly working on that as we definitely want to promote them."

Liberty Foods has been working with Associated Grocers for almost 40 years, and Dar sees them as integral to the store's history and identity. "They are a big part of our business; we probably buy about 75 per cent of our products from them. We work off their weekly flyer program, but we are definitely independent. If I find a product that works really well for us, I can pitch it to Associated Grocers and see if they can carry it for other stores as well. It's a good partnership, and they're very open to listening."



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Growing together since 1992

By Deb Draper

La Ronge Indian Band Partners with Associated Grocers

BRINGING FOOD SECURITY AND AFFORDABLE PRICES TO NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

One of the 10 largest First Nations in Canada with a population of almost 12,000, lies in North-Central Saskatchewan: the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. In 2003, Indigenous-owned Keethanow Group of Businesses was founded to provide essential products and services to the area, including groceries through independent grocery stores.

“Our communities are spread wide apart,” said Dennis Caplette, general manager for Keethanow Group of Businesses, “So the stores tend to be the hub of what goes on in those communities. Keethanow Supermarket in La Ronge has over 5,000 sq ft of space, about 20 staff members, and carries all the regular grocery store products, along with fresh meat, produce, and an in-store bakery.

Two satellite stores — one in Hall Lake about 100 km away

“Rain, sleet or snow, their trucks get to us. They’ve gone to bat for us on different things, and being a partner with them has helped us secure fair, equitable pricing.”

and the other at Sucker River, about 30 km north of La Ronge — have everything a typical grocery store would carry. We also have a smaller, more convenience-style store with a gas bar inside La Ronge.”



Food security and the rising cost of groceries is a huge issue across Canada and even more so in remote communities. About a year ago, pursuing its goal to bring food security at affordable prices to the town of La Ronge and its neighbouring population, Keethanow Group of Businesses sent out a proposal for a new vendor supplier and potential partner that would help solve some of those issues.

“We had a meeting with different vendors in Saskatoon, including Associated Grocers,” said Caplette. “We gave them a picture of what we needed and what we wanted from a new supply chain. Within about six weeks they put together a solid proposal and we ended up going with them. In June 2023 we rolled our stores over to them.

Each store files a weekly order, and Associated Grocers sends out trucks with the groceries twice a week. Our previous supplier delivered only once a week, and sometimes in the busier times of the month, our stores wouldn’t have enough groceries to restock. With our arrangement with Associated Grocers, we always have a steady supply of groceries,” said Caplette.

“Rain, sleet or snow, their trucks get to us. They’ve gone to bat for us on different things, and being a partner with them has helped us secure fair, equitable pricing.”

The Keethanow Group of Businesses went looking for a new grocery supplier and what they found was a business partner that understands the needs of their communities and some of the complex issues they have to deal with. “Not very often do you get into a relationship with an organization that truly understands the dynamics of what you’re doing and are open to working with you to help support your long-term vision,” said Caplette. “Associated Grocers have been very supportive; their teams came in and worked with our staff. A rep looks after our stores, tours them on a regular basis, and is there for support. One of my main contacts is Brody Powell, and I feel there is a mutual respect between us. Anything I need, he’s a phone call away.

Associated Grocers and their team are solid business partners of Keethanow Group. We are truly grateful for what they’ve done for us.”



Dennis Caplette, general manager, Keethanow Group of Businesses

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By Deb Draper

Keeping the Independence in Independent Grocery Stores

HAMMY'S FOODS HAS FOUND THE ANSWER IN ASSOCIATED GROCERS

Ponoka is a growing, vibrant and very western town in Central Alberta, home of Canada's largest seven-day rodeo on the Canadian Professional Rodeo Associations professional tour and full-service centre for the more than 7,000 residents and surrounding areas. Right in the middle of it all sits a large shopping centre dominated by one of Alberta's largest independent grocery stores - Hammy's Foods.

Since 1946, the Hamilton family has owned and operated the original Ponoka grocery store, Hamilton's Foods, growing and changing to best serve the town's growing population. In true pioneer spirit, when disaster struck, the Hamiltons took it as an opportunity. "In 1999 our store burned to the ground," said Jim Hamilton, second generation part-owner of the store. "So I built an entire shopping centre around it, brought in a drugstore, and some other stores including the liquor store that I already owned: Hammy's Spirits."



Jim Hamilton, second generation part owner

The grocery store continued as Hamilton's Foods for a few more years, but fulfilling the store's motto - "Your Hometown Advantage: Leading the way in providing quality, value, and service to our customers and communities" - wasn't working out under the IGA banner anymore. Another change was coming.

"We made a big renovation on the store, which was finished March 30, 2022. On March 31, 2022 we opened



with Associated Grocers as our supplier," said Hamilton. "A lot of the time, because I have one of the larger stores, I wanted products that were more difficult or impossible to get. Associated Grocers works with me to get those products however they can, and price-wise, they're competitive so I can then pass on good prices to our customers."

The store became Hammy's Foods to differentiate from the old name and with its staff of 75 offers all the products of a full-service grocery store including a bakery, deli, meat department with a smoker, and a grab & go aisle. Hamilton said, "Associated Grocers sells us the full line of meat, dairy, etc., but also encourages its stores to work

"They are very accommodating and will do whatever it takes to get things the way I want. It's impressive how incredibly easy they are to work with and thanks to them, we are truly able to keep our independence."

with local suppliers wherever they can. For example, we buy produce from a greenhouse just outside town.

Associated Grocers have been fantastic to work with; they're very open. They do the ads for me, but I have a fairly competitive location compared to others. Associated Grocers give me the ability to change the retails of any items and work with me if I want to heat up the flyer. They are very accommodating and will do whatever it takes to get things the way I want. It's impressive how incredibly easy they are to work with and thanks to them, we are truly able to keep our independence." ●

By Deb Draper

Looking after Family, Friends, and Community

MARKET STREET FOODS HONOURS THE PAST AND COMMITS TO THE FUTURE

Scott Mitchell is the founder of Market Street Foods in Vulcan AB, taking his place in his family's commitment to serving the community. "In 1941, my grandfather, who was a chemist, bought the drugstore in Vulcan because the RCAF base nearby needed a pharmacy. Eighty-three years later that drugstore is still a vital part of the small community and surrounding area."

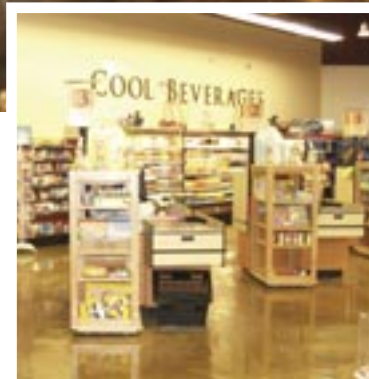
As a kid, Mitchell worked on the pharmacy side, went to university, but soon decided to come home, get into the food business, and raise his family in the small independent community of Vulcan. "In 1988 we opened the grocery store and Associated Grocers was right there with us. Rick Geirnaert was one of the first to come down and help set up the store."



Scott Mitchell, founder, Market Street Foods

After a large renovation, the new Market Street Foods opened in 2005 and the original pharmacy moved under the same roof, taking 7,000 sq ft of the total 25,000 retail space. About 43 staff members plus the pharmacy group keep it all running smoothly.

The meat department, deli, dairy, grocery section, and bakery have everything a customer might want or need, but there is so much more from gourmet and specialty



foods to daily hot food specials to hot coffee and drinks at the in-store Market Street Café. "We have a big smokehouse out back," said Mitchell. "We do a lot of custom cooking and private parties on-site - whatever the community needs."

"We're now moving towards the lifestyle wellness aspect in our store. The presence of the pharmacy makes for a certain level of awareness and confidence that comes with that protocol. From the produce aisle to the pharmacy, it shines a light on keeping everybody healthy and changes our mix of products, changes the way our customers perceive us as a caregiver as well as a provider."

We've been here a long time so we feel like we're guardians and stewards of our community. We have to be transparent. Large corporate stores are shareholder-driven not stakeholder-driven, and I think the public is becoming aware of that. We're in the service business and we need to recognize this.

Our store and offerings are a reflection of the vitality of our warehouse and the people that run Associated Grocers. We describe AG as being the kings of service; they pick up the phone when you call; they're there when you need them. Larry Chmielewski, Ian Dickson, and all the presidents in between were iconic in terms of how they committed their lives to making sure AG stayed vibrant and healthy, and now with Brody Powell leading the way, those great relationships that have been built in the past will carry forward."

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By Deb Draper

Community Service and Selection

THE SECRET TO THE SUCCESS OF SOUTHSIDE MARKET

The grocery business is in Chris Lee's blood: his father owns Safety Mart in Ashcroft, B.C., an uncle holds Barriere AG Foods, and another uncle has Pember Valley AG Foods. Seven years ago, Lee took his place in the family heritage and became the owner of Southside Market in Revelstoke, B.C.

Southside Market is a full-service grocery store with all the conventional offerings, a growing selection of local meats cut in-store, along with homemade sausages and ready-to-cook entrees. Fresh milk comes from a local B.C. farm, and organic milk, cream, and eggs are also available. In recent years, the store has been adding more ethnic and international specialties, catering to the many travellers coming from all over the world to enjoy recreational activities around Revelstoke.

The heart of this independent grocery store is in the community. "You see your customers day in day out and develop a lot of personal relationships," said Lee.

"They're great to work with, always willing to go above and beyond to help do whatever they can."



"What's nice about owning a small business, especially a grocery store, is we can impact the community as a provider." Improving food security is part of their business model to ensure access to healthy and affordable food. "When we first got here, we learned that many children were going to elementary school hungry, so we set up a breakfast program to feed them. It was so successful, the school district took it over and now have a daily program in all the elementary schools and the secondary school in the town. We still donate to the program, and it's nice to see it evolved from our beginning."

The easiest way to make customers happy is to listen to what they want and do your best to bring it in for them. Our family has been dealing with Associated Grocers since the '80s and they are very flexible in helping us this way. AG is our primary supplier, but we have an agreement that if we can get products we want to the Associated Grocers warehouse in Surrey, BC under the Pattison Food Group umbrella, AG will bring them on to us. That's a huge thing for us because a lot of the distributors we deal with are smaller labels or independents in Vancouver."

Another example: The power was going to be down in the Pemberton store for seven to 10 hours, a disaster for a grocery store. AG sent in trailers with freezers and stored all the products at no charge.

"They're great to work with," said Lee. "Always willing to go above and beyond to help do whatever they can." ●



- EASY SNACKS, MEALS AND ENTERTAINING -

Over the last few years, the grocery industry has seen many changes and our company is no exception. We've had a corporate re-structuring that saw all of our food related businesses join forces within the Pattison Food Group. This has allowed us to combine our strengths and enhance efficiencies across all our respective organizations. As well we saw many retirements in our management group which opened up opportunities for new faces with fresh ideas to enhance our team. I'm excited to see where we can take Associated Grocers in the future.

- Brody Powell, General Manager, Wholesale

*Happy Trails to Rick Geirnaert!
After 48 years of service with AG,
we are sad to see you go,
but happy to see you enjoying a
well deserved retirement in 2024.
All the best to you, Rick & Leanne!*



ICE CREAM

By Anne-Marie Hardie

Frozen Favourites

CONSUMERS' DESIRE FOR AFFORDABLE INDULGENCE DRIVES DEMAND IN THE **ICE CREAM CATEGORY**

The verdict is in: Canadians love their frozen treats. It remains a highly coveted treat for Canadian households, with 96 per cent penetration. The challenging economy has not dampened the demand for frozen indulgences. In fact, the ice cream and frozen treat sector remains vibrant, with growth in every category, from conventional to super premium.

"It's an affordable luxury; we've had three years of people splurging and buying on the Super Premium side, resulting in the category remaining in the five to seven per cent growth range," says Paul McMahon, director of category shopper development, Nestlé. "I believe that even in tough economic times, that trend towards small indulgences as consumers move away from restaurants and into the home will continue."

Innovation drives demand for this sector as manufacturers explore new taste experiences in the frozen format. "We have seen the overall consumption of ice cream increase over the last few years," says Lesya Chapman, marketing manager, Chapman's Ice Cream. Last year, Chapman Ice Cream entered the Super Premium market with two award-winning products: their Super Premium Plus Cold Brew Coffee ice cream, made with cold brew from Indigenous-owned Birch Bark Coffee and their Super Premium Plus Cookie Jar Ice Cream. A portion of the Super Premium Plus Cold Brew Coffee sales gets donated to clean drinking water initiatives for Indigenous homes across Canada. Chapman's is adding four new Super Premium Plus flavours to their existing product line, each in the 500 ml size: Cherry Cheesecake, Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough, Chocolate Cake Batter and Ruby Raspberry Ice Cream. At the same time, Del Monte will launch several fruit-based products, including a mango sorbet, strawberry lemon sorbet, and a raspberry chocolate gelato, each available in 946 ml.

continued on page 46

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Chocolate chip cookie dough mixed with a brown butter ice cream, with an enticing brown sugar ripple, accompanied by semi sweet chocolate chunks.

Refreshing raspberry ice cream with an abundant raspberry ripple and crunchy raspberry cookie gems. A delicious flavour explosion.

Winner Ice Cream Category. Survey of 4,000 people by Kantar.



SIAL Sets the Tone for Innovation

A Q&A with SIAL Innovation Competition Jury President **Isabelle Marquis**

SIAL books itself as the largest food innovation show in North America. How is this emphasis on innovation manifested in show design, events, and exhibitors?

This year is a special one, as SIAL Network celebrates its 60th anniversary. As far as Montreal is concerned, the show's surface area has been increased in two floors and SIAL Canada is evolving into "The North American Agri-Food Business Accelerator," marking a pivotal reorientation towards driving growth and fostering innovation in the food sector. This repositioning not only underlines our role beyond showcasing innovations but also as a key player in nurturing business development and industry advancements.

A new activation, SIAL To Go, exemplifies SIAL's innovative spirit by launching an immersive journey into the evolving "to go" market within restaurants, grocery, and retail sectors.



Isabelle Marquis, SIAL Innovation Competition Jury President

This pioneering initiative showcases trends, technologies, and innovations crucial for takeout and delivery services, including autonomous delivery solutions and innovative packaging. SIAL To Go represents our commitment to leading the industry towards a multi-platform future, highlighting the latest advancements that cater to the growing consumer demand for convenience and sustainability.

A fresh addition to this year's lineup is the expansion of the cheese sector, now rebranded as SIAL Dairy, to include the wider dairy industry.

The International Cheese competition will now be biennial in Toronto, with Montreal welcoming the 'Best Canadian Cheesemonger 2024' in alternating years, spotlighting the country's premier cheesemongering skills.

The SIAL Innovation program continues to be a cornerstone of our innovation focus, spotlighting products that have been introduced to the market within the last year and are at the forefront of reshaping the food sector. The registration will be free this year and prizes have also been improved: in addition to the usual visibility plan, prizes in services from Nielsen IQ and 100sqft at SIAL Canada 2025, the winners will be entitled to a private meeting with buyers. With the Innovation Awards ceremony scheduled for 12:30 PM on Wednesday, May 15, we celebrate the groundbreaking achievements of our exhibitors, reinforcing the importance of innovation in driving the industry forward.

Moreover, our dedication to supporting start-ups and emerging companies is manifested in the Start-Up area, where innovative food products and concepts are showcased. This dedicated space not only allows these ventures to connect with potential investors, retailers, and industry professionals but also includes a Pitch Competition on May

16 at 10 AM, encouraging innovation and collaboration within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In redefining itself as "The North American Agri-Food Business Accelerator," SIAL emphasizes its strategic focus on innovation, networking, and business development, solidifying its role as a pillar of the Canadian food industry.

What are some of the key innovations occurring in food processing, grocery retail and foodservice that you could highlight?

There is so much going on in our industry right now! Economy and sustainability are undoubtedly two big topics that will be much discussed this year. All food sectors, here and around the world, are strongly challenged by an unstable economy, the impact of climate change and wars, lack of human resources, and new regulations, to name a few challenges! So, how to navigate through times of turbulence like we face right now is a crucial question that many experts will address. New packaging solutions, technologies (including AI), ESG, and food waste solutions are also on the agenda. Great problems come with great opportunities, so this year should be rich in learning and inspiration for all visitors.

For the conference portion of SIAL, can attendees expect speakers to address how innovation is transforming the food industry landscape? Are there any examples?

Absolutely! In this era of economic, social, and environmental pressures, the need for innovative solutions has never been more pressing. SIAL Canada has entirely revisited the conference portion of the show, embracing this challenge head-on, and recognizing the essential role of innovation in fostering positive change. The renewed conference program introduces 10 thematic forums, each dedicated to a unique aspect of the food industry and lasting 1 hour and 45 minutes. These forums are structured to delve deep into each theme through three presentations, offering diverse perspectives on subjects related to the broad topic. Within this framework, attendees will gain insights into a wide range of innovations, from the use of artificial intelligence to streamline operations, to the exploration of new product trends that meet evolving consumer demands, and the implementation of sustainable practices that address environmental concerns.

This dynamic approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the ways in which innovation is driving the food industry forward, equipping participants with the knowledge and inspiration needed to navigate the complexities of the modern food landscape. Moreover, in a significant update to make the conference more accessible to all visitors, SIAL has made the decision to offer the conferences free of charge this year. This move underscores our commitment to facilitating an inclusive exchange of ideas and innovations that can propel the food industry into the future. ●

Packaging has become an essential tool to communicate these ingredient attributes to the end consumer. Recently, Happy Pops launched a packaging refresh to help increase awareness of the health benefits of their product. Their new package will clearly indicate that their products are vegan and gluten-free, helping engage consumers seeking products with those qualities.

Shared Indulgences

The continued shift to eating at home has created an opportunity for the premium category to expand into larger versions of their coveted treats. "Consumers have been telling us that the one pint is fine when I'm sitting on the couch or with my spouse, but when I'm entertaining, I don't want to have to buy a whole bunch of them," says McMahon. In response to this need, Häagen-Dazs will launch a 946 ml family pack for their top three selling flavours: Coffee, Chocolate and Vanilla. Nestlé will be adding 946 ml drumstick-inspired tubs of ice cream in three flavours: Chocolate Fudge Brownie, Vanilla Caramel, and Strawberry Cheesecake to this category. The tub of ice cream will include drumstick pieces, providing consumers with a drumstick feel in an ice cream format. "We are trying to bring a little bit more indulgence into a medium-sized pack instead of a 1.5 litre or two-litre version," says McMahon.

The demand for ice cream and frozen novelties shows no sign of slowing down, presenting an opportunity for grocers to increase impulse purchases. As much as frozen indulgences remain an impulse purchase, consumers are still seeking out their favourite flavours, so grocers must find the balance between stocking new varieties and those perennial favourites.



Chapman's will be added four new Super Premium Plus flavours to their lineup - Cherry Cheesecake, Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough, Chocolate Cake Batter and Ruby Raspberry Ice Cream.

"There are two fundamentals that you need to get right in ice cream; the first is that ice cream purchases can often be impulsive, so secondary display in a store is key," says McMahon. "The second is on-shelf availability. In the summer months, there are a lot of holes on the shelf, and that comes down to you've got the assortment but not the holding power to stock each one." At a bare minimum, those gaps on the shelf could result in a disappointed customer. However, they could also result in consumers leaving your store to pick up their desired product at one of your competitors. ●

photo courtesy shutterstock.com

Growth in the conventional category, including frozen bars and popsicles, has remained consistent year over year. However, there is a growing sector that is actively looking at ingredients when they are selecting their indulgent treats. "Over the last few years, we've seen consumers seeking a range of health benefits in their frozen treats, including looking for low calorie, protein-infused, low sugar and the rise of keto ice cream," says Leila Keshavjee, founder of Happy Pops. "However, what remains consistent is the demand for good ice cream, which is now expanding into more premium, small batch products." Lemon Mint and Pineapple Coconut remain the two top favourite Happy Pop flavours.

Recently, Happy Pops partnered with Mattel, resulting in branded Barbie and Hot Wheels packaging that will help engage parents and children with the fruit-based iced treats. "We felt that much of what Mattel stands for aligns with us," says Keshavjee. "It also gives us an opportunity to put out a fun, healthy product that kids will enjoy and parents will feel good about buying."

Häagen-Dazs will also expand its offerings in this category, including adding Key Lime Pie to its Extraaz collection.

"Consumers continue looking for creative flavours and the best value. That is where we work every day to deliver the best value to our consumers with the best quality of ice cream," says Chapman. Chapman will be introducing Crunch Bars to their Yukon line of large-size ice cream novelties. These bars will be available in two flavours, Strawberry Shortcake Crunch and Chocolate Éclair, with cookie bits in their coating.

Tapping into Consumers' Needs

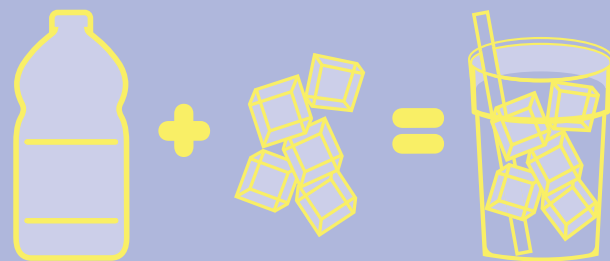
Health and wellness remain a core driver across all grocery store categories. For the frozen indulgence category, this includes shoppers looking for treats that include recognizable ingredients and allergen/diet-conscious options. "There's an ongoing trend towards more health and wellness," says McMahon. "So we launched into plant-based Häagen-Dazs last year, and its performance exceeded our expectations. Plant-based products open the ice cream category to new consumers." Häagen-Dazs added a decadent almond milk-based Chocolate Fudge Brownie ice cream to their offerings this year, making it the fourth sku in their plant-based ice creams.



ON ICE



SERVE YOURSELF A REFRESHING BEVERAGE AT HOME



COLD BEVERAGES

By Martha Beach-Yeo

CHILLING TRENDS

Less Sugar, Less Calories Heat Up Sales in Cold Beverages

As the seasons shift and temperatures rise, Canadians turn to cold beverages to quench their thirst and refresh their palates. From classic carbonated sodas to innovative health-conscious options, the aisles of grocery stores are teeming with a diverse array of cold beverages these days.

The non-alcoholic cold beverage category contributes approximately \$5 billion CAD annually to the GDP. Cricana (formerly IRI and NPD) (2024 Food and Beverage Outlook) data reported that beverage sales will continue to outperform in 2024. Health-conscious consumers are seeking more protein and energy drinks, while other factors fueling beverage sales include more innovation.

The International Food Information Council's (IFIC) Food and Health Survey reported that 75 per cent of Americans believe the foods and beverages they choose have a significant or moderate impact on their mental and emotional wellness and as a result shoppers are expected to reach for products that can offer sleep benefits, stress reduction and mood support — and this trend will be especially notable in the beverage category.

photo courtesy shutterstock.com



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are doing it because they see it as being good for their health, and this shift is benefiting other beverage categories like soda, juice, and water.

With consumers on a constant search for drink options that balance health benefits with indulgence and provide new and exciting taste experiences, Lynsey Walker, vice-president of marketing & communications at the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), which holds two major trade shows and conferences in Canada, has seen explosive growth in the beverage category — particularly in the non-alcoholic space.

“The innovation we’ve been witnessing on the trade show floor aligns with data we’re seeing across the globe.” The market value of low and non-alcoholic beverages surpassed \$11 billion globally in 2022 and is set to increase by a third by 2026. Walker says that non-alcoholic beer is still the most popular non-alcoholic (NA) product choice, however innovations with more sophisticated flavour profiles in NA wine and ready-to-drink (RTD) options are driving growth.

“Nature inspired flavours like hibiscus rose and Sakura

TRENDING LABEL CLAIMS FOR 2024 THAT LEND WELL TO THE BEVERAGE CATEGORY INCLUDE “CLEAN”, “COLD PRESSED” AND “FERMENTED.”



Lynsey Walker, vice-president of marketing & communications, Canadian Health Food Association

IFIC also expects to see an uptick of beverage offerings with botanical ingredients, particularly teas and seltzers, along with prebiotic and probiotic inclusions for gut health. The survey also notes that label transparency continues to show increased importance in consumers choices and labels that communicate healthfulness may resonate especially well. Trending label claims for 2024 that lend well to the beverage category include “clean”, “cold pressed” and “fermented.”

Consumers are also drinking less alcohol across the globe, and according to a recent Mintel survey, 60 per cent of Canadians say they are replacing alcohol with non-alcoholic alternatives. Fifty-four per cent say they

flowers and ingredients such as yuzu and lemongrass are on the rise-making perfect additions to creating an at-home mocktail.” Walker notes that retailers can leverage this trend by highlighting NA mixers tailored for home bars, including shrubs and syrups along with ready-to-use NA spirits featuring premium ingredients. Some retailers have created sections for complete at home non-alcoholic bars merchandising NA beers along with RTD mocktails, mixers, syrups and bar snacks.

“An increased focus on healthier lifestyles and sugar reduction is fueling the expansion of ready-to-drink (RTD) beverages,” says Walker. “At CHFA NOW Vancouver 2024, we anticipate witnessing a wave of innovation in premium RTDs (Ready-to-Drink), with

	\$ SHARE	SHARE Pts Chg	\$ VOL Abs Chg	\$ VOL % Chg	TONN % Chg
CHILLED JUICE	100.0	0.0	+\$8.9M	1.2%	-7.7%
ORANGE JUICE	61.3	0.0	+\$5.8M	1.3%	-7.5%
FRUIT JUICES	9.0	-0.9	-\$5.4M	-7.7%	-17.8%
DRINKS	10.2	0.3	+\$3.2M	4.5%	-4.9%
LEMONADE	9.1	0.8	+\$6.4M	10.8%	1.1%
ICED TEA	6.8	-0.4	-\$2.0M	-3.9%	-12.1%
SMOOTHIES	2.8	0.0	+\$244.0K	1.2%	-8.2%

Source: Nielsen, MarketTrack, NATIONAL GDM, CHILLED JDN + IT, 52 Weeks - PE DECEMBER 30 2023

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brands introducing new colours, textures, and formats to upgrade daily beverages and meet consumer demand for accessible luxury.” For example, Walker notes elevated cafe-style offerings incorporating carbonation, nitros, and naturally derived flavours and textures are all expected.

A common trend in most food and beverage categories has seen Canadians reaching for drinks that will not only taste good but also provide them with added health and wellness benefits, looking for options that support their nutrition and deliver functional perks to add to their overall health and prevent illness.

“People are looking for solutions to help them save time, — like smoothie beverages — as well as looking for functional products containing beneficial natural ingredients such as vitamins,” says Marlène Hins, vice-president marketing & innovation for Lassonde. “We note a trend towards less sweet products and health and well-being.” Hins says that at Lassonde, they market products aimed to maintain or improve the health and well-being consumers. “For instance, we have many products that are already responding to these trends such as Oasis HealthBreak and in the shelf category, Oasis HydraFruit juices containing 60 per cent less sugar as well as SunRype Slim beverage which has only 1g of sugar.” Lassonde will also launch reduced sugar and low-calorie products in the chilled section this spring.



photo courtesy shutterstock.com

“PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS TO HELP THEM SAVE TIME, -LIKE SMOOTHIE BEVERAGES- AS WELL AS LOOKING FOR FUNCTIONAL PRODUCTS CONTAINING BENEFICIAL NATURAL INGREDIENTS SUCH AS VITAMINS.”



Marlène Hins, vice-president marketing & innovation, Lassonde

Soft drinks have been a popular drink of choice among consumers of all ages for a long time and in Canada almost three billion units of flavoured soft drinks are sold every year, with dollar sales of flavoured soft drinks reaching approximately \$1.4 billion CAD, making them a top cold drink option. Pepsi and Coca Cola are among some of the most popular soft drinks with other brands like Canada Dry, Crush, Big 8 and Clearly Canadian contributing to healthy sales. Although

Canadians still have a taste for soft drinks, in recent years dietary concerns regarding sugar intake has caused some of the appeal of sugary soft drinks to decline, and the volume of soft drinks available for consumption per

person in Canada dropped from 82.93 litres in 2010 to 52.78 litres in 2020.

The distinction consumers are beginning to make between sugary drinks and beverages consumed with more health benefits in mind also plays into merchandising decisions. Segregating soda from other beverages can lead to increased sales for both categories. By providing a dedicated space for soda, retailers can allocate more shelf real estate to showcase a wider variety of options including flavours, sizes, and brands. Sodas often fair better in eye catching impulse buy areas, and for beverages that fall into organic or health food categories they can be showcased with other wellness products to enhance the appeal of contributing to a healthy diet.

THE WORLD'S CLEANEST PLANT MILKS



NATIONAL INCL NFLD GB +DR +MM during Cal Yr 2023 - w/e 30/12/23

CATEGORY	LOW CALORIES	\$	\$ Chg YA	% Chg YA	Tonnage 12L/cases	Tonnage 12L/cases Abs Chg	Tonnage 12L/cases % Chg
CHILLED	TOTAL CHILLED	\$718,134,222	\$7,828,079	1%	25,714,983	(2,229,131)	(8)%
CHILLED	REDUCED SUGAR	\$16,811,121	\$2,303,180	16%	482,612	32,338	7%
CHILLED	REGULAR	\$698,657,094	\$5,385,098	1%	25,149,215	(2,236,219)	(8)%

In the chilled juice segment Hins says they are seeing beverages produced with local fruits and juices with added value (e.g. functional or organic ingredients) and containers with a better environmental footprint as trends that are leading to the achievement of several innovations. “For instance, Lassonde markets organic juices under the Kiju brand that are 100 per cent pure juice, and refrigerated juices made from concentrate from local fruits such as those in the Rougemont Orchard Collection (Apple, blueberry, and cranberry).” She says the company has also foreseen the importance to continue to reduce their environmental footprint. “We have invested in the elimination of plastic straws on all of our brands marketed in 200 ml format and our 300 ml plastic containers contain 25 per cent recycled PET.”

One specific segment Hins says has seen increasing is lemonade, and along with products made with local fruits and products produced in Canada. “At Lassonde we are following these trends and will launch a new chilled lemonade this spring.” She says that consumers do prefer to buy products made in Canada, and retailers



FLAVOURED WATER, BOTH CARBONATED AND NON-CARBONATED, HAS BECOME A GO-TO ALTERNATIVE FOR CONSUMERS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING THAT OFFERS INTERESTING TASTE PROFILES.

offering these products on the shelf is not only a good practice but also can help sales.

Lower sugar options go hand in hand with lower calories options, both of which shoppers are veering towards when it comes to their cold beverage choices. According to Erich Schmidt, director, communications and public affairs for the Canadian Beverage Association (CBA), “recent research from the Conference Board of Canada shows that low-calorie non-alcoholic beverage servings have outstripped their full calorie counterparts and become mainstream over the past decade.”



Erich Schmidt, director, communications and public affairs, Canadian Beverage Association

Between 2009 and 2021, the share of low-calorie servings of total non-alcoholic beverage volumes has steadily increased from 44 per cent to 58 per cent. “This shift toward low-calorie servings has been driving the reduction in the overall amount of daily calories consumed from beverages per person,” said Schmidt. Across most beverage sub-categories, the share of low-calorie servings has grown since 2014, when the CBA launched the Balance Calories Initiative — to reduce the calories Canadians consume from beverages by 20 per cent in the decade between 2014 and 2025. Schmidt says the fastest growth has been in juice-containing drinks (nectars), still drinks, and caffeinated energy drinks. “Low-calorie flavoured water has continued to crowd out higher-calorie products, making up almost the entire flavoured water subcategory.”

Flavoured water, both carbonated and non-carbonated, has become a go-to alternative for consumers looking for something that offers interesting taste profiles without

the added sugar or calories. Consumption of flavoured water is expected to continue increasing in coming years after growing from per capita consumption of 5.7 litres in 2018 to an increase of almost eight litres by 2022.

Flavoured sparkling waters seem poised to emerge as the winner in waters, however plain packaged water has remained Canada’s most consumed non-alcoholic beverage by volume since 2012, surpassing carbonated soft drinks. Schmidt says, “the shift towards more water consumption has contributed to lower calorie intake from beverages.” In 2021, non-water segments represented 29 per cent of total low-calorie serving volumes with carbonates and flavoured water being the most consumed. Packaged water accounted for 41 per cent of total non-alcoholic beverage volume and 71 per cent of total low-calorie serving volume.

Consumer preferences in cold beverages have undergone significant shifts over the years, and health-conscious consumers are increasingly seeking out options with natural ingredients, lower sugar content, and functional benefits. This has led to a surge in demand for products like sparkling flavoured water, kombucha, cold pressed juices, and plant-based milk alternatives. At the same time, traditional favourites like soft drinks still hold a prominent place in the market, particularly among certain demographics. With the growing emphasis on natural products with health benefits, lower sugar and lower calorie options and the demand for innovative flavours and formulas there is ample opportunity for retailers and beverage manufacturers to drive growth and capture market share. ●

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FOOD PROCESSOR SPOTLIGHT

By Nerissa Allen B.Sc. – President of the Black Business Association of BC (BBABC)

It's time to change gears for Maureen Simon Foods Corp founder and president Maureen Simon. Simon has been offering up various delicious foods since the Expo 86 World's Fair. In 2024, Simon prepares to execute a rebrand and her largest product launch in her 18 years of food manufacturing.

Originally from the beautiful Caribbean Island of Trinidad and Tobago, Simon began her food industry journey with catering in and around Vancouver's Lower Mainland while raising her four kids. She soon began her local success by packaging the most popular items for the tables of Granville Island Market and local grocery chains.

Simon is known for creating unique and delectable recipes which draw upon — and are inspired by foods from the Caribbean / African diaspora, and in fact all over the world, always leading with flavour first. This collaboration brings familiar — yet unique tasting, scrumptious foods, naturally healthy that will warm your heart, fill your stomach and most importantly please your taste buds!



Photo credit: Femi Adewuyi

Bringing the Taste of the Caribbean

Maureen Simon Foods Corp founder and president Maureen Simon Has Unique Flair for Food Industry

Simon's secret is her perseverance, confidence in herself, and her unwillingness to take no for an answer. When she realized there were not only few women entrepreneurs in the food industry but even less black business owners, she did not let that deter her. In a recent address at the BBABC Lifetime Achievement Awards, Simon notably pointed out "The dreams in your heart are stronger than the fear in your mind."

There are few doors in the food industry Simon hasn't found a way to open and has made some strong and supportive friends along the way.

"Maureen Simon is one of the hardest working women I know. I met Maureen at Expo 86 when she came and asked me to give her a location on the site where she could sell her products to fare goers and she turned the opportunity into a great success story and a real and ongoing successful business. I am very proud to

call Maureen my friend." – Jimmy Pattison

In 2024, Simon is taking her products to another level with a new line of meat rolls and vegetable rolls called Rolliis. What is a Rollii?

A Rollii is a Jamaican filled roll. It is combining two popular handheld snack — Jamaican patties and European sausage rolls. Simon took the essence of a Jamaican patty filling and wrapped it in premium French puff pastry. In early 2024, Simon will introduce the Rolliis in a retail package starting in 4 flavours: Coconut Curry Chicken, Jamaican Jerk Beef, Spicy Jerk Chicken, Jamaican Jerk Ground Veggie.

Speaking of patties, this year Simon will revive the popular local brand The Real Patty Co and bring her uniquely flavoured Jamaican patties to the market. Also in the works is a brand redesign for her famous Jamaican Jerk Sauce and Coconut Curry sauce which will also launch this year. The sauces are currently available at PFG locations. Her famous Caribbean style Rum Cake gets a new look and will be available for the holidays just before Thanksgiving.

Simon plans to offer unique frozen entrée products and a variety of new items in the near future. "See business in the present, even if it is in the future" has been the frame of mind that has gotten her to where she is today and one that will continue to grow her business and her success. Here's to 2024! ●



SUSTAINABLE SMARTS

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS FOR GROCERS AND BRANDS



photo courtesy shutterstock.com

Sustainability in business challenges grocers and food and beverage manufacturers to seek profits without impacting the environment, global community, or society in a negative way. Today, Canadian consumers expect companies and brands to take charge when it comes to sustainability. According to a Mintel 2022 report, although 71 per cent of Canadians surveyed considered themselves sustainable consumers, 43 per cent said the most significant responsibility fell on companies. Moreover, consumers are opening their pocketbooks to support companies that demonstrate sustainability.

In a 2021 Statista report, it was found that 49 per cent of consumers shopped at companies that support protecting the environment. While 30 per cent wanted products with traceability, 46 per cent of Canadians said eco-friendly products or products with less packaging were more apt to end up in their shopping carts.

Plastic packaging accounts for 47 per cent of the plastics produced in Canada each year. The Canada Plastics Pact (CPP) is leading Canada's response to the escalating plastic crisis. In 2021, 41 Founding CPP Partners, comprising leading brands, waste management companies, government institutions, and NGOs, voluntarily formed CPP to accelerate action towards a circular economy for plastics.

CPP is a member of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Global Plastics Pact network and is a solution space of The Natural Step Canada in partnership with the Smart Prosperity Institute, whose shared vision is a strong and inclusive economy that thrives within nature's limits.



*Cher Mereweather,
managing director,
Canada Plastics Pact*

“Through fostering innovation and collaboration, our 100+ Partners from across the plastics value chain are taking meaningful steps to eliminate unnecessary and problematic plastics, redesign packaging and bolster their usage of recycled plastic,” says Cher Mereweather, managing director of CPP. “It plays an important function in society — from improving food safety to reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared to alternative packaging options — but we need to do better at eliminating unnecessary and problematic plastic and managing the plastic we do need at the end of its life.”

Loblaw Companies Limited has set out to make all control brand and in-store packaging 100 per cent recyclable or reusable by 2025. The grocery store giant has already started utilizing the Golden Design Rules for plastic packaging, developed by Consumer Goods Forum’s Coalition for Action on Plastic Waste. Galen Weston is the co-chair, along with Alexis Perakis-Valat, consumer products division president of L’Oreal.

Loblaw Companies Limited has taken on the momentous task of determining the plastic packaging components of over 10,000 skus to ensure compliance with the Golden Design Rules.

“We’ve made a lot of progress to date, with more than 60 per cent compliance by the end of 2023. However, we have identified a number of products that still require further exploration, action planning, validation, testing, and conversion, and we are actively working to address these issues. We are confident in our plan to achieve 100 per cent compliance by our target year of 2025,” says a company spokesperson.

Some of the control brand efforts include removing black plastic from across lids, trays, and jars and converting to



“Through fostering innovation and collaboration, our 100+ Partners from across the plastics value chain are taking meaningful steps to eliminate unnecessary and problematic plastics, redesign packaging and bolster their usage of recycled plastic.”

alternative colours that are easier to recycle. For example, the PC Shrimp Rings have moved to clear recycled polyethylene terephthalate (rPET) trays, and all Styrofoam trays in meat and produce are moving to clear rPET. “Most caps and lids previously in black plastic have moved to red, white, or a different colour to indicate flavour.”

Loblaw also decided to overhaul its coffee aisle with new packaging. The first-of-its-kind Canadian launch of a paper-based solution to replace non-recyclable packaging is available on shelves now. All 35 President’s Choice and no name whole bean and ground coffee varieties are transitioning to this innovative packaging.

Club Coffee, a long-time partner of Loblaw, designed a new AromaPak™ with Boardio technology. Made with a minimum of 80 per cent paper content from renewable, recyclable, and sustainable Forest Stewardship Council sourced tree fibres, this new packaging has earned the PC team a 2022 Global Packaging Award for Package Innovation and Sustainable Design.

“The biggest challenge and greatest opportunity is getting more businesses in our sector to sign on to the effort,” says a Loblaw spokesperson. “Solving a complicated

problem like plastic waste is a team effort, and we can only succeed if we’re all working together.”

To ensure success and participation, the company sets ambitious goals and empowers its global vendor base and internal teams to make the most significant impact possible. “It hasn’t been without its challenges, but to drive momentum, we’ve developed technical guidance that better integrates the Golden Design Rules into packaging materials, training for all product-focused teams, and maintained a steady drumbeat of enthusiasm to inspire our colleagues on our plastics mission.”

In addition to the company’s focus on fighting plastic waste, Loblaw’s Carbon reduction plan is to achieve net zero for Scope 1 and 2 enterprise operations by 2040 and for its indirect or Scope 3 emissions by 2050.

Scope 1 represents 2 per cent of Loblaw’s emissions from sources controlled or owned by the company. Scope 2 encompasses indirect emissions associated with purchasing electricity, steam, heat, or cooling, representing one per cent. “To do this we are working across our business and increasingly with our partners to find ways where we can lower emissions. One example within our operations is decarbonizing our domestic trucking fleet.”

In May, Loblaw announced plans to purchase five Class 8 T680 hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEV) from Kenworth to complete long-haul zero-emission deliveries using the latest carbon-free technology. By the end of 2024, the company plans to have 35 battery electric vehicles on the road.

Scope 3 encompasses 97 per cent of emissions. “Our Scope 3 emissions are a significant part of our overall carbon footprint but, by definition, are out of our direct control, so we are tackling them in unique ways,” says a Loblaw spokesperson.

“One example is the newly launched CANZA initiative. CANZA was co-founded in 2023 by a diverse group of leading organizations, including Loblaw, who are deeply committed to taking action — and leveraging their extensive networks and value-chain partners — to achieve a shared vision: a net-zero agri-food system for Canada.”

Loblaw has also committed to sending zero food waste to landfills by 2030. All eligible stores are donating food to a local food recovery charity through Feed More Families with a commitment to donating 1 billion pounds by 2028.

Through Loblaw’s partnership with Flashfood and the Flashfood app, Loblaw offers products nearing their expiration date at steep discounts. Since 2019, this has diverted over 40 million kilograms of potential food waste and saved Canadians more than \$110 million on grocery bills.

Loblaw has also partnered with ZooShare Biogas Ltd to provide foods no longer fit for human consumption to help produce biogas. “This biogas is then converted into renewable electricity, which is fed directly into the provincial power grid. This innovative approach reduces food waste and contributes to the generation of clean, renewable energy.”

Finally, through Loblaw’s Loop Resource Ltd, expired and damaged bakery items, which are no longer suitable for human consumption, are converted into ingredients for animal feed. These collaborations allow Loblaw to minimize waste and contribute to the circular economy by repurposing food waste as a valuable resource.

In conclusion, sustainability is at the top of consumers’ and grocers’ minds. It lowers operational costs, creates customer loyalty, enhances brand image, can boost revenue, and gives companies a competitive edge. Most importantly, it is good for our planet. ●

What follows are some top examples of how companies are rising to the challenge.



SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

Giving Bottles New Life

The Coca-Cola Company is first in Canada to roll out multiple brands in 100 per cent recycled plastic bottles*

Canadian consumers and retailers will see a sustainable difference when they purchase a 500mL sparkling beverage from The Coca-Cola Company in Canada.

As of February 2024, the company has transitioned all 500 mL sparkling beverages, including iconic brands such as Coca-Cola, Diet Coke, Coke Zero Sugar, Sprite, Fresca, Fanta, AHA and Barqs into 100 per cent recycled plastic bottles, excluding the cap and label. In addition to offering more sustainable choices for consumers, this announcement is expected to cause a ripple effect across the industry — ultimately boosting the demand for high-quality, food-grade recycled plastic in Canada.

As Canadian consumers look for more sustainable options, it’s encouraging to see major players in the industry taking steps to make sustainable choices easy and available. By being the first in Canada to transition multiple brands to 100 per cent recycled plastic bottles*, The Coca-Cola Company will reduce its carbon footprint by nearly 7,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions each year. To put this into perspective, that equals removing approximately 1,500 cars from the roads annually.

With a #1 Plastic Recycling Code, packaging made with polyethylene terephthalate (PET) or recycled PET (rPET) is the most recyclable type of plastic. It’s easily recycled at curbside pickup and through a deposit-return system. Bottles are cleaned and sorted before being crushed or shredded during the recycling process. Ground into flakes, it produces the raw material for new bottles to be created, thereby minimizing the need for new plastic.



Mika Unterman, director of sustainability, capabilities and planning, The Coca-Cola Company

“We made the transition because it’s the right thing to do,” says Mika Unterman, director of sustainability, capabilities and planning for The Coca-Cola Company in Canada. “This step forward will not only align with our global World Without Waste goals, but it will ultimately enable us to offer more brands in a sustainable format to meet a growing consumer demand.”

The Coca-Cola Company’s World Without Waste strategy highlights its commitment to ensure it takes the right steps towards building a sustainable business and waste-free future. By 2025,



the company’s goal is for 100 per cent of its packaging to be recyclable globally. Through increasing recycled content and lightweighting efforts, the company anticipates it will reduce its use of virgin plastic by a cumulative three million metric tons the same year. Moving toward 2030, The Coca-Cola Company is aiming to collect and recycle a bottle or can for every one sold while also using at least 50 per cent recycled materials in its packaging. ●

By being the first in Canada to transition multiple brands to 100 per cent recycled plastic bottles*, The Coca-Cola Company will reduce its carbon footprint by nearly 7,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions each year.

*Excludes cap and label



Zero Waste Solutions

DIGI has developed practical solutions to reduce waste

DIGI challenges grocers to rethink packaging and help save the earth. The company has developed practical solutions to reduce waste, helping grocers and consumers reduce their eco-footprint. With DIGI's All-In-One Bulk System and BYOC solutions, customers bring their containers from home, eliminating packaging waste. What's more, customers reduce food waste by buying only what they need. This zero-waste plan, combined with user-friendly solutions, enables consumers to save time and money in a way that benefits the environment.

DIGI's latest innovation, the Bring Your OWN Container (BYOC) Auto Tare Solution, is a game-changer in the grocery industry. With this easy-to-use, self-weigh system, customers can bring their own containers of different sizes to grocery stores and have them weighed using the same scale as bulk items. The registered weight of the container is then automatically subtracted from the total weight of the filled container, making shopping more convenient than ever before.



DIGI All-In-One Solution

To make the shopping experience even smoother, DIGI's motion-activated sensor, e.Sense is installed on the bulk container or dispenser. This sensor automatically transfers the PLU code to the SM-6000 scale, ensuring that customers can quickly and easily confirm the item on the scale and print the label as a final step.

DIGI's All-In-One Bulk System is a streamlined, tare-free method for grocery stores' bulk area, which functions with three different scale types in one. Customers can view the real-time weight and price of their pantry staples, such as nuts, seeds, or spices, in containers they bring from home. Ingeniously, when customers dispense, scoop, or pour directly from the Hopper Scale, Scoop, or Liquid Scale, both weight and price are displayed on the central console screen. Each All-In-One Bulk System functions around a single SM-6000 Printer Console that can be aligned to multiple scoops, allowing for flexible configuration.

The final step for the customer is to print the label. The result? Customers buy only what they need with fewer abandoned bulk products. What's more, multiple customers can conveniently operate the system simultaneously.

Explore the innovative solution provided by DIGI's linerless labels, revolutionizing the way customers buy products with reduced waste and lower costs. By seamlessly integrating with DIGI's label printers, these environmentally friendly labels automatically adjust length to minimize paper waste, ultimately lowering labelling costs and reducing environmental impact. In 2020 alone, DIGI's linerless labels have made a substantial difference by reducing label liner waste equivalent to circling the earth 13 times, showcasing a significant step towards sustainability and efficiency in the retail industry. Additionally, the product is more efficient without paper waste by enabling more labels on each roll. This reduces downtime for replacement, which results in greater productivity. With linerless labels, printers can now size labels automatically, eliminating the need to cut labels to predetermined sizes. Linerless labels are a game-changer in the grocery industry. ●

With DIGI's All-In-One Bulk System and BYOC solutions, customers bring their containers from home, eliminating packaging waste. What's more, customers reduce food waste by buying only what they need.



SM-6000 Scale for BYOC with auto-tare



SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR BULK AREA

BRING YOUR OWN CONTAINER (BYOC) AUTO TARE SOLUTION

4 Easy Steps

1. Weigh empty container & print container label
2. Dispense bulk item into container
3. Weigh filled container
4. Select container & bulk item on-screen then print label

DIGI's BYOC Auto Tare Solution allows the customer to weigh their container and bulk purchase themselves, using the same scale. The registered weight of the container is then subtracted from the total weight of the bulk filled container.

Zero-waste. Zero hassle.

DIGI'S ALL-IN-ONE BULK SYSTEM

A streamlined zero-waste BYOC solution where customers can weigh as they fill and see pricing in real-time! Weight and price are displayed on the scales to help the customer manage the amount and cost, it is also displayed on console screen for label printing.

Real-time Pricing!

WEIGH AS YOU GO

weigh as you fill

weigh as you pour

weigh as you scoop





Redefining Refrigeration

Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Retail:
Dauphinais Display case specialist.

Founded in Quebec (Canada), Dauphinais designs, manufactures and distributes refrigerated display cases for large grocery chains and small food retailers. They are committed to offering sustainable and energy-efficient products while integrating eco-friendly technologies such as nebulization and LEAP technology. The company prioritizes innovative green technologies to meet and exceed current and future environmental market requirements.

One of the energy-efficient solutions Dauphinais proposes includes using propane (R290) as a natural refrigerant in their plug-in display cases. As a pure gas, propane does not contain chemical agents, making it eco-friendly. "What is compelling about cases which use R290 gas is that they have a Global Warming Potential (GWP) of three which is significantly below the average GWP of most display cases using synthetic refrigerant fluids," says Randy Irwin, business development and project manager for Western Canada.

Dauphinais incorporates variable-speed inverter compressors into their plug-in line of products. Unlike traditional compressors, which operate at fixed speeds, inverter compressors adjust their speed according to cooling demand. This results in significant energy savings, as the compressor doesn't run at full capacity all the time. Inverter compressors can achieve higher energy efficiency ratings, reducing electricity consumption and operational costs. Moreover, this technology also operates more quietly than traditional compressors since it avoids constant starting and stopping at full power. The variable speed operation results in smoother and quieter compressor cycling, creating a more pleasant in-store experience for customers and team members.

Among their range of products, the company distributes the Garmo-RDGA-L4, manufactured by JBG2, one of the most energy-efficient R290 propane cases on the market. "The Garmo-RDGA-L4 is top-ranked (Class A) in the European Union Energy Label classification in terms of energy consumption," explains Irwin. "This case is also favoured for its large loading capacity and product visibility." Propane also offers great thermal stability. Therefore, using this energy-efficient gas helps to maintain a constant and uniform temperature guaranteeing the freshness and preservation of products.

To further improve product preservation and sustainability practices, Dauphinais offers Areco's nebulization technology, which is a fogging system that preserves the freshness and organoleptic properties of food. This technology keeps food fresher for longer and reduces waste thanks to its continuous cold-steam system that ensures better humidity control and temperature homogeneity. "One of the advantages of nebulization in the produce department is

that it eliminates the need for refrigeration in display cases since it is preserved only by the fog, leading to significant energy savings (up to 95 per cent)," says Irwin.

Another example of Dauphinais' commitment to sustainability is the distribution of cases using Novum LEAP technology. These energy-efficient and easy-to-operate cases feature an interchangeable cassette compressor system to simplify repairs and reduce downtime and service costs. "In short, the advantages of refrigeration units using LEAP are that they consume very little energy, require no defrosting, and are easy to clean. There's no ice build-up inside the display case, maximizing storage space and reducing both product loss from ice buildup and maintenance time."

For over 40 years, Dauphinais has accompanied its customers from the beginning to the end of their projects. With a team of professionals and technicians dedicated to design, customer service, sales and after-sale service, they are fully committed to building long-lasting customer relationships. Dauphinais strives to take care of its customers as much as the planet. ●



Randy Irwin, business development and project manager, Western Canada



Garmo-RDGA-L4



DAUPHINAIS



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LOW GWP (3)



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Stewardship, Italian Style

Mutti's Italian Tomato and the law of freshness

For over a century, Mutti, nestled in the heart of Parma, Italy, has been on a steadfast mission to give consumers across the globe the very best Italian tomato products. Company CEO Francesco Mutti has worked on maintaining the "law of freshness". By ensuring that all tomato crops are grown close to Mutti's processing plants, tomato shipments remain at their peak in terms of quality and taste. All tomatoes are handled for processing within 12 hours, using the least invasive processing methods to lock in flavour. Environmentally, the low travel distance ensures a lower carbon footprint.

"Traceability is taken very seriously at Mutti. The company's entire supply chain has been certified per international standard ISO 22005, guaranteeing that the origin of its tomatoes is 100 per cent Italian," says Laura Marchelli, sustainability manager.

Mutti has partnered with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Italy for over a decade. "This collaboration aims to monitor our water footprint along the value chain. This is mainly tomato growing, the most significant stage of the chain in terms of water consumption," Marchelli explains.

Mutti calculates its water footprint by collaborating with WWF Italy, some Italian Universities and specialized consultant companies. Monitoring begins with the tomato harvesting and continues with the other stages of the supply chain. "We want to calculate the entire amount of hidden water stored in every Mutti product. This means the water footprint calculation includes not only the direct consumption of water but indirect consumption as well."



Laura Marchelli, sustainability manager, Mutti

Mutti supported in the past over 60 supplier farms in the Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy regions to lower its water footprint through the implementation of most effective irrigation systems. The result? The company realized an overall reduction of its water footprint by 4.6 per cent. "Farmers were supported in implementing measures to improve irrigation and optimize water use. The project is now closed, and most farmers now have a drip irrigation system, which is the most efficient."

Mutti has continually worked to improve efficiency measures and the use of renewable energy. "Over the years, we have achieved significant reductions, thanks to optimization measures like using renewable energy through solar panels and installing mechanical vapour recompression (MVR) falling film evaporators, which are considerably more efficient than traditional evaporators."

In 2021, 92 per cent of Mutti's hazardous and non-hazardous waste (excluding sewage sludge) was recovered or recycled. "In 2022, we maintained the same level of recovered and recycled waste out of total waste produced. Waste is entrusted to third-party companies that reprocess them to obtain products, materials, or substances for their original function or other purposes in compliance with Italian law."

As a leader in sustainable practices, Mutti is collaborating with local institutions on the redevelopment of various territories owned by the company in the hopes that their efforts will be able to be replicated by other organizations in the future. ●

"Traceability is taken very seriously at Mutti. The company's entire supply chain has been certified per international standard ISO 22005, guaranteeing that the origin of its tomatoes is 100 per cent Italian."



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www.mutti.ca

For more information about the Mutti brand and products in Canada, please contact Italpasta Limited Tel: 1-905-792-9928 e-mail: info@italpasta.com

*Source: Nielsen ALL CHANNEL L52wks PE Dec 31, 2023



Innovating Change

Olaf Packaging has become a leader in controlled atmosphere packaging

Olaf Packaging, a family-owned business in Calgary, Alberta, is celebrating its 40th anniversary. Starting in the checkstand bag business, most of Olaf's business today is in clamshells and trays to support the produce, bakery and prepared food industry.

"Our clamshells and trays are made from PET, the same material as water bottles," says Kent Wang, company president. "We produce our products from a minimum of 80 per cent recycled material and are continually increasing our recycled content as material quality and availability increase."

Over the past 20 years, Olaf Packaging has become a leader in controlled atmosphere packaging (CAP), especially for produce. CAP extends shelf life and minimizes moisture loss while preserving quality and visual appeal. Wang explains by saying, "CAP puts produce to sleep by precisely limiting the oxygen it receives and the gasses it respires. We have worked with our produce customers to extend shelf life by one to four weeks, depending on the product." As an example, he points to bananas and avocados. "These products need CAP unless they will be delivered from their countries of origin by air. CAP dramatically addresses food quality, waste, choice, distribution, and overall food costs."

Wang explains how Olaf's controlled atmosphere packaging has changed, "Our CAP was all #7 just a few years ago, now it is all #5 PP. It took a lot of work with our customers because when we were a #7 product, we were PP laminated to LDPE. LDPE is easier to seal at high speed. Our customers needed to adjust their equipment and learn to work with PP. But everyone wanted to do so to become more recyclable."

The code #7 refers to Other Plastics, such as polycarbonate and biodegradable plastics. "A #7 also includes mixed materials like PP laminated to LDPE. It is only recyclable in rare cases where facilities exist," says Wang. A #5 is PP or polypropylene, while #4 or LDPE refers to low-density polyethylene. "We have worked with our customers to help up-cycle their packaging. Moving up in recycling codes significantly increases the ease and availability of recycling."

Although Olaf Packaging exited the checkstand bag business in the mid-nineties, they continue to supply plastic bags to their bakery and fresh produce customers. "These #4 bags are recyclable in most major municipalities. We have worked with our customers to reduce the amount of plastic in bags. However, plastic bags are still the most practical alternative to reduce food waste, manage food inflation, and support large-scale food packaging and distribution."

The Canadian Produce Market (CPMA) undertook a study with Deloitte to quantify the impact of a plastic ban on Canadians. The Impact Analysis of Proposed Fresh Produce Packaging-Related Regulatory and Policy Actions estimated that eliminating plastics would reduce fresh produce availability to

Canadians by 50 per cent, the cost of fresh produce would increase by an estimated 34 per cent, and food waste levels would also increase by 50 per cent.

"We stand with the CPMA. We don't think plastics elimination is practical," says Wang. However, Wang does conclude that a much more sustainable option is possible by bringing on more robust recycling facilities, promoting better recapture of used packaging, upcycling to more commonly recyclable materials and using more recyclable content in packaging production. ●

"We produce our products from a minimum of 80 per cent recycled material and are continually increasing our recycled content as material quality and availability increase."



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Supporting Sustainable Farming Communities

The Vita Coco Company develops impact farming programming adapted to local community needs

The Vita Coco Company started by chance when founders and Mike Kirban and Ira Liran visited a bar in New York City. Chatting with two coconut water enthusiasts from Brazil, the pair discovered this natural beverage's numerous nutritional properties and health benefits.

Starting in 2004, the Vita Coco brand grew. It wasn't long before the product was carried in stores nationwide. Today, as an industry leader, the brand is sold globally in 30 countries. The product line includes Original Coconut Water, Pressed™ Coconut Water, Pineapple Coconut Water, Farmers Organic Coconut Water, Original Coconut Juice with Pulp, Mango Coconut Juice, Original Coconut MLK, Vanilla Coconut MLK and Barista Coconut MLK.

"Coconut farming communities in remote parts of the world often face many challenges, including unreliable infrastructure for food production, inefficient farming practices, and a shortage of schools and educational resources," says Jane Prior, chief marketing officer. "In 2014, we founded the Vita Coco Project. This program is our unique way to encourage impact on the ground level by supporting and helping to empower coconut-sourcing communities. We strategically partner with suppliers in our value chain to engage local non-profit organizations in the countries we operate in and collaboratively develop impact programming adapted to local community needs. This allows us to engage impact on the ground in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and, most recently, Brazil, and invest in the people and places behind our product."



Jane Prior, chief marketing officer, Vita Coco Company

Vita Coco works with non-profits around the world to train farmers on regenerative agriculture to ensure they gain knowledge on fundamental principles, including composting and organic fertilizer usage, diverse crop management techniques like intercropping, micro breeding for hybrid seedling growth, and natural pollinator management. The establishment of demonstration farm plots models these best practices through real-life examples. This work is to not only enhance the sustainability of the agriculture industry but also improve conservation efforts, reduce waste, and optimize agricultural efficiencies."

By 2030, the company's goal is to help distribute 10 million seedlings and trees to communities worldwide through its Seedlings For Sustainability program. The older a tree gets, the fewer coconuts it produces. To remedy this, mature coconuts are partially planted into the ground to create a coconut seedling. Once it grows to between two to three feet high, it is replanted and replaces a senile tree. This ensures the continuity of coconut farming as a sustainable livelihood for the next generation of farmers. "The program enhances the resilience of the coconut industry's supply chain. This is crucial for maintaining consistent production levels

and meeting market demands, even in the face of environmental challenges or fluctuations in crop yields," says John Tran, director of sustainability and social impact.

The Vita Coco Company has helped distribute more than 500,000 seedlings and trees in cooperation with their partners. More than 12,000 farmers have participated in regenerative agriculture training. The results are impressive. In the Philippines, demonstration plot farmers have seen an increase in average coconut income by 146 per cent, and their average total income has increased 291 per cent. Additionally, since 2014, The Vita Coco Project has supported the construction of 36 educational centres. Through the company's non-profit partnerships, they have supported building new classrooms and schools, with access to water and electricity for internet connection. ●



GOOD FOR FEELING GOOD.



We're committed to empowering coconut sourcing communities on the ground level through our Seedlings for Sustainability commitment to help plant and distribute up to 10 MILLION SEEDLINGS & TREES BY 2030





Award-Winning Packaging Innovations and Strategic Partnerships

Kraft Heinz advances towards various environmental and social goals

Kraft Heinz is continually looking for new innovations and partnerships to make progress toward the company's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) goals. "At Kraft Heinz, our values compel us to do the right thing and to be bold in the actions we take," says Nicole Fischer, global head of social impact, engagement and governance at Kraft Heinz. "We believe in being good humans who are working to improve our company, communities, and planet."

Kraft Heinz has set several ESG goals like aiming to make 100 per cent recyclable, reusable or compostable packaging by 2025.

A Canadian coffee favourite, Nabob is Rainforest Alliance Certified, a distinction it earned from being grown and harvested on farms and forests that utilize sustainable practices. New sustainable packaging for Nabob was developed last year. Made from 80 per cent renewably sourced fibre, new canisters replace the former non-recyclable flexible plastic bags. This one change is estimated to reduce 2.5 million plastic bags annually. Nabob was recognized by receiving PAC Global's Sustainable Package Design Award for Packaging Circularity in 2024.

Kraft Heinz is also strategizing to see how they can encourage consumers to support sustainability efforts and ultimately promote a more circular economy. The company points to its partnerships with TerraCycle. "Ethical Bean and Tassimo both have recycling programs with TerraCycle for consumers to return hard-to-recycle materials like coffee bags and T-disks free of charge. This keeps these materials out of landfills while earning points that can be redeemed as donations to the charity of the consumer's choice," says Fischer.

Since the Ethical Bean program launched in January 2022, over 200,000 coffee bags have been recycled. Equally impressive are the results of the Tassimo program launched a year ago. Approximately 35,000 T-disks have been recycled. "Together, that's the weight equivalent of 430,000 single-use plastic bottles!"

Another ESG goal for Kraft Heinz is to provide 1.5 billion meals to people in need by 2025. "We're focused on increasing our food donation rates to ensure all Canadian tables have access to food," says Fischer. "In 2023, we donated approximately 2 million pounds of food to Canadians in need through the coordinated efforts of Food Banks Canada, Kraft Heinz Pantry Day, and Second Harvest. Kraft Heinz Pantry Day is the largest one-day, donation-matching event for Food Banks Canada. Consumers can support our food insecurity efforts by purchasing participating Kraft Heinz products in-store, and we'll match them with a donation to Food Banks Canada."

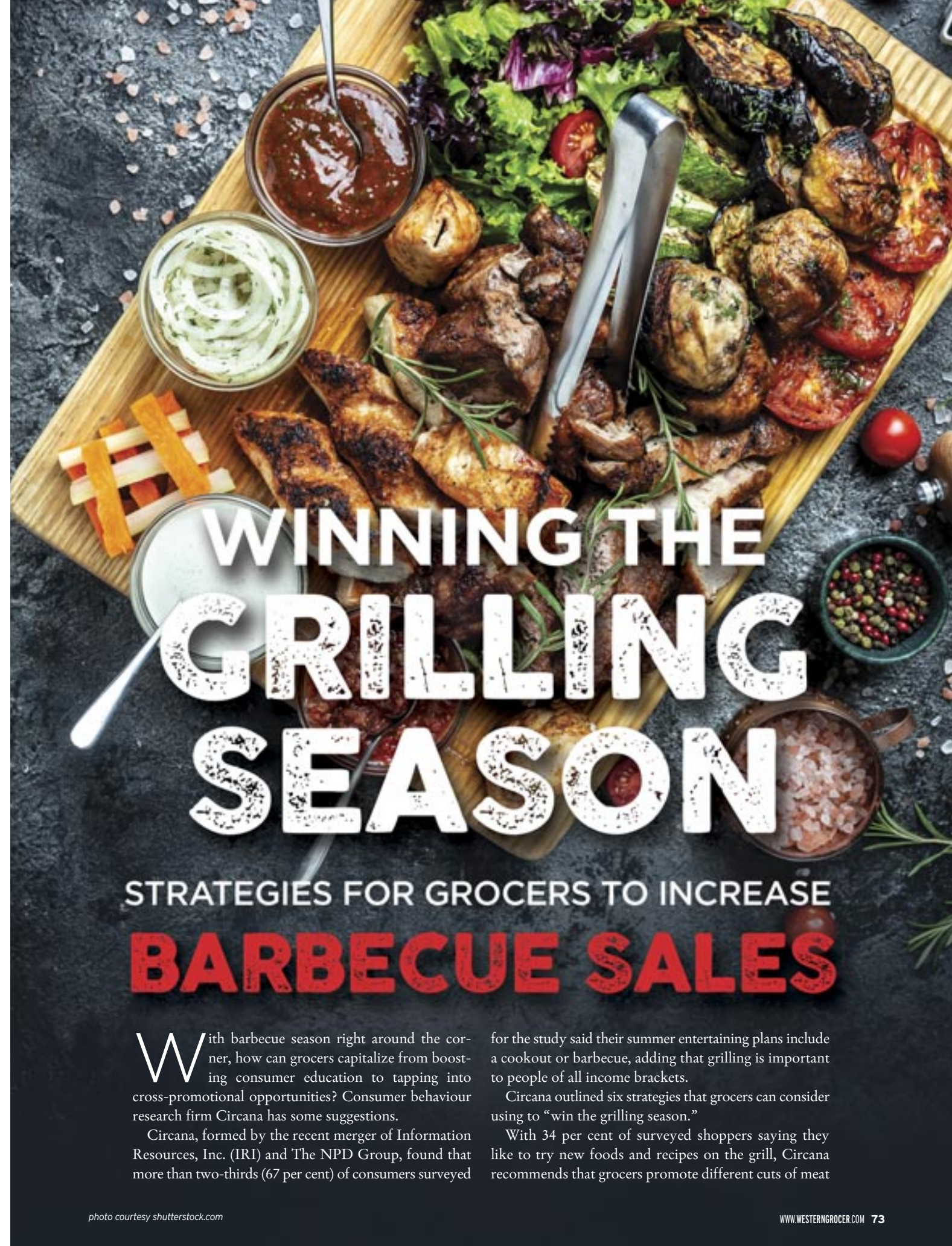
Another 2025 goal specific to Canada includes reducing food waste by 50 per cent in Canadian operations. "We continue to make progress toward our pledge to reduce food waste in Canadian operations," explains Fischer.

Since 2020, Kraft Heinz's partnership with NorthStar Recycling to divert unsold products from landfills for alternative purposes has diverted over seven million pounds of waste from landfills. The company's Mont Royal production facility has successfully reduced its waste to landfill by 21 per cent from 2019 to 2022. This was achieved by sending organic waste to a bio-digester for electricity, fuel, and gas production. ●

Another 2025 goal specific to Canada includes reducing food waste by 50 per cent in Canadian operations. "We continue to make progress toward our pledge to reduce food waste in Canadian operations."



Nicole Fischer, global head of social impact, engagement and governance, Kraft Heinz



WINNING THE GRILLING SEASON STRATEGIES FOR GROCERS TO INCREASE BARBECUE SALES

With barbecue season right around the corner, how can grocers capitalize from boosting consumer education to tapping into cross-promotional opportunities? Consumer behaviour research firm Circana has some suggestions.

Circana, formed by the recent merger of Information Resources, Inc. (IRI) and The NPD Group, found that more than two-thirds (67 per cent) of consumers surveyed

for the study said their summer entertaining plans include a cookout or barbecue, adding that grilling is important to people of all income brackets.

Circana outlined six strategies that grocers can consider using to "win the grilling season."

With 34 per cent of surveyed shoppers saying they like to try new foods and recipes on the grill, Circana recommends that grocers promote different cuts of meat

and give shoppers new grilling-focused recipes and meal ideas with in-store and out-of-store education materials.

As shoppers decide what exactly they want to cook up on their grills and smokers, Circana stressed that it's important that grocers get their everyday versatile quick-cut offerings right. Only chicken and exotic meats gained in 52-week pound sales year-over-year in May 2023 among fresh meats overall, while ground beef, chicken, pork and lamb also saw pound sales increase over the same period.

Circana says it is important to offer good availability and competitive everyday pricing on the most versatile and affordable meats: chicken and grinds.

Grocers can be mindful of prepared food options versus ingredients for cooking, given Circana's findings in its May survey that most shoppers prefer to



GROCERS CAN ALSO BOOST SALES BY GIVING CONVENIENCE SHOPPERS MORE QUALITY SIDES — LIKE UNIQUE DELI PASTA SALADS THAT WOULD BE TOUGH TO MAKE THEMSELVES AT HOME.

photo courtesy shutterstock.com

HERE ARE SOME PROACTIVE STEPS TO PREPARE YOUR GROCERY STORE FOR THE BARBECUE SEASON:

- REVIEW PREVIOUS YEARS' SALES DATA TO PREDICT POPULAR ITEMS AND ENSURE AMPLE SUPPLY.
- SCHEDULE STAFF TRAINING SESSIONS FOCUSED ON CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE AND EFFICIENCY.
- PLAN THE STORE LAYOUT TO ACCOMMODATE INCREASED TRAFFIC WHILE PROMOTING HIGH-DEMAND PRODUCTS.
- COORDINATE WITH SUPPLIERS WELL IN ADVANCE TO SECURE NECESSARY INVENTORY.

make their own grilled foods and sides from scratch. Some prepared items, though, are fan favorites: deli pasta salads were up 12.4 per cent in dollar sales and 4.1 per cent in volume sales over a year ago in May, Circana found.

Grocers can also boost sales by giving convenience shoppers more quality sides — like unique deli pasta salads that would be tough to make themselves at home — that they'll feel confident taking to a cookout. Grocers can even promote grilling as a convenient way to cook chicken or burgers quickly.



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Grocers can consider buy-this-get-that promotions to encourage shoppers and can go beyond temporary price promotions by turning to digital ads. Circana research has found that purchase-based digital advertising can offer four times higher return on ad spend than interest-based social and digital media targeting. Cross-promotion opportunities with items like bread, buns, rolls, alcohol, fresh fruit, fruit and veggie trays, and chicken can incentivize larger baskets, per the firm.

While value is important, quality and selection are also top of mind for consumers, according to Circana. ●

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SHOW UP, TRY HARD

OK FROZEN DOUGH ACHIEVES 30 YEARS OF SUCCESS BY ADHERING TO SIMPLE VALUES



Bruce Glaicar, CEO

The timing of OK Frozen Dough’s (OKFD) new 36,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Alberta coincides with both the Armstrong, B.C.-based company’s 30th anniversary, as well as the continued strong growth in demand for frozen dough throughout the retail and foodservice sectors.

Indeed, OKFD supplies more than 500 locations of grocery store in-store bakeries and over 200 locations of independent bakeries, making it one of the largest suppliers of frozen dough in Canada. “Customer demand over the past seven years really pushed our limits, and even though developing a new facility was a big undertaking, we knew it was the right path forward if we wanted to remain a reliable partner that our customers could count on,” says Bruce Glaicar, CEO of OKFD.

He adds, “While high inflation has changed grocery shopping habits, frozen dough has still seen healthy growth since it allows for a fresh baked option for a wide variety of food products, including bread, rolls and pizza dough.”

The demand for frozen dough remains high due to its affordability, versatility, and customization advantages. From a store operator’s point of view, convenience is key as frozen dough eliminates the need for time-consuming dough preparation from scratch, allows for consistency across baked products, and requires a shorter training time for staff. An active bakery is the cornerstone of a store’s fresh department that brings theatre to consumers’ store experience. Seeing freshly baked products coming out of the oven gives consumers confidence in fresh offerings and allows grocers to differentiate themselves. Nothing beats fresh-baked bread and rolls!



(Left to right) Channce Fuller, assistant plant manager, James Godfray, plant manager, Bruce Glaicar, CEO

Given that lifestyles are becoming busier, the frozen dough market continues to grow (in the U.S. it is hovering at \$17.45 billion and will likely reach \$29.57 billion by 2034, according to Future Market Insights Inc., with a similar growth rate anticipated in Canada).

Another phenomenon favouring frozen dough — and OKFD — is the growing popularity of home cooking and the desire for fresh-baked bread and rolls to complement their mealtime creations. “This became extremely evident during the Covid years, which was a crazy time for us,” Glaicar says. “Everyone was suddenly cooking from home, and this required us to operate full out, seven days a week. Fortunately, the trend continues.”



OKFD supplies more than 500 locations of grocery in-store bakeries and over 200 locations of independent bakeries.



established OK Frozen Dough at a small location in Vernon, with the mindset that they would be viewed as a minor player competing with well-established brands. To prevail, they resolved to prove themselves by providing excellent products and first-class efficiency of service.

Glaicar, who began his career out of high school in 1987 at Snow Cap Interior Foods, a bakery supply company, recalls, "It was one thing for Philip and Kevin to achieve quality, but the real key to their success was consistency: reliability in the supply chain is critical, and their diligence in this regard resulted in OKFD establishing a 30-year track record of avoiding any shortages in purchase orders placed even through Covid."

"THE NEW PLANT WILL ALLOW US TO BETTER SERVE OUR CUSTOMERS IN ALBERTA AND EASTWARD INTO THE PRAIRIES, SINCE WE ALREADY SHIP AS FAR EAST AS MANITOBA," GLAICAR SAYS.

Now, with the new Alberta facility expected to be fully operational in the spring, OKFD is better positioned to meet the needs of its expanding customer base. "The new plant will allow us to better serve our customers in Alberta and eastward into the prairies, since we already ship as far east as Manitoba," Glaicar says. "At the same time, our existing B.C. plant will reinforce our commitment to clients in that province."

OKFD's origins date back to the early 1990s, when founders Philip Thornton, a partner in Bakers Dozen Bakery, and Kevin Fors, the company's production manager, saw a need for a provider of quality frozen dough. In 1994, they decided to become partners and

One of Thornton and Fors' first customers was Butcher Boys Grocery, which had earned a reputation as Vernon's neighbourhood grocery store and is still a valued outlet for OKFD goods today. OKFD's customer base grew quickly from there, leading the partners to build a state-of-the-art production facility a few years later at the current Armstrong location.

Glaicar recalls, "Philip and Kevin worked incredibly hard, and I saw their progress firsthand because Snow Cap started the distribution of OK products. As a sales representative for Snow Cap, I even pushed the first cases." Eventually, in 2006 Glaicar joined the company as a sales manager.

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OKFD offers more than 100 different varieties of products.

OKFD's Armstrong plant was designed to meet food safety standards and improve overall efficiency. To further this goal, Thornton and Fors added equipment and fine-tuned operations, in addition to developing new products for customers in the Okanagan, Interior, and Kootenay regions. Consequently, the footprint of the plant expanded: a 10,000 square foot addition was constructed in 2006, coinciding with an investment in a

spiral freezer to improve production efficiencies (a second spiral freezer was subsequently added as demand for OKFD's products grew). Soon after, another 10,000 square foot addition was constructed, to increase holding capacity and production space.

During this time, OK Frozen Dough also became a third-party audited company, resulting in the creation of a formal GMP Food Safety Plan. Today, they are a SQF-certified facility.

Glaicar says, "Our timing couldn't have been better from the company's launch to today. We came on the scene when in-store bakeries were switching from scratch to frozen, grocery chains were growing, and their customers were expecting consistency from store to store. Instead of stores having to spend the time and expense of hiring and training in-house bakers to bake from scratch, our product simply needed to be thawed, proofed, and baked."

Thornton began discussing retirement in 2014, but tragedy struck when Fors died from injuries in a motorcycle accident. Thornton sold the business to a family with ties to the Okanagan area, and Glaicar became CEO in 2016. "I have been fortunate to be surrounded by a truly excellent team, including plant manager James Godfray, accounting clerk Tracy VanDyk, production manager Larry Keir, food safety supervisor Randy Kier, maintenance manager Ray Ponsioen, and a very dedicated production team," he says.

This team was responsible for pushing OKFD's production capabilities to the limit to respond to increased demand during Covid. "It was a challenge but ultimately very good for us because it proved our processes could withstand big volumes," Glaicar says.

When the focus became opening a facility in Balzac, Alberta, they decided to construct a mirror image of the Armstrong plant, albeit with newer equipment sourced from across North America, Italy, and beyond.

pizza dough in varying sizes will also be a staple of the Balzac plant.

Today, OKFD offers more than 100 different varieties of products and staff are constantly working on new ideas. When asked to elaborate on how OKFD provides high quality frozen dough, Glaicar says, "We have our formulas, but I have to stress again that consistency is the key above all else. We maintain a consistency of suppliers — Roger Foods mills our flour, for example

"WE CAME ON THE SCENE WHEN IN-STORE BAKERIES WERE SWITCHING FROM SCRATCH TO FROZEN, GROCERY CHAINS WERE GROWING, AND THEIR CUSTOMERS WERE EXPECTING CONSISTENCY FROM STORE TO STORE."

To facilitate this expansion, Kevin Slavin was named Balzac project manager and has now transitioned to Balzac co-plant manager with support of Balzac co-plant manager Dorian Heyndrickx. Meanwhile, back at the Armstrong Facility, Plant Manager James Godfray is supported by Assistant Plant Manager Channce Fuller.

In Alberta, as in Armstrong, OKFD will continue to produce its range of breads (white, crusty, dessert, rye) buns and rolls (including crusty and soft, variety rolls, submarine rolls, and bagels), plus high-end signature items including European Rye Bread, Cheddar Jalapeno Bread, Rustic Ranch buns, and Cheddar Jalapeno buns. Since OKFD's clients include cafes and pizza makers,



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to let customers test their markets before committing to larger production runs. Also, a 'Just-In-Time' production approach allows them to offer the best possible product date codes.

Governing all this is an unwavering adherence to sustainability, facilitated by the innate benefits of frozen dough, including the fact that it requires less space for transportation and on-site storage compared to par-baked or fully baked frozen bread products. This also means less food waste for bakeries since production requirements to be calculated right down to the last item.

OKFD has always sourced fresh, local ingredients as close to home as possible. A case in point is Rogers Foods, which mills Canadian prairie grain into flour just five kilometres down the road from OKFD's Armstrong plant. Additionally, OKFD uses an energy-efficient on-demand hot water system; compostable waste is separated and sent to nearby SPA Hills Composting; and an on-site waste treatment system further reduces the company's environmental impact.

The people behind OKFD have crammed a lot of achievements into three decades of operations, but Glaicar reflects the mindset of his staff when he declines to dwell on success and instead contemplates the future. "We're excited about our new production facility and the new staff currently in training, all of whom embody

"WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT OUR NEW PRODUCTION FACILITY AND THE NEW STAFF CURRENTLY IN TRAINING, ALL OF WHOM EMBODY OUR MOTTO, 'SHOW UP, AND TRY HARD'".

— and never deviate from production procedures. Also, we save a small sample from every mix, freeze it, thaw it, then proof it and bake it to ensure the product lives up to our standards before it leaves the building."

This is augmented by flexibility when filling orders of all sizes, with OKFD supplying smaller batch sizes

our motto, 'Show up, and try hard,'" he says. "This is a new chapter for us, and together, we're looking forward to serving new customers as well as the existing ones who put us on the map 30 years ago, and who keep us there today."

Remember, nothing beats fresh baked bread and rolls. ●



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First-Ever Meiga Supermarket

One hundred- and twenty-year-old British Columbia-based Louie family owned and operated Georgia Main Food Group has opened its first-ever Asian grocery store in Port Moody- Meiga, translated from its Chinese name meaning beautiful family.

“With deep, local, and trusted roots going back 120 years, we are set to redefine the Asian grocery store experience with Meiga Supermarket,” said Gary Sorenson, chief operating officer, Georgia Main Food Group. “Meiga will offer quality Asian products in an atmosphere of discovery where new, authentic, and exclusively sourced products are part of our customers’ everyday shopping. Meiga’s commitment to freshness will be found in our products and it’s also embedded in our attitude, with a fresh view on what the Asian supermarket experience will be like.”



Gary Sorenson,
 chief operating officer,
 Georgia Main Food Group

At Meiga (pronounced May-ga), customers will be warmly welcomed by staff who are knowledgeable about Asian ingredients, sauces and dishes. Products found inside the supermarket will include fresh produce and meats, an open kitchen with ready-to-serve hot foods including traditional Chinese take-away specialties, Cantonese BBQ, RWA beef and pork, hot pot, sushi, fresh bakery and a juice bar.

“We will constantly be on discovery for new items found through travel and food exploration throughout North America and Asia,” adds Sorenson.

“We will find new food trends elsewhere to get in front of what is currently offered locally. The Louie family and our GMFG management team are thrilled to be bringing our immense grocery and retail infrastructure and experience to launching a new Asian banner in Meiga.”

Meiga will cater to Asian food enthusiasts who are looking for a unique grocery shopping experience as well as consumers who wish to explore and discover new ways of cooking and appreciating authentic Asian foods, redefining shopping in Asian supermarkets in Canada.

Charnelle McClure, senior director of marketing and brand loyalty for Georgia Main Food Group, says “Our research shows there is opportunity for more competition for Asian supermarkets in the Vancouver - Lower Mainland area.”

McClure says “The Louie family have been working on this concept for about five years. Currently we are focused on our first Meiga location while at the same time our real estate group is searching out additional retail spaces. We will open more locations over the next three to five years and beyond.”

Through Meiga’s high service approach, top-of-the line products are offered in an atmosphere of discovery where new, authentic, and exclusively sourced become everyday shopping. “Our commitment to freshness is found in our products but it’s also embedded into our attitude, with a fresh view on what a grocery store experience could be like,” says McClure. ●

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Trade Show Hours: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

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What's Trending in NOW
Thurs. April 4, 2024
8:30 – 9:30 AM
RM 202-204

Incubator Alley PITCH
Fri. April 5, 2024
8:45 – 9:45 AM
RM 202-204

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*Online registration is free for retailers, health practitioners and CHFA members only. Onsite registration is open April 3-5, 2024 at Vancouver Convention Centre, West Building. Onsite registration fees apply for non-member health practitioners, brands and business services. Photo ID and proof of industry involvement is required. Visit chfanow.ca for full attendee policy.

Rise & Shine at CHFA NOW Vancouver

**THREE DAYS,
THREE BREAKFASTS,
THREE SESSIONS**
YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

CHFA NOW Vancouver is right around the corner. We bring new ideas to the trade show and conference each year to ensure your time is well spent — exploring new products, uncovering new trends and inspiring new business opportunities.

While our schedule is jam-packed with opportunities throughout the day, we're especially excited about our breakfast series this year. Each day, we're encouraging retailers to join us to get their fuel for the day while uncovering something new.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3:

**Rise & Unite:
Tap into The Power of DE&I
8:00 – 9:15 a.m.**

Recognizing how imperative diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) is to businesses and consumers, we are here to help guide businesses in their DE&I journey. We are proud and excited to debut the first of our DE&I breakfast series, Rise & Unite, at CHFA NOW Vancouver. The first of the series is called Tap into the Power of DE&I. We welcome a panel of diverse voices and leaders in our community who champion and advocate for DE&I within their organizations. Our panel consists of Naomi Uy, business consultant; Lola Adeyemi, founder of It's Souper (and the winner of our Diversity Award in 2023); Stephanie Amos, supplier diversity manager at Sobeys and Margaret Coons, founder & CEO of Nuts for Cheese.





photo courtesy shutterstock.com

FRIDAY, APRIL 5:

Incubator Alley PITCH
8:45 – 9:45 a.m.

Seeing brands who joined us in Incubator Alley make waves in the industry is one of our favourite parts of our jobs at CHFA. That's why we are dedicated to helping entrepreneurs break through the noise of the trade show floor and get the recognition they deserve.

We debuted our Incubator Alley PITCH program for the first time at CHFA NOW Toronto in 2023. The response was overwhelming, and we are thrilled to bring it to CHFA NOW Vancouver for the first time this year. This retailer-exclusive breakfast gives a select number of exhibitors joining us in Incubator Alley a chance to provide a sixty-second pitch on what their business is all about and why you should consider bringing it to your store's shelves. You'll walk away with new brands to discover and a cheat sheet to remember where to find these new budding entrepreneurs looking to make their break in the industry.

These programs are just part of the new VIP experiences we bring to

retailers joining us at CHFA NOW this year. We recognize retail comes with challenges, and making time for trade shows can be tricky — so we're doing what we can to make it the most rewarding experience for you and your team. From ride-share discount codes and parking passes to meal vouchers for our food trucks, we have tons of perks waiting for you at CHFA NOW. Everyone from your team is invited, and we urge you to take advantage of the perks of being a VIP at CHFA NOW. ●

Our panel will share inspiring stories and real-world examples of how embracing diversity and inclusion practices and being an authentic ally is integral to your business' success and positive workplace culture. From this session, you'll learn how to evaluate and measure your business' progress in DE&I and gain strategies to advance to the next stage of your journey. We're working

With over 900 exhibitors with dozens of products, it can be hard to see everything there is to offer on the CHFA NOW trade show floor.

hard to ensure you leave the session inspired to take an active role in your organization's efforts and equipped with the right tools to put DE&I into practice. We sincerely hope you join us as we kick off the first of this essential series.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4:

What's Trending in NOW
(natural, organic and wellness)
8:30 – 9:30 a.m.

The trade show floor is packed with everything from new vitamins and supplements, organic and better-for-you food, to healthy home and lifestyle products. With over 900 exhibitors with dozens of products, it can be hard to see everything there is to offer on the CHFA NOW trade show floor. Our Thursday breakfast is exclusive to retailers and aims to give you insight into what consumers are looking for from natural, organic and wellness brands and provide a sneak peek of where you can find trending products on the floor. From baby boomers to Gen Z, consumer preferences change — we're here to help you adapt to each and equip your store shelves with what shoppers are looking for today.



Register at chfanow.ca/Vancouver
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from Wednesday, April 3 to Friday, April 5, 2024.



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Online Grocery Retailer Spud Commits to Putting More Women-led Brands on Shelves with the #HerFairShare Initiative

While Canadian female-founded and led businesses have been on the rise over the past five years, female entrepreneurs still face barriers when trying to get their products onto shelves.

Online grocery retailer Spud takes pride in supporting women in business. However, they also recognize that there is always more we can do to promote equity for women. That's why, this International Women's Day, Spud is introducing #HerFairShare — a commitment to getting more women-led brands on grocery shelves, starting at Spud.

With #HerFairShare, Spud aims to grow its selection of women-led brands from 20 per cent to 25 per cent by 2025. This initiative begins with Spud creating five new openings on its storefront exclusively for women-led brands, with applications opening on March 4th.

The grocery retail landscape presents a myriad of distinctive and challenging obstacles. In 2023, many large retailers began telling suppliers the cost of getting products on shelves would be rising to help fund improvements to the retailer, ultimately pushing the vendors to pay more for their spot. For female-led businesses trying to enter the market, this listing rate increase can discourage them from even attempting to break into the space.

Spud does not charge a listing fee for vendors to be stocked on their shelves, nor does it implement price change fees. These seemingly small practices can have a major impact on vendors who are entering the grocery industry or launching their business.

"At Spud, we've never charged listing fees as a means to provide easier entry for local and independent brands into the grocery space, removing barriers and jumpstarting their brands. It's a symbiotic relationship between Spud and startup brands; we offer a platform for their business growth while connecting local brands with compelling founder stories directly to our customers, who are passionate about supporting the local economy," said Bridget Westerholz, vice-president of marketing at Spud.

"For small businesses, every dollar counts, and with slim profit margins, even a small loss can have a significant impact. That's why support from businesses like Spud, who not only provide another sales channel and marketing support but also waive costs like stocking fees, is invaluable," said Katie Ruddell, a Spud female vendor and Founder of Kokomo.

#HerFairShare aligns with Spud's long-term priority of enhancing visibility for women in the CPG and grocery category while fostering economic growth for female founders and the broader local economy. "#HerFairShare echoes our dedication to local communities by championing and empowering female vendors in our backyard. By prioritizing local purchases, we keep money within our local economies, diminish carbon emissions by reducing transportation needs, and give visibility to smaller brands that do not have the resources to enter large-chain grocers. There's so much power in buying local," said Bridget Westerholz.



Coffee Association Chooses Grounds for Health



The Coffee Association of Canada (CAC) has announced that Grounds for Health has been selected as their Charity of the Year for 2024. For over 27 years, Grounds for Health has partnered with the specialty coffee industry to prevent cervical cancer in coffee communities in Latin America and Africa. Cervical cancer kills one woman every two minutes, yet it is entirely preventable with access to basic healthcare services. Through their programs, Grounds for Health ensures that nurses, health educators, women and families have the training, equipment and support they need to get and give these services.



"Grounds for Health is an exemplary choice for our Charity of the Year due to their significant impact on improving the health of women in coffee-growing communities," said Robert Carter, president, Coffee Association of Canada. "Grounds for Health's concrete actions and compassionate dedication to women in coffee-producing countries has had real-life, lifesaving effects on one of the most marginalized groups in our industry."

Women are vital members of coffee communities and the specialty coffee industry. They provide labour on coffee farms, at washing stations and wet mills; they raise children and ensure they have access to clean water, healthcare and education; and they play critical roles in climate adaptation and climate resilience. To date, Grounds for Health has screened and treated over 215,000 women to prevent cervical cancer. Through their high impact work protecting women's health, Grounds for Health is also protecting the health and wellbeing of the community, environment and coffee industry as a whole.

"We are delighted to be named the first Charity of the Year by CAC!" said Kyle Engelman, executive director, Grounds for Health. "Many CAC members are supporters of Grounds for Health, inspiring us every day with their commitment to the farmers and women who make this industry possible. Thank you for this honour — we promise to continue our high impact work alongside you."




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Saskatchewan Food Prices Continue to Rise

Saskatchewan has a vibrant food industry with its numerous and diverse array of agriculture products, but its consumers will also be seeing a rise in food prices in 2024.

A Look at the Processing Industry

In 2022, Canada's food and beverages processing industry was the largest manufacturing industry in the country in terms of value of production with sales of goods manufactured worth \$156.5 billion.

Saskatchewan's value-added agriculture sector had an estimated \$6.4 billion in revenue in 2022, an increase of nearly 40 per cent since 2017 (\$4.6 billion)

There is estimated to be over 300 value-added processors in Saskatchewan that employ over 6,000 people in the province.

"These processors are making their mark in the Saskatchewan food processing landscape in terms of new product launches, business/market expansion and success in the marketplace," notes Dr. Mehmet Tulbek, president of Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre Inc.



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Grocery Statistics

The grocery market in Saskatchewan is expected to grow to \$3.2 billion in 2024 amongst its 297 businesses according to IBISWorld. This employs 12,472 in the industry.

“The Saskatchewan population continues to grow, adding over 31,000 residents in the 12 months ending in October 2023. More people would suggest grocery sales should in turn expand, especially when paired with the inflationary pressures that has been observed of late,” says Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, David Marit.



provinces may experience price increases of up to 4.5 per cent in the coming year.

The report notes that in 2023 food prices saw a five per cent increase (an expected above-average) food price increase in Saskatchewan. It is expected that 2024 will also see an above-average increase.

As food prices continue to rise, many consumers are shifting to discount banners trying to make their grocery bill go a little further.



Minister of Agriculture, David Marit

Food Inflation

This year Canada is expected to face a widespread increase in food inflation.

Canada’s Food Price Report 2024 predominantly attributes this anticipated rise in food to the rising costs of inputs, heightened transportation expense and the detrimental effects of climate change on crop yields. It is foreseen that all

SASKATCHEWAN IS HOME TO STAR EGG

Star Egg is a Saskatchewan-based business that has been operating for over 60 years providing Western Canada with nutritious, wholesome eggs.

The company is in the process of modernizing its operations with investments in automation and AI that will enhance the ability to meet the needs of their growing market.

“We are still facing inflationary pressure. Inflation rates have slowed since peaking last year but remain higher than normal. Labour availability is also a challenge,” shares CEO Shawn Harman.

Per capita egg consumption continues to climb. They are seeing more demand for specialty eggs like free run, free range and organic.

Saskatchewan has always been home to Star Egg and Harman Eggs.

“There is a strong industry presence here with support from the Saskatchewan Egg Producers,” says Harman.

Looking to the future Harman says that Star Egg will continue to meet the growing needs of their primary market in Saskatchewan by providing fresh local products to the retail and foodservice markets there, as they support the demand for eggs across the country.





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Saskatchewan has access to a diverse range of quality agricultural commodities, which are produced sustainably and in abundance.



Although the processing industry is seeing growth and thriving in some areas there are also factors that are affecting it.

“Consumer expectations for agri-foods products have increasingly focused on low cost, upcycling and sustainability attributes. There are also social and governance pressures that the industry is demanding processors report on and are used to measure the performance of companies,” explains Tulbek. “Value-added processors are responding to this by showcasing their sustainability, social and governance practices to their customers, investors and other stakeholders.”

A Look to the Future

With their growing fermentation and bioengineering ecosystem the Food Centre can assist companies not only with contract research, scale-up and manufacturing but also with variable raw materials and co-products which can be utilized in scaffolding, protein and other advanced food ingredient manufacturing capabilities.

“The future of value-added agriculture in Saskatchewan is quite bright and we are optimistic. With geo-political uncertainty around the world, Saskatchewan is seen as a reliable supplier for agricultural commodities and co-products, and can address the needs for food, feed and fuel around the world,” says Tulbek.



Dr. Mehmet Tulbek, president Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre Inc.

There has been ongoing work to establish a Grocery Store Code of Conduct.

“Saskatchewan has been a supporter of this effort, with a preference for an industry-led code. Seeing this work come to completion in 2024 would be a good thing for grocers, consumers and suppliers alike,” says Minister Marit. ●

Key Factors

Canada’s Food Price Report noted a number of factors contributing to the price increases in the industry including climate change and beef prices.

“Supply chain issues affect grocers in similar ways as it does with farm input suppliers or other industries,” says Minister Marit. “These issues can reduce product availability or cause time delays. Both of which may drive prices upward and impact our residents.”

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Royal Ceylon, the first stop, is Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, the magical island in the Indian ocean. 1001 Mystery, the second stop, is the Middle East, and is inspired by Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves. Moroccan Legend, the third stop, takes the consumer to another destination in the Middle East, Morocco, with its signature blend of green tea and mint. Milk Oolong, the fourth stop, takes the consumer to the far eastern Fujian province of China to experience the delicately fragrant Milk Oolong tea.

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Manitoba Harvest Hemp Foods and Brightseed Launch Bioactive Fiber

Manitoba Harvest is partnering with Bioactives company Brightseed to revolutionize the functional fibre market with a breakthrough product: Manitoba Harvest Bioactive Fiber. Furthering Manitoba Harvest's 25-year commitment to transform consumer health through the power of hemp, NEW Bioactive Fiber helps close the fibre gap for consumers. Manitoba Harvest Bioactive Fiber leverages Brightseed's novel ingredient made from upcycled hemp hulls, the outer shells of hemp seeds. AI-led research identified hemp hulls as an untapped source of dietary fibre and gut-health beneficial bioactives.

For more information: www.manitobaharvest.com

Chapman's Celebrates Product of the Year

Less than a year after its launch, Chapman's Super Premium Plus Cold Brew Coffee ice cream has been awarded Product of the Year! This prestigious award celebrates innovation and recognizes the best products on the market as voted by Canadian consumers. Crafted from a unique blend of coffee beans, rich cream and fresh milk, the bold and smooth taste of the luxurious Cold Brew Coffee ice cream was created for true coffee aficionados. This Chapman's Super Premium Plus ice cream is made with real cold brew from Indigenous-owned Birch Bark Coffee Co. and comes in a popular 500mL size. Even sweeter is that a portion of the Super Premium Plus Cold Brew Coffee sales gets donated to clean drinking water initiatives for Indigenous homes across Canada. "This Cold Brew Coffee ice cream is truly the best in class! Partnering with Birch Bark Coffee was a great experience, and we're proud that it is getting the recognition it deserves," says Ashley Chapman, chief operating officer of Chapman's Ice Cream.



Husmann Launches Evolve Technologies

Husmann has launched Evolve Technologies as part of its ongoing commitment to providing low global warming potential (GWP) refrigeration solutions. Husmann is one of the world's leading manufacturers of refrigerated merchandisers and refrigeration systems — producing, installing, and servicing refrigeration solutions that display and preserve fresh foods in more than 250,000 supermarkets and convenience stores in the United States. Evolve Technologies provides technologies that enable the use of more sustainable and more environmentally friendly refrigerants including R-744 (CO2) and R-290 (propane). As part of Evolve Technologies, Husmann has expanded its production capacity for transcritical CO2 refrigeration systems in its Suwanee, GA facility. Husmann is also increasing capacity for its self-contained R-290 (propane) line of products.



For more information: Website: www.husmann.com

Danone Canada's Silk Launches Innovative Plant-Based Yogurt

Danone Canada's Silk continues to forge a plant-based revolution with the launch of its new protein plant-based yogurt featuring Canadian pea protein. With 12g of protein per 175g serving and a signature Greek-style thick texture, the new Silk plant-based yogurt is available in Key Lime and Vanilla flavours, delivering on exceptional taste, consistency, and nutrition. Silk also introduces an improved recipe, new flavours and sizes for its current range of coconut plant-based yogurts.



For more information: SilkCanada.ca

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