

# 10 TOP

## Top 10 Canadian food & beverage companies to watch in 2018

Every year *Food in Canada* shines the spotlight on 10 growing Canadian food and beverage businesses we think will be making headlines in the coming year. Following, in no particular order, are our Top 10 to watch in 2018.

# 1

### 1642 Sodas

Bastien Poulain founded 1642 Sodas in 2014 in Montreal. Today the company has five employees and its sodas are

found in IGA and Metro in Ontario and Quebec, and several gourmet grocers.

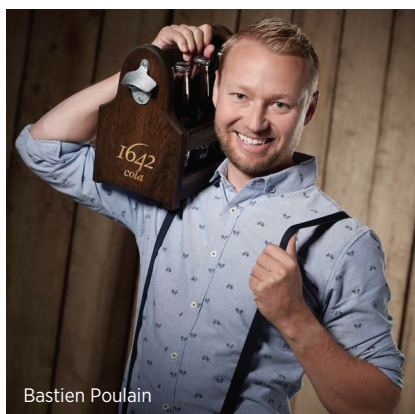
[www.1642sodas.ca](http://www.1642sodas.ca)

**Q: What made you start the company?**

Entrepreneurs find ways to solve a problem or a situation that is not right for them. In 2013 I was eating with friends and the only sodas on the menu were the red brand and the blue brand. My heart and head said, “it’s not right.” I began researching and found that we could change the situation by offering good craft sodas, making them in Canada and increasing the quality.

**Q: What challenges did you face?**

How do you make soda when you don’t have experience? The main challenges were getting space on the shelves, finding a good distributor, and marketing with zero budget. We wanted to change the norm in the industry by not adding benzoate sodium, no plastic bottles, no artificial sweeteners. It was not easy, but we are really happy now.



Bastien Poulain



**Q: What makes your product unique?**

We really take our time developing our recipe. We use natural spring water, natural sugars such as maple syrup or honey, and 95 per cent of our suppliers

are from Canada — that is really important for us.

**Q: What has consumer response been like?**

We were very surprised to have such a warm welcome from consumers. They were able to drink something better and local. We had the chance to appear on *Dragons’ Den* in 2015 and the cola became very popular.

**Q: Future plans?**

We are launching an orange and sea buckthorn oil flavour this summer. We are selling in the Greater Toronto Area, as well as in Vancouver.

**Q: What are some recent highlights?**

We work with Canadian sommelier Véronique Rivest’s (who was the 2012 Best Sommelier of the Americas and came in second in the 2013 World’s Best Sommelier Competition) restaurant Soif Bar à Vin in Gatineau, Que. We also won two awards at the Les Prix Foodies-QC for our 1642 Tonic and 1642 Ginger in 2015 and 2016, respectively. We supply Cirque du Soleil and we had the chance to offer a bottle of 1642 Cola to Celine Dion at her restaurant Schwartz’s in Montreal.



## Blue Harbour Cheese

Lyndell Findlay launched Blue Harbour Cheese in Halifax in 2013. Today there are three employees who help produce three different cheeses, which are found in Sobeys,

independent cheese retailers, restaurants and hotels. [www.blueharbourcheese.com](http://www.blueharbourcheese.com)

### Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?

After years of working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the conflict zones of Africa and Asia, I retired in 2011. Looking for a new career is challenging and I wanted satisfying work that I could do in Halifax. I turned to my interest in cheese making and in 2012 I interned with a farmstead cheese maker in Ohio, and attended the Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese. I returned to set up my own artisan cheese facility, with a focus on blue cheese.

### Q: What challenges did you face getting started?

We're one of Canada's very few urban cheese producers. Finding a space with the right zoning and complying with city regulations was definitely a challenge as well as milk supply.

### Q: What makes your products unique?

Urban Blue, which has been called "blue butter," is a mild and approachable creamy cheese that is turning non-blue



Lyndell Findlay



cheese consumers into enthusiasts. We also make two sheep milk cheeses. Our Electric Blue is inspired by the French Fourme style of cheese, and the HipHop cheese is a semi-soft smear rind

cheese, washed with a special blend of local craft beer.

### Q: What has consumer response been like?

Comments go something like, "I don't like blue cheese" to "oh, that's amazing" the first time people try Urban Blue. Demand has rapidly grown. Every week emails arrive from all over Canada, asking where our cheese is available.

### Q: What are your future plans?

I'm on a mission to convert everyone to the love of blue cheese! We're planning a new plant this year (still within the city), with expanded capacity and a federal registration, which will remove trade barriers. We'll also develop new types of cheeses.

### Q: What are some recent highlights for the company?

BHC showcased our cheeses in Berlin this year as part of a trade mission. We're looking at export opportunities through CETA. And we're sourcing high-quality sheep milk.



## Gravelbourg Gourmet Mustard

Val Michaud runs Gravelbourg Gourmet Mustard, with a few contractors who help. The

company, which was founded in 2011, manufactures 13 different products. [www.gravelbourgmustard.ca](http://www.gravelbourgmustard.ca)

### Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?

When a local miller was established in Gravelbourg, Sask., we thought why not develop something with that resource? Availability was easy. The milling plant has since closed, so I source from another location.

### Q: What challenges did you face getting started?

Distribution is one, and with growth there have been other challenges like producing new flavours and co-packing.

### Q: What makes your product unique?

We have flavours like Saskatoon Berry Mustard. Saskatchewan grows between 75 and 80 per cent of Canada's mustard and between 40 and 50 per cent of the world's mustard. It's an important resource we have to use to create something unique. It's disheartening to see our

resource exported out of country and made into gourmet mustards elsewhere and we Canadians buy it back.

### Q: What has consumer response been like?

Consumers are delighted and impressed with the quality and uniqueness. A number of chefs have commented on the high-quality and great-tasting product and said they recommend my mustards to other chefs.

### Q: What are your future plans?



Val Michaud

I want to ensure that Gravelbourg Mustard is across Canada and easily available. I want to export it, so everyone can experience a taste of Saskatchewan. I want to educate people more about the uses of mustard, its health benefits and different ways to cook and incorporate mustard in your meals. Mustard is

a must!

### Q: What are some recent highlights for the company?

Gravelbourg Gourmet Mustard was on Dragons' Den in December 2017. We had three deals on the table and we accepted one. The exposure has been fantastic! Consumers across Canada saw the show and immediately contacted me with orders and comments. It was rewarding for me; my hard work and perseverance is finally paying off.



## Health Addict Inc.

Carrie Darmaga founded Stouffville, Ont.-based Health Addict Inc. in 2012. The maker of whole food, superfood frozen smoothie kits sells her blender-ready products under the Fru-V brand in

Longo's and Vince's Markets.

[www.fruvsmoothie.com](http://www.fruvsmoothie.com)

### Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?

I used to have smoothies in college and wished there was a quicker version to buy. When I started working for the school board I helped to launch a Breakfast Club and saw so many kids. I thought again about my smoothie idea and how I could work with the Breakfast Club of Canada and help kids have a great breakfast.

### Q: What challenges did you face getting started?

Everything was a challenge as I didn't have a background in the food industry. It was difficult finding support for someone working from the ground up. I found help at the University of Guelph, where they took my concept to a product, but it was another four year before it got to a store shelf.

### Q: What makes your product unique?

Fru-V has 10 ingredients, so nutrients come from multiple sources. It's low in sugar. It's not all pre-blended but consumers just need to add water (or dairy or a dairy alternative). It's vegan, high in fibre, has three to four grams of protein and five to six essential nutrients. Donations go to the Breakfast Club of Canada with every purchase.



Carrie Darmaga

### Q: What has consumer response been like?

People are amazed at how they love the greens in Tropical — Veggie. The Berry — Veggie is tailored to consumers who want something not crazy sweet. If you like fresh-pressed juices but want more fibre, you'll love this product. When I did sensory testing with 100 Canadians, 74 per cent liked the product very much or extremely.

### Q: What are your future plans?

I'm working on two new flavours and getting the product across Canada.

### Q: What are some recent highlights for the company?

Vince's Markets was the first to take the product. I will always appreciate that. Getting into Longo's Brothers Fruit Markets was also big since they have so many stores. I sent samples to a distributor in BC who wants exclusive rights for the West Coast. It's reassuring when others have faith in the product you worked so hard on.



## A&M Gourmet Foods Inc.

CEO and owner Irina Vialykh started A&M Gourmet Foods in 2007.

The company, which has approximately 30 employees, produces 80 different products for retail and foodservice, such as dips and spreads, protein snacks, sunflower oil, vegan mayo, and Kefir+ Overnight Oats under the Simply Simple brand. The products are found in Canada and the U.S. [www.amgourmetfoods.com](http://www.amgourmetfoods.com)

### Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?

I immigrated to Canada from Eastern Europe about 20 years ago and found that there weren't many nutritious food product options available. After a period of cultural adjustment, education and valuable work experience, I started my own food company, with a focus on creating products that are tasty, clean and healthy. Our motto is that the most delicious and nutritious foods come from simple, fresh, high-quality ingredients.

### Q: What challenges did you face getting started?

We went through a major learning curve



at the beginning. We faced some financial challenges and the existing competition. In addition, there were numerous regulations and manufacturing processes that we needed to learn.





## Pepper North Artisan Foods

Ana and Drew Stevens of Oshawa, Ont. launched Pepper North Artisan

Foods in 2013. The company makes hot sauces that are found in 300 grocery chains in Ontario, as well as some sales in Quebec and BC.

[www.peppernorth.com](http://www.peppernorth.com)

### **Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?**

**Drew Stevens:** We began like many others, by growing hot peppers in our home garden and turning them into delicious spicy products for friends and family. As demand began to grow, so did our batch sizes. Adding eye-catching labels, we started attending local farmers markets and festivals. Before long, we were making a name for ourselves across Canada.

### **Q: What challenges did you face getting started?**

Our biggest challenge has been finding a production facility that we can take full advantage of and that can keep up with demand. We are still hand produc-



ing our sauces, so finding a processing kitchen that is willing to work with us was a huge step. Also, as we were scaling up our business we had to find local suppliers that could handle the increase in orders without affecting the quality of ingredients.

### **Q: What makes your product unique?**

We use rare and unique hot peppers paired with interesting ingredients. We create hot sauces that enhance your meals, are flavourful and are not too overpowering. We also make a couple of sauces that are in the ultra-hot range. All of our food products are hand crafted and individually quality inspected. We use locally sourced ingredients.

### **Q: What has consumer response been like?**

Consumer response has been incredibly positive. Loyal customers tell us they are so happy we are an all-Canadian

brand and that our unique flavours and various heat levels are totally different than what's currently available in the market.

### **Q: What are your future plans?**

We want to further expand outside of Ontario and are hoping that in the near future we will be across Canada. We are strategic about who we partner with, whether that be a distributor or retail chain, and we make sure that their core values are in line with ours.

### **Q: What are some recent highlights?**

We won three awards at the 2018 Fiery Food Challenge in Texas including second place in the Fruit Based — Hot/X-Hot category; second place in the Ultra Hot Pepper category; and third place in the Barbeque Sauce — Alcohol Infused category.



### **Q: What makes your product unique?**

We use unique ingredients that are becoming trendy in North America but have been known in Europe for years. We combined probiotic kefir

with gluten-free oats, fruits and spices to make our Simply Simple Overnight Oats. They were a staple breakfast and snack during my childhood and they make a great on-the-go breakfast or snack option for Canadian consumers. We use kefir and pressed cottage cheese in most of our dips and spreads.

### **Q: What has consumer response been like?**

We have had very positive responses from our customers on how innovative we are by adding a twist to traditional ingredients and formulating them into unique recipes.

### **Q: What are your future plans?**

We are excited about our brand-new Vegan Certified product line, which is about to launch within the next couple of months.

### **Q: What are some recent highlights for the company?**

Our facility achieved SQF (Safe Quality Food) Level 3 Certification. Also our products made the Grocery Innovations Canada Top 10 Most Innovative Products two years in a row (Simply Simple Protein Pickup in 2016 and Simply Simple Kefir+ Overnight Oats in 2017).

## 7 Modhani Yogurt

Barinder Singh Badwal is the presi-

dent of Modhani Yogurt, which was founded in 2015 and launched its first “Herb In & Spiced Up” yogurt in 2017. The Brampton, Ont.-based company, which has eight employees, makes Greek yogurts with fruit, turmeric and other spices.

Its 16 products are found in various chain grocery, independent and ethnic stores.

[www.modhani.ca](http://www.modhani.ca)

**Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?**

We use turmeric for such a wide range of things. In addition to cooking, we use it for burns, to boost our immune systems in flu season, or in my wife’s case, to help alleviate her rheumatoid arthritis. My wife and I were discussing this one day and felt that Canadians were missing out on the benefits of this incredible spice. I have always had an entrepreneurial spirit and next thing I know, I’m looking into how I can find ways to bring turmeric to the market. This wasn’t just about bringing awareness to a vaguely known spice, but also making it a

household item that Canadians can leverage the way my family has been doing so for centuries.

**Q: What challenges did you face getting started?**

Turmeric is not all that well known as an ingredient, let alone its benefits. Fortunately, we are not the only ones who are interested in turmeric — we quickly found there was plenty of scientific research touting its benefits. It has been our goal to equip ourselves with this information and try to get out there and educate as many people as possible.

**Q: What makes your product unique?**

Our “not-so-secret” ingredient is turmeric! Everyone knows the health benefits of consuming yogurt. But there isn’t a product out there that adds turmeric and not just any kind of turmeric, but fresh turmeric that has been carefully cooked to enhance its properties.

**Q: What has consumer response been like?**

We absolutely love opportunities to go out and get people to try our yogurt because we get to share first hand in their experience. Whether they’ve heard of turmeric or not, we’re incredibly happy with how much people have loved the yogurt. We had one customer say, “I feel like I’m eating cheesecake without the guilt!”



## Left Field Foods

Dave Pullar, CEO of Calgary-based Left Field Foods, says the company’s



launch of the Spokes brand air-puffed potato snacks late last year was a game changer. Today there are nine flavours and the product is found across Canada in more than 3,000 retail stores.

[www.leftfieldfoods.ca](http://www.leftfieldfoods.ca)

**Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?**

Left Field Foods started in

1999 as a very small grassroots, better-for-you snack company. We have innovative consumer solutions that appear to come “out of Left Field,” and we make our snacks with simple and better-for-you ingredients from the “Left Field.” Our new SPOKES brand product has been transformative in the growth and success of the company. We spent many hours talking with consumers to create the brand.

**Q: What challenges did you face getting started?**

Building a team to take us through accelerating growth was critical. It took some searching to bring the right talent into the business. We worked hard to know what was important to our consumers. We also needed resources and capital to meet our vision. We connected with Avrio Capital about two years ago, and they supported our growth and provided capital, insights and connections.

**Q: What makes your product unique?**

SPOKES is a better-for-you potato snack with only 40 calories per cup. We never oil-fry and only use a mist of sunflower oil so that seasonings stick. SPOKES deliver a great crispy potato snack without needing to compromise. They’re free of 11 major allergens, are Non-GMO Project Verified and have no artificial colours, flavours or preservatives.

**Q: What has consumer response been like?**

I love the look on peoples’ faces when they try SPOKES for the first time. It’s like a light just turned on and then they check the ingredients and nutrition facts. You can see another light go on when they realize that SPOKES has only 300 calories in the whole bag.

**Q: What are your future plans?**

To work with retail partners in Canada to drive growth and help with innovative merchandising solutions. We’re working on expanding into the U.S. and across North America.

**Q: What are some recent highlights for the company?**

We are one of the finalists in the Retail Council of Canada’s Grand Prix New Product Awards.





## Naledo Foods and Beverages Inc.

Vancouver-based Naledo was co-founded by Nareena Switlo and her mother Umeeda Switlo in May 2016. The company makes wild crafted whole root turmeric paste under the Truly Turmeric brand. The turmeric root comes from 350 small-scale farmer partners in Belize, where the company has a production office. Today the product is found in 600 stores in Canada, Belize, the U.S. and the Caribbean. [www.naledo.com](http://www.naledo.com)

### Q: Where did you get the idea for the company?

**Nareena Switlo:** Umeeda's family came to Canada as refugees in the 1970s. Fresh spices they used were not available here, so Umeeda's mother began making homemade pastes to help preserve fresh spices. Fast-forward to 2014, Umeeda was on a CUSO International volunteer placement in Belize where she saw the best wild turmeric. We came up with the world's first wild crafted, fresh turmeric paste. We decided to build a social enterprise that would support growers in Toledo, Belize, and produce products sustainably.

### Q: What challenges did you face getting started?

We started very small, with one blender. Then we had to learn how to scale up production quickly once we launched. There were a lot of challenges with our supply chain. Find a mentor who can help you. We were lucky to have Ishkandar Ahmed of Choices Markets, and Marie Sharp in Belize.



Umeeda Switlo & Nareena Switlo



### Q: What makes your product unique?

Instead of using turmeric powder we start with whole turmeric root and mix with all-natural ingredients. We had the BC Institute of Technology test our turmeric root for its curcuminoid content and found that our wild variety from Belize has three times the curcuminoids as other roots.

### Q: What has consumer response been like?

The response has been incredible. We have done very little marketing so word of mouth has been instrumental.

### Q: What are your future plans?

We are expanding our product line and are launching into the U.S. and Caribbean countries this year. We found out in May that we have been invited to pitch on CBC's Dragons' Den.

### Q: What are some recent highlights for the company?

We have two of our Belize team members attending university, three with new businesses, and all supporting their family and saving for the future.



## Feige's Gourmet Dressings

Monica Filman and Mark Snowden are both the owners and president and vice-president, respectively, of Listowel, Ont.-based Feige's Gourmet Dressings. They currently have five products available throughout Ontario. [www.feiges.ca](http://www.feiges.ca)

### Q: What made you start the company?

**Monica Filman:** We were in foodservice (MoDeans Roadhouse for 18 years and Feige's Fine Dining for 11 years) and the dressings were house dressings I created for our fine-dining restaurant. Customers wanted to purchase them, and a local store (Kitchen Cupboard & Icebox) wanted to carry them. When demand grew my husband and I decided to devote our time to making and selling the dressings.



Mark Snowden & Monica Filman



### Q: What challenges did you face?

Not really knowing where to start. Our first step was to purchase a bottling machine and a place to produce the dressings. Funding was tight, but we did receive some government assistance. Breaking into a market that has so many choices and making contacts was challenging, but the product seemed to sell itself.

### Q: What makes your product unique?

Our product is a cold-pressed sunflower seed oil with no added preservatives. It's not overpowering — it's a very light dressing that lets the flavours of your vegetables come through with a clean finish on your palate. They're also versatile

and can be used to marinate meat, make dips and roast vegetables. You can take our dressings to your table from start to finish, including dessert.

### Q: What has consumer response been?

It's been overwhelming. Moms tell us that their kids and husbands would never eat salads before. I think it's because the dressings are a sweet/sour base. Retailers have come across our dressings and contacted us, and they've had consumers request they carry them.

### Q: Future plans?

We would like to expand across all of Ontario and Canada, creating employment and new products. We get calls from people out West and even from the U.S., wanting to purchase our products.

### Q: What are some recent highlights?

The growth in production due to increased sales is surprising. Our sales have grown every year. 🍓