



The 2017 Leadership Awards

We are very pleased to once again partner with *Food in Canada* in presenting the 2017 Leadership Awards. These awards recognize Canadian food and beverage companies for their achievements in Growth, Innovation, Stewardship, Community & Industry Leadership, and Health & Wellness. It is clear that the companies being recognized this year once again demonstrate qualities that truly exemplify leadership in the industry, an industry we are very proud to be associated with.

Here in Canada and around the world, food and beverage companies continue to invest in new offerings and new markets. Many also focus on how they can provide healthy new products in an environmentally friendly way to positively impact their local economies and communities. Canadian consumers continue to look for improved quality and value in their food and beverage choices, while retailers continue to promote goods that bring consumers into their stores and move product off of their shelves.

The industry leaders recognized this year are exemplary examples of successful Canadian food and beverage producers. Muskoka Brewery's Moonlight Kettle Project exemplifies an innovative program that develops products uniquely and quickly. Canadian Prairie Garden Purees' approach to creating puréed products with "more goodness" has greatly enhanced their customers' health and wellness choices. From a stewardship perspective, Petcurean's partner evaluation and scorecard process serves them very effectively, while Mrs. Dunster's leadership role in bringing independent bakeries together has strengthened that sector in Atlantic Canada. Finally, the growth demonstrated by Riverside Natural Foods in recent times is a great example of how Canadian producers can expand and diversify very successfully here in Canada and internationally.

Canadian producers have clearly shown that they are up to the challenges of a dynamic Canadian and global economy. At Grant Thornton LLP, we're dedicated to serving the food and beverage industry, and are very privileged to recognize these 2017 industry leaders. 🍓

James Menzies, national manufacturing leader
Grant Thornton LLP www.GrantThornton.ca





(L - R) Riverside Natural Foods owners Salma Fotovat, director, Supply Chain; Nima Fotovat, president; and Sahba Fotovat, director, Operations. (Front) Moe Fotovat, managing director.



Riverside Natural Foods

—GROWTH AWARD—

BY CAROLYN COOPER

“The start of the company was more of an inspiration around the product,” says Nima Fotovat, recalling the origins of Riverside Natural Foods, the Vaughan, Ont.-based company that he and sisters Salma and Sahba launched in June 2013. “I had two kids starting daycare, so I went into the supermarket to get organic, school-approved, allergen-friendly, peanut- and nut-free snacks that I could pack for my kids’ lunch box. I found that there was nothing.” Having all worked in the family food business, Fotovat says the siblings “saw an opportunity for healthier, more nutrient-dense organic snacks that are also allergen free.”

That quest led to the creation of the MadeGood brand, a line of organic Granola Bars and Granola Minis that pack a powerful nutritional punch. Kosher, vegan, organic and non-GMO verified, the brand is free of the eight leading allergens in North America (peanuts, tree nuts, wheat, dairy, eggs, soy, sesame and fish), and features ethically sourced ingredients like dried fruits, whole grains and pure, cold pressed high oleic sunflower oil. Each product also contains the nutritional equivalent to a full serving of vegetables, and at least 20 per cent of the required daily intake of vitamins A, B1, B6, C, D and E, from the addition of spinach, broccoli, carrots, tomatoes, beets and shiitake mushrooms.

Best of all, the bars and minis are delicious, making them a “win-win snack,” says Fotovat. “As a parent I would love my kids to eat broccoli and carrots, but it’s difficult. So we thought if we could find a way to sneak that into the product it would deliver something beyond just a sweet snack. Kids think they’ve got a treat, and parents feel good.” Adds Fotovat, “MadeGood also allows kids with allergies to feel normal, so they can share their snack with everybody else.”

While Fotovat says “anything with chocolate” is a top-seller, flavours include apple cinnamon,

chocolate banana, chocolate chip, mixed berry and strawberry. Riverside’s newest products include Crispy Squares in vanilla and chocolate chip, and a cereal, a new category for the company.

Since the brand launched in 2014, Riverside has experienced significant growth annually, and in fiscal 2016 alone sales grew 200 per cent over the previous year. The company now has almost 70,000 sq.-ft. of production space across two adjacent facilities, and has national distribution at most major retailers, as well as on airlines Air Canada, WestJet and Delta, and in 20 countries worldwide. This summer the company will also begin providing product to Toronto-based school and daycare caterer Real Food for Real Kids.

Innovation remains a key driver of growth, and Fotovat says the company is focused on “making a healthier, better version” of snacks that families enjoy. Because of the brand’s allergen-free designation, food safety and quality is a priority. “That’s really a critical thing for parents with children who have allergies. So there is no room for error,” explains Fotovat.

“It is a very tough, strict process that involves our supply chain all the way to the consumer.” As a result, the company stresses strong, on-going relationships with its suppliers, customers and its employees, many of whom have been there since day one.

The strength of those relationships is also the reason Fotovat says real success for the company means much more than just financial growth. “Success, as a subjective thing, is when you come to work and people are enjoying working here. It’s not that it’s going to be easy — it’s going to be challenging, it’s going to be a learning experience, but it’s going to be fun as well,” he says. “So if we can create that it means the business is growing and things are good.”



FOUNDED: 2013



HEADQUARTERS:
VAUGHAN, ONT.



PRODUCTS:
MADEGOOD BRAND
BARS, MINIS AND
CRISPY SQUARES.



FOOD IN CANADA'S
2017 LEADERSHIP
AWARDS

The Muskoka
Brewery Team



Muskoka Brewery

—INNOVATION AWARD—

Photos: Muskoka Brewery

BY DEANNA ROSOLEN

How many companies can boast of having a program that employees voluntarily work together on in their own time? This program simultaneously taps into new trends in the market, appeals to consumers, and at the end of the year produces several new innovative product ideas. It's what makes one of Muskoka Brewery's approaches to developing new products such a standout.

Launched in 2015, the success of the Moonlight Kettle Project was a surprise to everyone, says Todd Lewin, president of Muskoka Brewery. "It's taken on a life of its own. It's one of those unique

programs that is connecting with our employees and our team in terms of being part of our culture and what we do. It's also a great innovation pipeline for us. And it's landing really well with consumers who get to try the brands on tap."

The project partners a brewer with two or three other employees from any department. In the past, teams have worked closely with Gary McMullen, one of the founders of Muskoka Brewery (McMullen left the company last month), to develop a recipe and a style of beer. The team is also responsible for naming the beer and coming up with a list of foods that will pair well with

it. Then each team is booked a month in which to brew. Heartier and darker styles of beer are produced in the winter months, while in spring and summer the program produces beers that are light, floral and fruity.

The program was relatively easy for the brewery to launch. The original idea for the Moonlight Kettle Project came from the sales and marketing team, which wanted to pilot some test beers. After many conversations, says Lewin, the project began by collaborating with employees from across the company. It has all been employee-driven rather than mandated by management, so employees



Todd Lewin, president,
Muskoka Brewery.



FOUNDED: 1996



HEADQUARTERS:
BRACEBRIDGE, ONT.



PRODUCTS:
CREAM ALE, CRAFT
LAGER, HARVEST
ALE, IPA, STOUT,
SPECIALTY BEER.

maintain a real sense of ownership.

Although original plans were to do a couple brews this way, Lewin says the concept quickly became hugely popular with employees. Teams have remained small so that each person can make a more meaningful contribution. The project now runs 12 times per year, and there is a team in place for every month until mid-2018.

Once the team is ready, they launch their beer at the company's Hopped Up Hump Day gatherings. Depending on the response to the new brew, Muskoka Brewery then offers it to consumers on tap as a Limited Edition through the

Moonlight Kettle Series. In 2017, the brewery ended up launching two of the new beers that came out of the series lineup in 2016: Kirby's Kolsch and Shinnicked Stout. Beyond creating new products, the program has enhanced an already strong company culture at Muskoka Brewery. Through the Moonlight Kettle Project participating employees become better brand ambassadors as they learn about the brewing process — long days in which the teams are lugging around hops and malt and getting their hands dirty, says Lewin — and the company's core product.

As the company continues to grow

(it hired 60 new employees last year), projects like this help maintain a culture of openness. At a company-wide retreat in February, Lewin noticed employees from different departments who met on a Moonlight Kettle Project team mingling and sitting together. "Moonlight Kettle brings people together and allows for collaboration," says Lewin. "It has kept conversations going and is breaking down barriers. I would say it's been a key pillar to what we believe from a culture point of view. And when you have rapid growth we think anything you can do to foster communication and collaboration is a good thing." 🍷



FOOD IN CANADA'S
2017 LEADERSHIP
AWARDS



Walter Cosman,
general manager
of Petcurean.

Petcurean

—STEWARDSHIP AWARD—

BY DEANNA ROOLEN

When you ask about stewardship and the sustainability program at Petcurean, Walter Cosman says all you need to do is look out the office windows. The company's general manager explains that when you see the surrounding mountains and lakes in Chilliwack, B.C., "you see firsthand what you're working on to protect and what's at risk if we don't do a good job of it."

That's why Cosman says that implementing the company's sustainability program wasn't a challenge — staff can see every day what's at stake. In fact, Cosman attributes the company's success foremost to those 70 employees who not

only care about the planet, but who are also committed to putting pets first. The fact that the company is still privately owned by founders Ron Mayert and Dan Vanleuwen is another contributing factor to the company's success, which in the last five years began exporting to more than 10 countries, bringing the total number of countries they are sold in to 29.

"We are privately owned and independent," says Cosman, "and that allows us to be focused on pet nutrition. We don't have to worry about our stock value or quarterly profits or quarterly results and reporting to shareholders. We have private ownership and [our owners] have a vision for where our category is going

and have allowed us to look at innovative new products."

One of those new and innovative products is called GATHER. The product for dogs includes Wild Ocean Line-Caught Cod, Free Acres Organic Free-Run Chicken and Endless Valley Vegan. The ingredients are certified, non-GMO and organic. They include whole chicken, peas, flaxseed, oatmeal and barley, with line-caught cod and krill certified by the Marine Stewardship Council. For cats there's Free Acres recipe with organic free-run chicken. The challenge in getting GATHER to market was finding suppliers that were sustainable and certified. The company's products

Photo: Don R. Young Photography



FOUNDED: 1999



HEADQUARTERS:
CHILLIWACK, B.C.



PRODUCTS:
PREMIUM PET FOOD
BRANDS INCLUDING
GO!, SUMMIT,
NOW FRESH, SPIKE
AND GATHER.

supply team had to literally “scour the Earth” to “gather” (hence the brand name) “those right suppliers and do their due diligence to make sure they were truly sustainable,” says Cosman. “It’s one thing to say it on paper and offer it as a sales pitch. But we had our people go out and kick the dirt in their fields, inspect their farms and stand on their boats to be sure.”

Like all new suppliers to Petcurean, each partner which provided ingredients for GATHER’s recipes had to meet strict criteria for sustainability based on five pillars: humane animal welfare practices; protection of water supplies and the limit of water use; protection of farmer, rancher and producer livelihoods; preservation

of natural resources; and preservation of biodiversity.

To reduce the use of traditional polyethylene in its GATHER packaging, while keeping the bag strong and durable, the company developed a 30 per cent bio-based plastic produced from sugarcane with a reduced environmental impact. Now, Petcurean saves a four-pound bag’s worth of petroleum-based material for every 16-lb bag made. Its other dry pet food bags are sourced from North America instead of overseas to lower the carbon footprint. Meanwhile, the company has invested in a new pet food oven which uses less energy and produces less waste, and its dryers are now

expending 15 to 25 per cent less energy.

While sustainability wasn’t a challenge in implementing, keeping that entrepreneurial spirit alive as the company grows has sometimes proved trickier. Cosman says he’s taken the added step of hiring an innovation manager to work closely with their pet nutritionist to identify trends and market opportunities. “Pet owners are passionate about the footprint they make on the environment — or as we like to say ‘paw print,’” says Cosman. “They want the same things they can get for their own shopping needs — sustainability, organic, transparency — and they want that reflected in the food they’re feeding their pets as well.” 🍎



Photo: James Walsh/Rod Stears Photography

Mrs. Dunster's

—COMMUNITY & INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AWARD—

BY CAROLYN COOPER

When Blair and Rosalyn Hyslop purchased Mrs. Dunster's from Dairytown Products in June 2014, the couple knew there would be a few challenges, like getting a management team in place. But within 24 hours of owning the Sussex, N.B.-based commercial bakery the Hyslops received an unexpected setback. "We lost the distribution rights to a product line that represented about 15 per cent of our business," says Blair Hyslop. "So that was kind of a rude awakening day one."

Hyslop decided to reach out to regional bakeries to see if they were interested in the company's distribution capabilities. The couple worked hard to build strong relationships with customers

throughout New Brunswick and Maine, while at the same time expanding in-house production of doughnuts, cookies and sweet goods. Sales grew steadily, and in fall 2015 the entrepreneurs acquired Borden, PEI-based Snair's Golden Grain bakery, which produced complementary products like artisan bread and rolls, and which expanded the company's distribution throughout PEI and Nova Scotia.

Then in January 2016 the small community of Sussex was devastated to learn that PotashCorp, the major employer, was closing the Picadilly mine operations, putting 430 people out of work.

"That kind of set us in a new direction," recalls Hyslop. "We really started focusing more on growth, and on getting more involved in the community to try and

help alleviate the impact of the mine closure." As a result, he says, "we had a plan to grow three per cent a year, and we've grown an average of 35 per cent a year for the last two and a half years. We've more than doubled the number of employees. So we evolved pretty dramatically over the last two and a half years, and it's turning out to be something a lot more awesome than we had intended."

Working with the local Chamber of Commerce, the Hyslops led a process that brought together 150 local business leaders to produce a strategic plan for economic development and business attraction for Sussex. They also rallied local bakeries to encourage the sector to share strengths and knowledge to help



Blair and Rosalyn Hyslop, owners of Mrs. Dunster's.

them face common challenges. “We never looked at it as a real competitive threat, we looked at it as an opportunity to work together,” says Hyslop. “This is a small market in Atlantic Canada, and we really need to work together as an industry to make sure that we have the tools we need to succeed.”

For instance, says Hyslop, there’s an absence of new bakers across Canada, particularly in smaller communities where there are no part-time courses for professional development. Hyslop is the Atlantic Canada representative on the board of directors of the Baking Association of Canada, which is now working on a plan to enhance professional development training opportunities for bakers.

In addition, the company helped bring the Junior Achievement Company program to Sussex, and both Blair and Rosalyn sit on the

boards of a number of local charitable organizations, and mentor other small business owners in the region. “There was a need first and foremost, for people to get involved and get re-engaged in the community,” explains Hyslop. “So we decided to contribute what we could in terms of leadership and manpower and time. For us it was something that seemed like the right thing to do.”

That involvement has been overwhelmingly positive for the company, which has tremendous loyalty in the community. Sales have grown 93 per cent since the Hyslops opened shop, and today Mrs. Dunster’s 26 trucks deliver 40 different freshly baked products two to three times a week to retailers and restaurants throughout the Atlantic region. That’s just five per cent of the roughly 200 in-stock baked goods Mrs. Dunster’s sells through its small shop, which receives an astonishing 400,000 visitors each year. Top-selling items are its famous doughnuts, followed by gingersnap cookies, English muffins, cheese garlic buns, and a wide variety of bread and rolls. “We probably have the widest range of products of any bakery in the region, and the ability to get them to market to just about any store in the region,” says Hyslop. “So it’s a nice place to be. We have lots of options in front of us.”

But, he stresses, any growth must comply with the couple’s vision for the business, based on three elements. “We want to have a healthy growing company, so we focus a lot on our culture — we like to say this is a place where awesome people get to work in an awesome work environment,” says Hyslop. “We want to continue to make and distribute exceptional food. And we want to continue to be actively engaged in the communities in which we do business and in which we work and live. Those are the guiding principles that drive our vision. We just want to achieve our potential, whatever that is. So far it seems to be greater than we’re able to imagine, so we’re just going to sit back and see where it goes.” 🍪



FOUNDED: 2014
(THE ORIGINAL
MRS. DUNSTER’S
OPENED IN 1968)



HEADQUARTERS:
SUSSEX, N.B.



PRODUCTS:
DOUGHNUTS,
COOKIES, ENGLISH
MUFFINS, ARTISAN
BREAD, ROLLS,
SWEET GOODS.



FOOD IN CANADA'S
2017 LEADERSHIP
AWARDS



Kelly Beaulieu, COO
of Canadian Prairie
Garden Purees.

Canadian Prairie Garden Purees

—HEALTH & WELLNESS AWARD—

Photo: Steve Salmikowski/Chronic Creative

BY DEANNA ROSOLEN

Kelly Beaulieu is a pioneer. Where others might have dismissed the bruised and misshapen vegetables culled from farmers' harvests in Manitoba as unprofitable, she saw opportunity. But she also saw a troubling fact: a huge amount of waste.

Between 30 and 60 per cent of farmers' vegetable harvests are culled, says Beaulieu "because they don't meet the strict visual quality standards of supermarkets." That's bad news for the farmer who doesn't have a market opportunity for those vegetables and it's bad news for the planet. As Beaulieu explains, we're going to have 9.7 billion people on the Earth by 2050 so "we have to do a better job of looking after the food that we do have so people aren't starving."

That's what sparked the idea for Canadian Prairie Garden Purees (CPG), which takes those fresh and raw vegetables, fruit and pulses and turns them into nutrient-dense purées. The products pack in so much nutrition that 100 g of the company's purées is equal to 1.4 vegetable servings. The purées are vibrant in colour, are low acid and do not contain any additional ingredients or preservatives. They are kosher and halal certified, and include beets, carrots, chickpeas, navy beans, parsnips, Saskatoon berries, sweet potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, corn, onions, pumpkin and squash.

For Beaulieu, who is COO of CPG and an agronomist by training, the road to success included a steep learning curve and several challenges. She started work on the idea for the company in 2008, beginning with research on the various available processing technologies. While Beaulieu chose aseptic processing, it had to be adapted to meet her vision. "I was looking for an environmentally sustainable processing method," she says. "I looked at a whole bunch of different methods before I chose the technology that I did. And that technology had never been used for this type of a product, so I had to adapt it entirely to do what I wanted it to do."

Over the following years Beaulieu worked with a manufacturer and engineers to get the technology — which is patent pending — right.

In 2013, she finally raised enough money to purchase the equipment. Her aseptic processing technology uses steam to cook the vegetable purées to fully sterile in less than nine seconds. While it's effective, it's also the only one of its kind in the world, meaning the entrepreneur and her team had to determine how to run the technology once it was up and operating in the plant.

Beaulieu also spent many months working with the Food Development Centre in Manitoba, which helped the company with food safety testing, obtaining HACCP certification and certification by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. There were also many months of working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in order to be certified to export to the U.S.

By the end of 2014 CPG was finally fully commercial, and today there are 20 staff, 10 in production and four in management. But with such a unique concept, Beaulieu says customers in foodservice and manufacturing often need convincing and time to test samples in their recipes, especially as her purées are such high quality. But, she says, "The best way I sell my products is I let people taste them. That's the secret. We open a pouch and let them taste it. That's a slam dunk every time." Beaulieu's proprietary technology uses high temperature to cook the vegetables, fruit and pulses in seconds, followed by a rapid cool down to lock in the nutrients. Purées are packed in pouches that are shelf stable for two years. Other technologies take longer to cook the product, which are then often sold frozen. The technology can also create thick and creamy pulse purées, compared to units currently on the market, which produce more watery pulse purées. The technology removes any beany taste, so the purées can be used in foods like burgers and cheesecakes. As a result of these factors, CPG has seen a 100-fold increase in sales growth each year.

"As far as our technology goes, I feel we're just at the start of a huge opportunity," says Beaulieu. "The things we can learn and do with this technology — the sky's the limit. The more I learn, the more excited I become. We just have to figure out more ways to use it." ●



FOUNDED: 2014



HEADQUARTERS:
PORTAGE LA
PRAIRIE, MAN.



PRODUCTS:
PURE VEGETABLE,
FRUIT AND PULSE
PURÉES.