



## Little Companies Big Dreams

**I**t all started eight years ago when we were brainstorming ideas for our sixtieth anniversary issue. Besides the de rigueur exercise of looking at the first 10 years of the North American Free Trade Agreement and historical data on the food industry, the editorial staff wanted to showcase a top 10 list of emerging food entrepreneurs.

I took the opportunity to waltz down memory lane and looked over some old issues. I'm amazed at the incredible ingenuity and determination of these entrepreneurial companies.

And, for the most part, these businesses are hail and hearty. In fact, most have thrived. In reviewing the past top 10 features, a couple of constants rise to the surface. In almost every year, we've usually had at least one winemaker, ice cider brewer or microbrewer crack the list. Does that speak to the typical long cold Canadian winter? We've featured Canadian success stories like Peabutter, a peanut butter substitute made with a special type of red pea, Happy Planet organic juices, Clodhoppers candy and small artisanal cheese makers plying a centuries old craft.

Among the more esoteric items we've ever featured are Tayo potato beverage, native-themed Earth & Sky bannock mixes and Arctic caribou meat. Another thread that weaves throughout our stories has been the tale of immigrants offering tastes of their homeland to a North



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American palate. There have been East Asians homesick for the kick of spice and vegetarians fed up with the same old tofu. When I was growing up lasagna was a foreign food. Now I'd have to offer kangaroo steaks to my kids to have that same sort of impact.

When you listen to these start-up stories, the difficulties with financing, the trials and tribulations of batches of prototypes that didn't turn out, or the suppliers that phone the morning of a batch run with excuses about delivery problems, you have to wonder what would drive a relatively sane person to enter the slim margins of the food industry.

For the most part, it's the realization of a long-held dream. For some, it's a chance to offer a healthy product to the marketplace. Some see a market niche and decide to wear the many hats that it takes to get a small company off the ground and up and running.

In looking back, I see that most of our featured companies have persevered. Larger corporations have even scooped some of our past top 10 participants up. But beyond all that the real commitment and attention to detail shine through. All of our past and current entrepreneurs are passionate about what they have to offer to consumers. For the most part, it's all a labour of love, sweat and tears.

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