

Natalie Locke Milne

Randal Ius, co-founder and vice-president of Brand Development, Happy Planet Foods

A carrot juice toast over an organic field in B.C.'s Fraser Valley was the spark that led to the "kismet" beginning of Happy Planet Foods, a pioneer in the natural and organic smoothie category in Canada. Randal Ius and Gregor Robertson had a hunch they'd stumbled onto something unique while pressing fresh vegetables from Robertson's organic farm in the early 1990s.

"We thought that people in cities should have access to great tasting juices," says Ius, a self-described foodie, who shared a common concern for food security and sustainability with Robertson. "Happy Planet was born out of many long hours of figuring out how we might be able to get the fruits and vegetables grown on [Robertson's] farm into a drinkable format for people to enjoy," he explains. In 1994 that dream came to fruition when Happy Planet began producing all-natural and organic super-premium fresh juices and smoothies for the Vancouver market. In 1998 Starbucks took notice of the artisan juicer and began carrying Happy Planet's smoothies in its outlets. It was "a major turning point" for the small company, says Ius.

While Happy Planet still strives to use as many local ingredients as possible, consumer demand for exotic ingredients has taken the company around the globe in search of natural and organic fruits and vegetables. Today, Happy Planet produces over 25 varieties of natural and organic juices, smoothies and organic drinkable yogurts.



Randal Ius

Q&A

What do you love most about your job?

"Being part of a team here at Happy Planet, a company that is singularly focused on providing consumers with the best beverages that we can possibly make. People really love what we do and that makes my work here incredibly rewarding."

What is your management philosophy?

"We have a very fun and challenging work environment that allows employees to grow and encourages them to share in the Happy Planet vision of taking care of themselves and the planet."

What is the most challenging part of your job?

"Focusing my energy on developing products that best reflect the vision and the passion of Happy Planet. And [formulating] beverages that meet more rigorous demands from both consumers and the retail and foodservice sectors."

How would you describe your operational or management style?

"We provide employees at Happy Planet with the autonomy to do great things and with a healthy balance of team goals."

What are the issues your sector is facing?

"Because we're using fruits and vegetables in their natural state, the challenge has been in procuring organic and local ingredients. Every year there's been at least one crop that has been hit with some type of issue. We've never actually had to change a formula, but we've certainly come close."

What about opportunities opening up in your sector?

"I think the demand for organic products is phenomenal. Couple that with consumers' willingness to try new and different fruits and vegetables and it's making for a very interesting time in this category. I also see local as an important driver."

INTHE SPOTLIGHT

FIRST INDUSTRY JOB: "When I was 13 I made submarine sandwiches at the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) in Vancouver."

FAVOURITE FOOD: "Anything fresh. My wife's fish burritos are pretty hard to beat."

INDUSTRY MENTOR: "[Partner] Joel Solomon stands out in the crowd with his unrelenting passion for a just and sustainable community. He's been an ardent believer in Happy Planet's vision since the very first day and remains a great ally to our company."