

Hirsche Fraser Meats

Natural Beef - Field to Plate • By Deanna Rosolen

When BSE was discovered in Canada in May 2003, Grant Hirsche was one of many farmers who were hit hard. Hirsche and his wife Annette run a purebred operation and sell breeding bulls – half of them to the U.S.

“When [BSE] hit it was devastating for us. To cut your income in half overnight... And to make it even worse two years ago here at home we were getting \$1,000 to \$1,100 for our cull cows, cows that aren’t good enough anymore to raise calves,” he says. “Now we’d send them to auction and they were only offering \$100.”

The situation led Hirsche and partner Doug Fraser, another rancher, to take the bull by the horns, so to speak: The two launched a meat store in June 2004. Their 2,200 square-foot provincially inspected store in Okotoks, Alta., is called Hirsche Fraser Meats – Natural Beef – Field to Plate. In addition to beef, the shop sells pepperoni sticks, sausages, beef and pork bacon and jerky. Customers will also find free-range chickens and turkeys and premium pet food.

Before the store, Hirsche, who’s a certified meat grader, actually started selling meat from a truck in September 2003. He borrowed a refrigerated truck, got a license and permit and parked it on the side of a road in High River and started selling hamburger processed from his own cull cows. Despite the difficulty finding a processor and competing with retail store prices, Hirsche still sold out the first weekend. In fact, customers started asking for steaks and roasts.

By November, Hirsche was processing other farmers’ cull cows and added jerky, sausages, beef bacon and pepperoni sticks to his product list. But it was tough selling from the back of a truck in -30°C weather.

It was when a local TV station aired a 30-second piece on

the 6 p.m. news one day in February 2004 that Hirsche’s small venture took off. After the piece ran the station was inundated with hundreds of calls, wondering how to find the meat truck, says Hirsche. “The next day we went out on the highway like normal and instead of getting five or 10 people, we probably had over 200.”

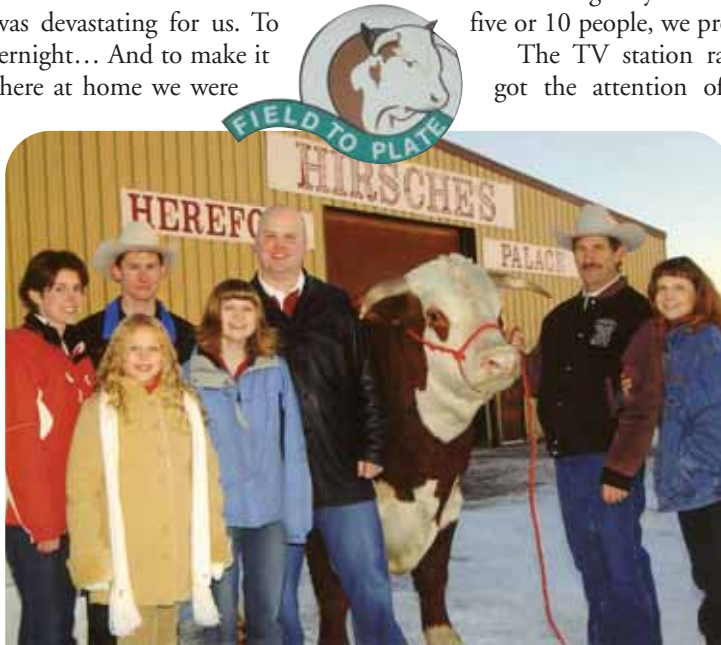
The TV station ran the piece again and that got the attention of a company that produces tradeshow. The company asked Hirsche if he could come up with 100,000 lbs of beef and sell it at a farm and ranch show. Hirsche, along with more than 30 ranchers, processed about 100 cattle and went to Edmonton for the show. Hirsche says hundreds of people lined up and waited up to four hours. They had six cash registers going and often sold single orders of up to \$600. “When I saw that kind of support, I thought we should try and have a permanent store.”

But it still hasn’t been easy. “The concept is great, people love what we’re doing, but we’re still struggling,” says Hirsche. His original dream was to build a slaughterhouse with a retail store, but the town didn’t want that. So they’re depending on other people to process their cattle and that’s costly.

They’ve also looked at going federal to sell out of province or online, but the cost and time makes that prohibitive. And while consumers appreciate the product, many still do all their shopping in the large supermarkets, says Hirsche.

But he remains positive. “The reason I started this little store was that I had seen a need to sell direct, to be able to bypass the middleman to make more competition for our product,” he says. “This little meat store came out of BSE. And I think that’s positive.”

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All in the family (from left to right): Kimberly, Brian, Kelsey, Karma, Justin, Grant and Annette.



TOP10

Brave New Brew

By Gail Powell

It's Shakespeare that put Stratford, Ont., on the map and thanks to Joe Tuer and his wife Rebecca Hill the theatre crowd have something to whet their whistle with when they get there.

Last spring, the pair returned from a three-year stint in Singapore, got settled back into their hometown, reacquainted with family and friends and then opened up the town's first premium microbrewery.

Stratford Brewing Company was a decade-long dream of Tuer that came to a head last April. After graduating from Ryerson in '93 and with a business degree in hand, Tuer set out to explore the world of brewing beer. But with no experience or savings, the lending institutions were not willing to advance him a dime. Today it's the generous support of family and friends that helps keep the beer flowing.

"I've always been really excited about the microbrewing industry as it involved a great interest of mine – great beer," says the 30-something Tuer. "When we were planning to come back to Canada we knew we wanted to get this brewery up and running so we started buying equipment for the plant online while we were still in Singapore," he recalls.

Their 2,000 square-foot plant houses brewing equipment made in Victoria, and purchased secondhand from a brewpub in Cincinnati. Their primary focus is a Czech-style pilsner draft beer, "though there is enough room for a small bottling line," he says. "We don't have bottles – yet," notes Tuer. "However, after we go through the proper government channels we hope to have bottles in production by the end of this summer."

With 30+ accounts (and growing) in bars and restaurants from Toronto to London, Tuer says he has no plans to take Stratford Brewing nationwide.

"Beer, like milk, has a best before date and right now we can deliver between Stratford and Toronto in under 90 minutes," he says. Adding, "The beer comes out of our cold room and it's dropped off at the restaurant right away. Our

beer has no preservatives and isn't pasteurized. I can guarantee it's fresh and has been maintained in the proper storage environment...it's not like it has been on a truck for six days going to B.C."

With only four main ingredients, water, malted barley, yeast and hops, Tuer says it makes sense that their logo is of two-row barley. "With barley being the main ingredient we thought it was a good fit for our logo because it's like an identifier as to what's in the beer," says Tuer. "When you look at an orange juice box, odds are there'll be an orange on it somewhere."



We want people to know that we're new and different. We're not looking at how beer used to be made, we're looking at how beer is made today in Europe, something a little more timeless.

As far as marketing this craft brew from a theatre town of the same name, Tuer says he'd prefer to steer clear from the Shakespearean theme. So far the company's only quote from the 16th century playwright is in its tagline – Beer, As you like it – but don't count on any more Shakespearean nuances.

"I think if we make a good product we don't have to rely too closely on the theatre. We know that 95 per cent of our beer will probably end up being sold in Toronto and I think that the Stratford Brewing name works well by itself. Sure, we came up with a few taglines including Taming of the Brew, but if someone doesn't know Shakespeare they're

not going to get the joke."

Besides marketing and branding Tuer also handles sales and says his biggest challenge so far has been getting the word out that Stratford Brewing exists.

"It's just me cold calling 2,000 bars in Toronto," he quips. "We want people to know that we're new and different. We're not looking at how beer used to be made, we're looking at how beer is made today in Europe, something a little more timeless. So it could be 100 years old or come out 100 years from now and it will still be consistently good beer."

In Tuer's case the old Shakespearean dictum actually fits quite nicely here. Truly, "You can't have too much of a good thing."

Gail Powell is a Georgetown, Ont.-based freelance writer.

Making Their Mark

By Hélène Katz

Marc-Antoine Lasnier and his sister, Alexandra, were looking for things to do with apples when they joined their parents, Michel and Josée, in the family business two years ago. Apples have been in the Lasnier family since 1927.

It started with Marc-Antoine's great-grandfather Valérien. The apple orchards in the Eastern Townships were handed down to grandfather André, his son Michel and now Marc-Antoine and his sister Alexandra.

It was the "new" generation that decided to try their hand at processing apples in June 2003. "We started out growing and selling apples," Lasnier, 26, says. "That's what the first three generations did. My sister and I are the first generation to process the apples." Part of that was out of economic necessity, he admits. Profit margins from selling fresh apples, mostly through the Métro grocery chain, were getting slimmer. Plus, the fourth generation of Lasniers wanted to make their own mark on the family business.

Alexandra, 23, takes care of the solids and Marc-Antoine turned his attention to the liquids. Their products include pies, jellies, jams, spreads, bread, apple butter and dressings, and apple cider and port. Apple cider was a natural choice, since it had been produced for family friends since 1966.

But it has been their award-winning ice cider that seems to have drawn the most attention. Their Glacé de la Colline took a silver medal at the 2004 Coupe des Nations de Québec competition. The judges weren't the only ones to appreciate the ice cider. "At first we thought we could sell 500 bottles, but we were modest in our expectations," Lasnier admits.

They sold 5,000 bottles from their first year of production and 10,000 last year. The ice cider is currently on store shelves at the Société des alcools du Québec (Quebec Liquor Commission) and in the company's on-site boutique. Vergers de la Colline is now targeting the Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia markets to find distributors as well as eyeing the export market.

Vergers de la Colline has two orchards a kilometre apart in the same village. The 125 acres of orchards grow 25,000 apple trees and the company has 10 full-time employees in addition to 60-70 apple pickers.

The company has the capacity to produce 30,000 bottles and would like to produce as much ice cider as possible to give it time to age. But with their location on the edge of highway 137, there's no room to grow at the moment. "We can't expand our orchard because the road is supposed to be widened," Lasnier says. "It's not urgent because we have stock, but we do have to think about it."

They have other fish to fry while they wait to hear back from the municipality and the provincial ministry of transport about the expansion. The ice cider is turning out to be such a popular gift that Vergers de la Colline is creating special packaging. They have also decided to redesign their sombre-looking labels to spice them up.

Then there's the distribution to tackle. That means trying to expand the number of liquor stores that carry their products and buying prime real estate on the shelves.

"We can buy space in the SAQ to better position ourselves so that we are on top shelves," Lasnier says. "Otherwise, we are part of the regular rotation and we might find ourselves on the bottom shelf."

New products are also in the works, including a light cider coming out this summer and "a big project in 2006," Lasnier says coyly. He won't give any details except to say that Vergers de la Colline will be giving their customers new products to eat and drink.

Developing them is delicate business. "We try with small vats and we can sometimes go through 50 products before we get the right one," Lasnier says. "You have to wait for fermentation, decantation and then get it analyzed. Then you have to taste it and then the final stage is approvals with the SAQ. At the same time, you have to create the labels and the bottle. But it's so much fun to do."



The two generations of the Lasnier family showcase their produce and the cider.

From left, Michel, Alexandra, Josée and Marc-Antoine

Hélène Katz is a Montreal-based freelance writer.



TOP10

Good 2 Eat

Outside the box thinking leads to new product niche • By Sandra Eagle

Soon after the sale of his sign painting franchises, Shan Jamal was ready for a new challenge. Jamal, now the president and CEO of Goody2Chews Foods Inc., is betting on the good-for-you mantra to propel the sales of his nutritious, tasty, fruit and nut snack into the stratosphere.

With the media frenzy at a fever pitch about obesity, Jamal thinks he has the perfect product at the perfect time. Goody2Chews are a blend of dates, raisins, cranberries and almonds and are covered with chocolate, yogurt and butterscotch coatings to give a hint of indulgence. The chews come packaged 10 pieces to a 55 g bag. Jamal is marketing his product as “the nutritious answer to sweet cravings.” The dates increase the fibre quotient and whey protein concentrate contributes vitamins, calcium and iron. “But don’t tell kids that these chews are good for them,” Jamal adds laughing.

Jamal’s original idea was for a fruit and nut mixture that he could sprinkle on his de rigeur bowl of cereal in the morning, but brutally frank members of an advisory team he had assembled asked him why he wanted to produce another trail mix. Within an hour he thought to himself why don’t I throw the mixture in the blender. “You know, it was good that I wasn’t in the food industry so I could do crazy things, because I would have thought inside the box.” Jamal remembers that his wife was looking at him in a peculiar way when he got out the rolling pin and started flattening what he calls the “brown blob” and cut it into shapes. Although the shapes stuck to one another and the idea would need further work, Jamal had hit upon the kernel of what



Jamal has recently hired brokers in Canada and the U.S. to get the news about Goody2Chews into retail. He feels his packaged snacks have excellent potential with the on-the-go-lifestyle of many families who may have a craving for a wholesome sweet snack.

was to become his Goody2Chews product.

The next step was to enlist the services of Dr. Philip Lee Wing of the Food Development Group for help with product formulation. With his team urging him on, Jamal knew that he had a great idea, but needed expertise to realize its potential. Wing told him it wasn’t a topping but a snack and that he had a great idea. Wing proposed some changes, like adding a coating to prevent the mixture from sticking together and the addition of whey proteins and skim milk powder to increase health benefits.

Jamal has recently moved into his new peanut-free, 12,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility in Kitchener, Ont. So far, he has a staff of nine employees and one production line in operation, which he hopes to ramp up to 100 per cent efficiency in a month’s time. There is ample room, Jamal says, for a second line when the time comes. So now, the only part of the jigsaw puzzle left, is getting the message out and the product into stores.

Jamal has recently hired brokers in Canada and the U.S. to get the news about Goody2Chews into retail. He feels his packaged snacks have excellent potential with the on-the-go-lifestyle of many families who may have a craving for a wholesome sweet snack. In that vein, he feels he can target the big-box stores, grocery, convenience outlets and gas marts. He’s also sure that his product will have a wider appeal than the rug-rat set. “It has been an interesting project for me. From all the indications I have, from all the experts and advisors I have, we will not have a problem for demand of this product.”

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Dressed for Success

By Hélène Katz

Call Mylène Dimaulo the accidental entrepreneur. The president of Joisse Mylena in Bois-des-Filions, Que., owned a restaurant when she started making her own salad dressing. She made the leap from restaurateur to company president in 2001, when she found herself selling a dozen bottles a day through her restaurant.

"I started making it on the kitchen counter in the house four years ago," she recalls. "I was doing everything. Making it, bottling, it, labelling it, selling it." Her salad dressings can also be used as marinades for meat and fish. Business was so good that four months later she had to hire a sales rep.

After a year and a half of running her business out of her kitchen, Dimaulo rented a 4,500-square-foot facility and the company now produces 300-500 cases of dressing per week. Sales have doubled to half a million dollars in the last year and Dimaulo is aiming for \$1.2 million in sales for 2005. The company has a full time staff of nine, including four sales reps.

Dimaulo says her product is unique in its category because it uses only natural ingredients. "I feel like I have no competition at all," she says. "If you look at the Krafts of the world, they all have preservatives. My product is 100 per cent natural, no preservatives, and has an amazing shelf life."

In 2003-2004, Joisse Mylena was one of the finalists in the annual Canadian Grand Prix New Products Awards sponsored by the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors. But getting that far has been a lot of work, Dimaulo admits.

She has grown her company at a slow but steady pace. "When you go fast, you make mistakes and lose everything," she says. She began by selling one type of dressing and then expanded her offering to four, introducing a new one about every three months. Joisse Mylena now sells 12 varieties of salad dressings.

Selling her product to her first retail outlets took a bit

of nerve, she admits. "It took me 30 minutes to walk into the store to sell it, I was so scared. To go from working in a restaurant and cooking to selling wasn't the same thing." Once she'd made her first sale, she was hooked on selling.

Now her product is on shelves in more than 200 Metro and IGA stores in Quebec and 12 gourmet stores in Ontario, New Brunswick and Halifax. A 250 mL bottle of her dressing retails for \$4.99. She also gets positive responses at food shows such as the Montreal SIAL and the Canadian/International Food and Beverage Show in Toronto. At the Montreal SIAL two years ago, her company nabbed 61 new customers.

They're clients Dimaulo is careful to keep happy. "I've never promised anything I couldn't deliver, because it's easier to lose a customer than to keep one because they always want the best quality, best product, best demo."

Growing her business also hasn't come cheap. Dimaulo invested \$600,000 in production equipment and is looking to spend another \$125,000 to keep up with the demand. She is also launching a line of pestos. Finding financing

hasn't been easy. "You try, knock on one door, it doesn't work, you knock on another." With persistence, a door eventually opens.

Getting her business to this stage has demanded a lot of hard work. "I'm 37 but I feel like I'm 46," she laughs. She continues to have a hand in every aspect of the company. "I could be president one day, in the lab the next and doing a delivery the next," she says. "It's my place. I don't mind."

It's clear that Dimaulo is basking in the glow of her company's success. "I'm really enjoying it," she says buoyantly. "Don't get me wrong, I've cried a few times. You break your head so often trying things. They say four years is the magic number."

For this entrepreneur, it is. "I finally found what I want to do."



Dimaulo says her product is unique in its category because it uses only natural ingredients. My product is 100 per cent natural, no preservatives, and has an amazing shelf life.

Hélène Katz is a Montreal-based freelance writer.



TOP 10

Trails End Buffalo Stix

By Deanna Rosolen



Buffalo meat and cranberries – who would have thought the two would go well together? Who would have thought of putting the two together in the first place? As Judy Wilkinson says: “That’d be me.”

Wilkinson and her husband Kevin, both of Turtle Lake, Sask., launched Trails End Buffalo Stix last July. The couple has raised buffalo since 1978 and today they still have about 100, but Judy says they always had it in the



Buffalo Stix differs from beef jerky in that it’s soft and easy to chew. The product has no MSG, additives, byproducts, wheat, filler or soy.

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back of their minds to develop a pemican-type product. “As the market was dwindling for the animals, we were looking for a new and different way to market our meat,” she says.

The couple approached the University of Saskatoon and contracted the food centre there to develop a recipe. It started out with blueberries, but that turned into a “production nightmare.” So the Wilkinson’s thought of cranberries. The meat is from their farm and the cranberries come from a supplier in Saskatoon. The meat is ground first then mixed according to the Wilkinson’s

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recipe. It's formed into an eight or nine inch long stick and smoked. The product has no MSG, additives, byproducts, wheat, filler or soy.

"We were looking for something different than traditional jerky because there's tons out there and it's quite tough and hard to chew," says Wilkinson. "We were looking for something mainly targeting women and children that was soft and easy to chew and we'd call it a meat snack."

Once the recipe was where they wanted it, the couple contracted out production to two butcher shops: one in Drake, Sask., and one in Lloydminster, Sask. Together they produce on average about 50 lbs per week. The product is sold in gas service stations and bars, and retails for \$2 for one stick (23 g), \$3.25 for a package of three of shorter length (45 g) and \$6.99 for a package of four (90 g).

The challenge now, says Wilkinson, is just getting the product out there. (At press time, Wilkinson was to meet with a dollar store representative to discuss getting the product into more outlets). Tradeshows have been "fantastic," she says. They give out samples and are gratified at the response and at how many people really like the product. At a recent trade show, she says, "There were a couple of stores that came up and said, 'this is really good, how can we get it?' And that's the thing: trying to figure out how to get the product to people because gas is really expensive and we've looked at a distributor and they're very costly. And I'm not sure that we really want to lose that control, so I'm not sure which direction we're going to go."

The product is also found in some of the Saskatchewan Food Processors Association stores called Sask Made Marketplace. For now, the operation, says Wilkinson, is going well. They're also going to keep going with the original flavour, Cranberry Craze. "It's a struggle keeping track of the inventory and of what you've got and where it's going. Right now I think we're doing really well with this and I don't want to spread ourselves too thin."

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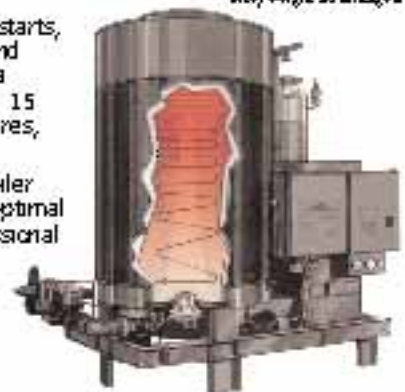
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The Long and the Short of it

By Jack Kohane

A secret family recipe and a history almost as ancient as the British Isles are combining to bake up a storm of Scottish shortbreads at Winnipeg-based McGarva International Inc. “It’s true to my Grandma’s recipe, one passed along from mother to daughter for generations,” smiles Gwen Todd, the company’s founder. “For years, I baked shortbread for family and friends, and requests kept coming in for me to make more. I considered commercializing the recipe, but didn’t know how to go about it.”

But fate stepped in when on a drive to Portage la Prairie in 2000, Todd noticed a road sign pointing out the nearby Food Development Centre (FDC), Manitoba’s prime test kitchen facility designed to take food products from concept to commercialization. A sweet notion rose in Todd’s mind.

After pitching her idea to the FDC, Todd teamed with its food scientists to create an additive-free formula for mass production, retaining the taste of traditional Scottish shortbreads based on her family’s time-tested model. “Then came trials to determine the nutritional content, and assistance with everything from labeling requirements, health regulations, shelf life (up to three months; six-month trials continue at this writing), packaging and ingredients,” notes Sherry Desilets, McGarva International’s vice-president. “This was done over two years, taking place while the Todds were busy operating the family’s grain farm.”

Shortbread has been connected to dairy farming and butter making in Britain since Medieval times. Shortbread is actually a biscuit rich in butter, served with tea and traditionally eaten at Christmas. Originating from Scotland, where legend says this was a favourite treat of Mary Queen of Scots, shortbread has been traditionally made with oatmeal, although most U.S. and U.K. imports into the Canadian market today are of wheat flour. As for the name “shortbread,” according to the Oxford Dictionary, this describes the biscuit’s friable nature. “If made right, it literally melts on one’s tongue, savoured and consumed in a moment,” coos Todd.

The McGarva shortbread uses Winnipeg-sourced ingredients of sugar, milled flour, butter and cornstarch, baked in 9-inch rounds and served cut from the centre into 12

triangles, termed petticoat tails. “It’s quite labour-intensive to make,” explains Todd. Employing one full-time and one part-time baker, the style of baking shortbread, as per the Todd technique, requires hand-forming the round, each hand-pressed into pans, hand sliced and then hand boxed right in the baking pan. “We looked at automating this process, but determined that machines can’t duplicate the look and texture of the traditional product,” she says. “Shortbread will always demand some hands-on preparation.”

Currently its products – a 310 g shortbread round (SRP around \$10) and a companion 500 g shortbread crumbs package (SRP about \$6) – are baked in FDC ovens, yielding up to 400 rounds per day. McGarva also markets a 620 g, 24-petticoat sliced round to the local foodservice sector. The shortbread crumbs provide an ideal bottom base for cheesecakes and lemon meringue pies, explains Desilets, adding, “At present, our shortbread is sold in retail outlets at the Forks market in Winnipeg, and we are looking at building our own baking facilities to service several Western Canadian retailers who have sampled our products at trade shows and expressed interest in carrying our products.” The company’s goal is to produce 30,000 rounds in its first year of full operation.

Along with a recently launched website (www.mcgarvashortbread.com), the shortbread’s logo and packaging have evolved, with a new retail package launching in May 2005. Says Desilets, “Each package depicts Grandma McGarva’s silver tea set, which was given to her when she married and was later passed down to Todd. We thought it only appropriate to use her tea set in our photo shoots, to bolster the idea of tradition and history, and to name the company after her since it is her original recipe.”

McGarva’s partners concede a daunting marketing challenge lies ahead. “Because shortbread is so closely linked to Christmas feasts, we need to educate consumers that this is a product to be served year-round, as a pleasing complement to any meal,” nods Todd. Grandma would have agreed.



“...machines can’t duplicate the look and texture of the traditional product,” she says. “Shortbread will always demand some hands-on preparation.”

Jack Kohane is a Toronto-based freelance writer.



YRU Cooking?

By Deanna Rosolen

Roger Belliveau knows his market and what they like to eat. And with that knowledge in hand, Belliveau and his wife Leona started YRU Cooking in Moncton eight years ago.

Today, six employees work out of a 1,600-square-foot provincially inspected unit on St. George Street to produce single- and family-size frozen servings of lasagnas, shepherd's pie, stir-frys, sweet and sour chicken, spaghetti with a meat sauce, chilis, cabbage casseroles, fish cakes and meat pies. And there's cheesecake for dessert.

Belliveau says either by this fall or next spring, he'll be opening a federally inspected facility in an industrial park. That's when he'll start shipping out of province.



"I knew a bit about the market and what's going and what's coming and I noticed that people don't want to cook. I noticed there was a need for ready made meat pies and other items like that and so we launched it off that."

Belliveau started in the food industry in his dad's bakery, which was also in Moncton. His dad sold the 50-year-old business to an employee two years ago. But it's where Belliveau first tuned into his customers and the things they were looking for. He knew there were a lot of dual income families in the area and "I knew a bit about the market and what's going and what's coming and I noticed that people don't want to cook. I noticed there was a need for ready made meat pies and other items like that and so we launched it off that."

He started with cabbage rolls, lasagnas and shepherd's pie and says simply: "Because those were my favourite meals to eat. And I love making them." They also happen to be popular fare in the area and were a hit with restaurants, which would serve them up "as if they were making it themselves." Belliveau now sells to cafeterias, hospitals, and independent bakeries, grocery stores and meat markets. Belliveau does all the marketing himself.

Getting the company to where it is today, though, wasn't easy. Belliveau says they started the venture from scratch and were "forever experimenting" before settling on the formulas that worked. "You're forever listening to comments and when you get enough people telling you that something is wrong, you rectify that problem. Now we got it pretty well down to where we want it."

Belliveau says they also work with a dietitian who helps them with ways to lower the salt content, for example, by replacing it with other spices.

With the opening of the new site, Belliveau expects to be hiring on three or four more staff and buying new equipment. Will he be adding new items to his repertoire? "I'm always experimenting," he says, but won't say what just yet.

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TOP10

Growing in Green

By Sandra Eagle


Mike Fata and his business partners are really into green. Fresh Hemp Foods Limited has been growing at a steady pace over the past seven years from \$60,000 to \$2.5 million in sales this year. Not bad for a product that Health Canada had classified as a level one narcotic until 1998.

Fata, president and North American sales manager, and his two partners, Alex Chwaiewsky and Martin Moravcik, created the company with 50 shareholders/farmers to grow, manufacture and sell hemp products when it became legal to do so in 1998. The company is vertically integrated with 20 farmers (who are also shareholders) growing 4,500 acres of hemp, some of it organic, to supply fresh seed.

Fresh Hemp sells four product lines that include hemp oil, shelled hemp seeds, hemp nut butter and hemp protein powder. Fata explains that educating the consumer is a huge job for the company. "There are many people who've said to us,




The Original three (from left to right):
Martin Moravcik, Alex Chwaiewsky and Mike Fata.
Manitoba Harvest products can be found in
2,500 health food stores and national retail food chains
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'we've tried hemp and it's gross.' Because of the richness of the essential fatty acids in hemp, it has to be fresh. If hemp is manufactured fresh it will have a wonderful nutty flavour, it will taste very creamy and have a great mouthfeel. It has a vibrancy when you eat it. If the product sits for a while, or if it's not packaged or refrigerated right, the oil starts to go rancid. It will taste bitter and scratchy on the throat. Because every other brand on the market doesn't have complete control over its manufacturing, a lot of the time their product is stale."

Fata and his partners launched the company with the assistance of the Food Development Centre of Manitoba, near Portage la Prairie. "They had the filtering and bottling machinery and taught us a lot about food safety and GMPs," Fata says. In January 2003, the company was able to move into its own 6,000 square-foot facility. "That was always our dream – to manufacture to order. Since our sales have dramatically increased, we manufacture every day."

Sales have grown from the first handful of health food stores in Winnipeg. He now has 25 distributors throughout North America, a couple in Europe and one in Japan. Manitoba Harvest products can be found in 2,500 health food stores and national retail food chains across Canada in the natural food section.

Part of the reason for the jump in sales is the nutrient rich attributes of

shelled hemp seed. In terms of nutrient content, it contains 34.6 per cent protein, 46.5 per cent fat and 11.6 per cent carbohydrate. It provides both of the essential fatty acids needed in the human diet and contains all the essential amino acids. Hemp food products have a low cholesterol content and are high in natural phytosterols, which reduce cholesterol levels. Fata adds, "at

first we didn't do this to become successful or for the money aspect. It was truly driven by the health aspect and the health of the planet and of course to keep ourselves busy and to make some sort of living. Now it feels really good that the company has become a success and we're still really just scratching the surface."

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TOP10

Qimmik Dog Biscuits

By Sandra Eagle

It's the first time I've ever had an interviewee slobber all over me. He was gorgeous too – a beautiful red-head. His name was Soyer. The only problem was that he had a tail and four legs. Yes, he was the real thing, an honest-to-goodness Canadian Eskimo dog (CED). One of the last remaining 300 purebred CED on the entire planet, and a "spokesdog" for a new upscale doggie treat called Qimmik biscuits.

The fish-shape biscuit, named after the Inuit word for dog, is made with human-grade ingredients and fish-oil omega-3. Meghan MacKinnon, director of marketing for Qimmik, says four years of R&D went into the formulation of the product. It took that long for an acceptable delivery method to be found for its intended canine market, because fish oil degrades very quickly. The biscuits are made of all natural ingredients with wheat, honey, garlic and vanilla masking the fishy taste of the omega-3.

Qimmik Manufacturing Inc. is a sister company of Canomega Industries, which has been supplying omega-3 oils to Asia for about 10 years. MacKinnon says the pet food industry is the second-largest growing market in North America. For now the biscuits are manufactured by a co-packer and only sold through veterinarian offices. A 558 g box sells for \$30. There are about 90 biscuits in a box. Each 6.2 g biscuit contains 46 mg of omega-3 fatty acids.

And this is where Soyer comes into the picture. As the official spokesdog for Qimmik he is living proof of the goodness of fish oil. For hundreds of years, CED thrived in one of the harshest environments on the earth – the Northern Arctic – on a diet of marine fish. These are dogs that could pull twice their body weight over frozen

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distances of 70 km per day. The dogs have dense coats, keen eyesight, strength and endurance. Denice Vick is Soyer's owner and a registered breeder of CED since 1988. The CED is one of the three indigenous dogs to Canada. She's a firm believer in the benefits of omega-3 fish oils for her dogs. Recent research from Texas A&M University suggests that omega-3 aids in canine neurological development, improves skin health, vision and circulatory health, as well as learning ability in puppies.

Sadly, with changing Inuit lifestyles and the advent of snowmobiles, the once thriving CED population of about 20,000 in the '50s is now down to between 200 and 300 survivors. The Qimmik biscuit was inspired by the marine diet of the dogs. As part of the "Everyone Needs a Friend" campaign Qimmik is donating a portion of sales to the Canadian Eskimo Dog Foundation, a non-profit group dedicated to raising awareness and preserving this magnificent breed.

Sandra.eagle@food.rogers.com



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