MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE

SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINABILITY IN FOODSERIVCE

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THE COLUMN: CHEF TAWYNA BRANT ON CANADIAN FOOD & ENTREPRENEURSHIP



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-AT-LARGE

This issue of MENU delves into the rich tapestry of Canadian culinary heritage with our theme, 'Roots', which is particularly poignant to me this harvest season, having recently had the opportunity to attend the Terroir Symposium in Calgary Alberta. This year's symposium focused on the transformation of the hospitality and culinary industries in the wake of the pandemic and had much to offer as food for thought. Similarly, this magazine celebrates diverse perspectives on Canada's food industry and culture and delves into the vital role that restaurants, chefs and food thought leaders play within it. As restaurants and consumers alike grapple with skyrocketing inflation, concerns about the environment, sustainability and as food sovereignty and food security intensify, I hope you'll find wisdom and the grains of real progress and hope within the contributions from those who have shared their perspectives.

Inside, you'll hear from the inimitable Chef Tawnya Brant with her first-person take on Canadian food and the things that keep her up at night. You'll hear powerful and fascinating personal stories from newcomers to Canada and the foodservice industry including the extraordinary Chef Raquel Fox and the success story of serial restaurateur, Paul Pham. We catch up with Karen Baxter on this year's Taste Canada Awards shortlist and what's new in Canadian food writing and connect with Chef Jeff Stewart to discuss Anita Stewart's legacy and Food Day Canada's recent 20-year anniversary. And, in a special collaboration with Bartender Atlas, we share a list of some of Canada's top and up-and-coming bar talent.

We also shine a light on sustainability in the foodservice industry, taking a look at the whys and hows of building circular economies for restaurants and Restaurants Canada resources to support restaurants in light of looming changes in legislation regarding single-use plastics. We learn more about how to incorporate sustainability in everyday operations from an inspirational, multi-disciplinary team at Earls and explore Canada's animal welfare policies and sustainability initiatives across the food chain with the Humane Society International Canada, Maple Leaf Foods, High Liner Foods and the Canadian Cattle Association.

Our very own Chris Elliott, Chief Economist and Vice-President Reseach, sits down for a deep-dive on the hotly anticipated restaurant industry research report and forecast *Foodservice Facts 2023* sharing the story behind the numbers. David Hopkins from The Fifteen Group shares debt management strategies for restaurants and we learn how restaurant leaders and staff can help manage seasonal stress with great insights from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

These stories from leaders across Canada demonstrate to me the value of the work we do and who we are here to help. As always, as MENU's editor-at-large, I'm inviting member feedback, story pitches and requests for coverage on the issues that matter most to you at media@restaurantscanada.org.

Yours in a unified, vibrant and empowered Canadian foodservice industry,



Kelly Higginson
President & CEO

Fall 2023
Volume 8 Number 4

Restaurants Canada
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8.4

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Editor-At-Large
Kelly Higginson

Contributors
Karen Baxter
Chef Tawnya Brant
Rodney Clark
Chris Elliott
Chef Raquel Fox
CJ Hélie
David Hopkins
Melanie McGregor
Anna Pham
Dacyion Reid
Chef Paul Shufelt
Chef Jeff Stewart
Chris Szego

Editorial & Creative Direction
Arable Brand Communications

Circulation Inquiries, Changes and Updates
members@restaurantscanada.org
1-800-387-5649

Advertising Sales
Laurie Dawe
ldawe@restaurantscanada.org

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Mailing Address
Restaurants Canada
1155 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M6J 1J4
T: 416-923-8416
Toll-free: 1-800-387-5649
F: 416-923-1450
info@restaurantscanada.org

X
𝕏 @RestaurantsCA

Instagram:
RestaurantsCanada

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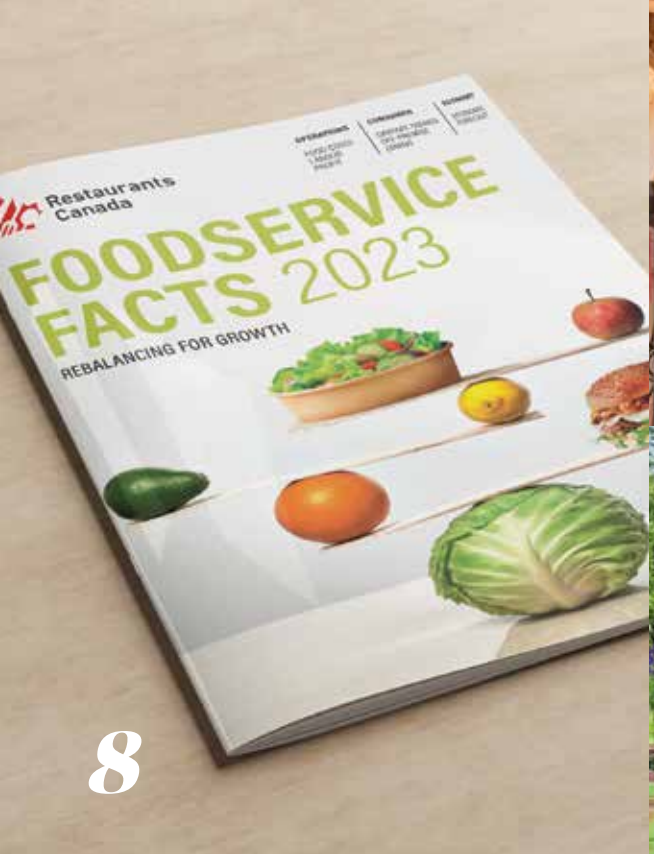
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8


16


34


31

contents



ON THE COVER:
Chef Tawnya Brant on Canadian food, running a business and the cost of school lunches.
photo courtesy of Lisa MacIntosh Photography

THE PASS

6 Restaurants Canada's **MENU Unplugged Podcast** hosted by **Jay Ashton has launched** and is available to listen wherever you get your podcasts (Toronto, ON); MENU magazine was onsite at the **Prince Edward Island International Shellfish Festival** and congratulates the winners (Charlottetown, PEI); the Restaurants Canada team was thrilled to attend the **2023 Terroir Symposium** and enjoy some western hospitality (Calgary, AB); the **26th annual Taste Canada Awards** shone a light of some of Canada's finest cookbooks (Toronto, ON); a special delegation led by Restaurants Canada headed to **HostMilano** to promote Canadian foodservice innovation and opportunity (Milan, Italy); **La Grande Tablée** takes place this month (Toronto, ON, Quebec City and Montreal, QC); and the **Foodservice Facts 2023: Rebalancing for Growth** and **Decoding Canada's Plastic Regulations for Foodservice** webinars are available to watch on demand.

THE FRONT

8 Rebalancing for Profitability
Chris Elliott, Restaurants Canada's Chief Economist and Vice-President, Research shares his thoughts on Foodservice Facts 2023 and speculates (slightly) about where the industry could be headed

THE COLUMN

16 Chef Tawnya Brant on Canadian Food & Entrepreneurship

THE MAIN

22 Taste, Tradition & Transformation
The tradition of Canadian food writing with Karen Baxter of Taste Canada

31 A perspective on gratitude and food injustice for every Canadian from the extraordinary Chef Raquel Fox

40 A Simmering Legacy: Food Day Canada Comes of Age and Steps into the Spotlight
with Chef Jeff Stewart











YOUR STORIES

26 From Refugee to Pizzapreneur:
The story of restaurateur Paul Pham, as told to his daughter Anna by Anna Pham

38 "Serve a good person a good oyster, and you'll have them for life."
A conversation with Rodney Clark by Anna Pham

BEHIND THE BAR

44 Canadian Spirit: The People Behind the Best Beverage Experiences
by Chris Szego

49 On Tap & On the Map: Growing Partnerships and Margins with Canadian Beer

SPOTLIGHT: SUSTAINABILITY

52 The Future is Round: Building a Circular Foodservice Economy
by Chris Szego

60 The Federal Single-Use Plastics Ban: What You Need to Know

62 Big Little Ideas: For Earls, sustainability is all about the journey

68 We are what (and where) we eat.
Perspectives on animal welfare for foodservice

FRESH

80 Debt Management Tips for Restaurants
by David Hopkins, President, The Fifteen Group

86 Perfect Holiday or Perfect Storm? Recognizing and Managing Seasonal Stress for Foodservice

PARTNER CONTENT

34 Celebrating Local Agriculture & Restaurants in Ontario
Foodland Ontario

42 Molson Brewing Company: Canada's Pioneering Brewer & Modern Beverage Innovator
Molson Coors Beverage Company

58 Robert Spencer Hospitality: Engineering Circularity & Resilience Into Farm-to-Table Operations
Groupex Canada

78 Restaurants Canada Member Exclusive:
Notch

84 Turning Passion Into Profit: Chef Dacyion Reid
Interac

MARKETPLACE

88 **Nestlé Professional** introduces their latest innovation: **MINOR'S® General Tso's and Bourbon Style Ready-to-Use Sauces**, **Bertani** invites you to discover their **premium and quality Italian territorial wines**, **Chemsyn** is the only partner you need for **foodservice cleaning and sanitizing solutions**, and Canada's first merchant financing company **Advantex Capital** aligns their business with your needs to **create a clear path to success**.

THE PASS



MENU UNPLUGGED PODCAST

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If you're not following Restaurants Canada's new podcast MENU Unplugged, hosted by Jay Ashton, you're missing out! Tune in for our first episode, where we welcome our very own President & CEO, Kelly Higginson. Follow us for electrifying discussions with industry leaders and disruptors, and analysis of the hottest foodservice trends and opportunities reshaping the future of our industry.

Available on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts

MENU magazine was onsite September 14-17 for the Prince Edward Island International Shellfish Festival in Charlottetown to see Water Prince Corner Shop take home the Restaurants Canada 2023 Shellfish Excellence Award and Chef Michael Hauschild (Ottawa, ON) and Chef Marc Lepine (Ottawa, ON) earn first and second place in the Garland International Chef Challenge. Plans are already underway for next year's festival, September 19-22, 2024!

Learn more at: peishellfish.com

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TERROIR SYMPOSIUM

A Restaurants Canada delegation had the opportunity to attend this year's Terroir Symposium September 30-October 3 in Calgary, Alberta. This year's theme was "Transformation", representing the restaurant, tourism and hospitality industry as it undergoes a period of seismic change. Sign up for their newsletter to make plans to attend next year's symposium!

Learn more at: terroirsymposium.com

TASTE CANADA AWARDS · LES LAURÉATS DES SAVEURS DU CANADA

The 26th annual Taste Canada Awards Soirée took place on Monday, October 30th, honouring the best and brightest Canadian cookbook writers. Read more about Taste Canada on page 22 in this issue of MENU.

Learn more at: tastecanada.org

host Milano INTERNATIONAL HOSPITALITY EXHIBITION

Restaurants Canada was in Milan, Italy for HostMilano October 13-17. As the world exhibition dedicated to the catering and hospitality sector, HostMilano is an ideal opportunity for Restaurants Canada to deliver on its strategic partnership and commitment to foster the international sector and relationships. The RC team was delighted to have the opportunity to introduce its delegation of Canadian F&B companies and buyers to the global community.

Learn more at: host.fieramilano.it/en

La Tablée des Chefs

La Grande Tablée, the flagship event by La Tablée des Chefs, gathers brigades of renowned chefs in Toronto (November 6th), Quebec City (November 13th), and Montreal (November 20th) to create a one-night only menu in support of the organization's mission to reduce food insecurity and educate youth to develop their food autonomy.

Learn more and get your tickets at: www.tableedeschefs.org/en

RESTAURANTS CANADA ON DEMAND: WEBINARS

Available to watch now:

Foodservice Facts 2023: Rebalancing for Growth
Presented by AMEX, with Restaurants Canada's Chief Economist and Vice-President of Research, Chris Elliott

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REBALANCING FOR PROFITABILITY



MENU in conversation with Chris Elliott, Restaurants Canada's Chief Economist and Vice-President, Research

Each year, we meet with Chris Elliott to explore the nuances behind his trusted annual industry forecast, Foodservice Facts. This is our chance to probe a little and allow Chris to speculate (as much as he's willing to indulge his muse) about the bigger story behind the data and where he believes the industry is going and to explore opportunities in the white spaces of the report.



MM Foodservice Facts is a months-long project. As you prepare to launch this year's edition, we're curious about how the process felt compared with last year's "Stranger Things" theme.

Chris Elliott: *I think what concerned me most in this year's process was how to present the information. Stranger Things was a cool concept that really expressed last year's theme and I was comfortable with it. This year's report is similar in its prognosis, but I didn't want to rehash the theme or tell people what they already know and feel. They're suffering out there. I think they're looking for answers.*

Originally, there was a frustration and anger from the pandemic and being shut down, but now it's just sheer exhaustion, and a lot of people in the industry are worried about their retirement and how they're going to pay back their debt. Restaurants Canada can work on those things on the policy side, but it's tough for operators to know what to do right now.

I came across one article from a café operator in Niagara Falls. They should have been well-situated as a quick service restaurant, but because people have not come back to work and the tourists haven't come back, their business didn't work out. And this is a business that pivoted to catering, they did all the right things, and they even won an award. Yet, even with all they had done, they still went under and closed. So, it's become a bit of a challenge in terms of what do you tell operators when they've done everything right?

I've been trying to rely on some of the CEOs in the U.S. to try and understand their success stories and how they're approaching the new era. We know the industry is rebalancing, but we're not yet sure of the direction. This year's Foodservice Facts provides that context.

MM What are the big takeaways from the report? What's the outlook for the "return to normal"?

We keep thinking that the worst is over and that things are going to rebound and get better, and in some ways, they have. We've seen an improvement in the supply chains





and so far in 2023, labour markets are much better. The job vacancies peaked in 2022 and are starting to come down.

But in 2023, pricing is probably the biggest challenge facing operators on the consumer side and certainly on the debt side. It continues to be a major hurdle for them.

On a positive side is the robust consumer spending, especially in the first quarter, which is what has forced the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates so aggressively. That has definitely been a positive thing; however, it has not translated into a strong bottom line.

While a surprising number of people weathered the financial chaos of the pandemic better than projected, it seems that inflation, housing scarcity and precarity and the interest rate increases are poised to affect far more people. Do you think we're heading into a delayed correction on consumer spending?

Certainly, and that's what we're forecasting. Even though we are seeing a pullback in overall total consumer spending, the Q2 foodservice sales numbers are up 11 per cent, compared to Q2 2022. Even when you factor out inflation at six per cent, and you factor out population growth at three per cent, real per capita sales are still up two per cent over last year. And this growth is despite the pent-up demand and people returning to restaurants that fueled growth last year — we still grew beyond even those numbers this year. It boggles the mind, but it's not sustainable in the long term. There must be a moderation on spending.

During the pandemic, there was $300 billion in pent-up savings. There's still $140 billion of that accumulated savings left over, and then you have wages going up as well. That said, about 70 per cent of Canadians said they aren't going out to full-service restaurants as much because it's getting more expensive to eat out. That's not entirely about restaurants. It's the extra pressure of their rising rent and rising grocery prices.

I think that as we head into the back half of 2023 and early 2024, people are going to start looking at their bank accounts and asking, "Where can I cut back?"



There's a general understanding that prices on everything have risen and that restaurants have been through a lot, and they have to pass on some of these costs in order to survive.

MM Sales numbers suggest a healthy return to business, yet more than half of restaurants are breaking even or losing money. Do you think the anomaly might be based on restaurants absorbing an unsustainable percentage of inflation and cost increases on ingredients, rent, labour, etc.? Could they reflect operators' efforts to keep customer traffic by keeping prices artificially low (however high they may seem to diners)?

That's a fair assessment. Retail grocery price inflation is about 11 per cent and restaurant price increases total about seven per cent. There's a gap there and the fear is that if restaurants raise prices too much, people may just stop going out entirely. I think we're reaching that tipping point already.

Surveys are all saying that people are not going to go out as much because it's getting too expensive, but then they continue to go out. There's a real disparity between what should happen and what is happening. As long as job markets remain strong and wages continue to climb, people will complain about prices and maybe curb the frequency of restaurant visits, but they'll still go out. We've seen this before and what happens is that once we start to see the slowdown and its impact on employment, we'll see the real effect on restaurants.

MM How would you summarize the narrative of this year's *Foodservice Facts*? What does all this mean?

The way I would sum it up is to say that even after three tumultuous years, these waters remain very unsettled due to the changing tide of consumer behaviours that came out of the pandemic. You also have these imbalances in the labour market that led to labour shortages and rising wages all compounded by imbalances in the global economy. The restaurant industry is still just trying to catch up to those changes and trying to find those calm waters.

On the one hand, we're getting closer to closing the gap between these new consumer behaviours and economic factors while trying to get to where the industry needs to be on the other. It's something that will take time to rebalance.

In March 2020, everything changed overnight and was just shut down. We went from working at our offices to working from home. The restaurants can't just pick up from the downtown core and move to the suburbs. These changes happen slowly. Full-service restaurants had to move to takeout and delivery and since then many of them have become quite good at that. While some changes happen quickly on the consumer side, it's taking operators a little bit more time to catch up to those changes, respond and begin to understand where the industry needs to be and where it's going next. These imbalances make that process more challenging.

The way I would sum it up is to say that even after three tumultuous years, these waters remain very unsettled due to the changing tide of consumer behaviours that came out of the pandemic. You also have these imbalances in the labour market that led to labour shortages and rising wages all compounded by imbalances in the global economy. The restaurant industry is still just trying to catch up to those changes and trying to find those calm waters.

MM Are we starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel?

I think we're starting to see the horizon.

One of the big disruptors has been remote work. Part of the Angus Reid survey we did for Foodservice Facts sought to measure the percentage of workers still working remotely. It hasn't really changed much from where it was this time last year. We also asked, "Looking ahead 12 months, do you think you're still going to be working remotely?"



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The vast majority of respondents said they will. It doesn't look like people going back to their regular work habits and schedules is going to happen.

If that component is here to stay, it's a radical, long-term change to how people are consuming their meals. Thursday may have become the new Friday in terms of meeting at the office and going out for dinner and drinks afterwards, but people are not having breakfast and lunch out as much. The off-premise delivery model is a permanent change as well.

I think we'll see more restaurants permanently focusing on the off-premise and embracing drive-through service. Chick-fil-A has been the newest to announce an elevated restaurant design with multiple drive-throughs on the main level and a smaller dining room on the second level. Some of these changes that seemed temporary in the pandemic fog are now looking like the future for many.

MM So, across the industry as a whole, you don't see these shifts as temporary adjustments, you're seeing the greatest opportunity in a full reformatting and re-platforming?

Yes. While we were working on the Report, I was walking down University Avenue in Toronto and I saw a new Chipotle. It would have been very easy to miss because it was so small. I took a peek inside and it didn't look like it had more than 10 or 12 seats. The one in Dundas Square easily seats 50 or 60 people. The new format had a pickup window at the front as well. It really seemed to be the right-sized model for the future: smaller footprint, smaller seating area and pickup window.

I think we'll see more restaurants permanently focusing on the off-premise and embracing drive-through service... Some of these changes that seemed temporary in the pandemic fog are now looking like the future for many.



In our Outlook Survey I asked restaurant operators, "If you could reduce the total footprint and on-premise portion of your business, would you?" 24 per cent of operators said they would. The number jumped for those that had 200 seats or more, with 43 per cent saying they wished they had fewer seats. So, they're looking for about a 30 per cent reduction.

This is really changing that landscape in terms of how much of the business is now permanently shifted off premise.

MM So, if you opened a restaurant tomorrow, what would it look like?

The digital component of restaurants is going to be driven by delivery, so I think, regardless of concept, the ultimate necessity would be a drive-through. Fast casual restaurants are already getting seriously into drive-through, and we're starting to hear rumblings in the U.S. that casual dining restaurants are following suit. People want food when and where they are.

MM You're describing a radical change from the way we historically value restaurants as consumers. It's not so much about community and emotional connections, it's moving toward a mobile, on-the-go need state: "I'm hungry here and now. Where's my food?" Is the future focused mainly on convenience and price?

Exactly. There's always going to be a space for places like steak houses and finer dining that caters to special occasions, but in this different world we find ourselves in, it's more about the speed of service and the convenience overall.

We're using restaurants differently, but by no means does it follow that restaurants cannot build connections with their guests, even if it's often a virtual one. That loss of human connection can be challenging; however, at the same time you can learn more about your guests digitally, offering that great service and building that crucial loyalty in the long term.

MM Will loyalty programs become a more widespread component of that digital connection?

I believe that quality, experience and price will always be key, but loyalty development is the next layer operators should be looking at. You start with your core items and build your brand around the quality of those and then you add the items that will elevate your menu, but the big difference is how you can measure that. As a data guy, I think that's key.

Your core menu must connect with the consumer. You review those items and make sure they score as high as possible on price and speed, and then you can innovate on the items designed to build loyalty. You want to be providing incentives to reward your loyal



customers and introduce the brand to potential new customers.

Incentives can also encourage customers to explore your menu. As a restaurant patron I tend to go toward the same menu items over and over again, but if there's a special on or a new item I've never tried before, this could get me to branch out.

There are a lot of opportunities out there, but I think the best loyalty programs are the ones that reflect the best parts of the brand. They communicate in the right way, at the right frequency, with the right message.

MM Are there additional opportunities for full-service restaurants to learn from aspects of other segments or models?

QSRs are all about value, speed of service and convenience, but very much focused on the off-premise. Full-service, of course, is firmly entrenched in the on-premise and that is not changing. It still dominates and it's coming back, though not completely the way it was before. The differentiating point is the quality of the food, but the emphasis still must be on that service and that experience.

When we look at spend on a per capita basis, spending at full-service versus quick service restaurants is not much different — people still want to go out and connect with friends and family. That's where the FSRs will always play a crucial role. I think the really big point of differentiation is that full-service restaurants have truly endured a nightmare during the last few years because of the lockdowns. They're more likely to have incurred significant debt and to still be struggling under its weight relative to the QSR segment.

During the pandemic, many FSRs embraced not only delivery, but catering and we're also seeing opportunity in group buying from office spaces. I think that taking advantage of workers' return to office spaces for catering or group lunch plans is a big opportunity for operators. There could be a rewards or incentive program built into these lunch services, like if you spend more than $200, you get a free cake or similar. Group pre-orders introduce efficiencies and predictability into the model, which are badly needed.

Virtual kitchens are also still a promising concept. I heard about a pizza restaurant in the U.S. that sold salads. Typically, pizza restaurants wouldn't be known for their salads, but this restaurant knew that they had great salads, so they made the salads the centrepiece of their virtual kitchen. They still had everything else on their virtual menu, but they spun their virtual concept around the salad and were very successful. The fact they built a successful, co-efficient sub brand around the salad portion of their business shows that there are menu optimizing formats and possibilities that can work well for FSRs and reach new audiences.

MM You've identified some interesting potential growth areas for restaurants — limited time offers, greater app and/or digital menu integrations to introduce customization and earn customer data, and the further development of off-premise side of the business. Are there operational efficiencies?

The report outlines that a restaurant needs almost 13 employees to generate a million dollars in sales. Grocery stores need just four employees to generate the same sales revenue. We have as much of a labour productivity problem as we do a labour shortage problem. As an economist, I've been preaching this for years. The solution lies partly in new technologies, but we're also labour intensive.

At one point, there were about 200,000 job vacancies in the Canadian foodservice industry—we accounted for one out of every five job vacancies in the country. That's an astonishing number. The only way we could try and bring people into the industry was to start raising wages. Restaurants had to raise them above and beyond what they could afford, which shows how desperate operators were for staff. When we look at job vacancy rates for restaurants against retail, restaurants have twice the job vacancies retail has, but we pay roughly the same. In fact, if you include servers, they often make more than retail staff. It has been about trying to get people to come back to the industry by offering wage increases, benefits, flexible hours and other incentives needed to bring that labour pool back.

So, there is opportunity in streamlining operations and finding additional ways to improve efficiency that work for your customer as well as the business. If you can make things easier for your staff and speed up the line, this will improve employee retention and morale while helping your customer.

Some of this could be about automation, but overall, it's about removing the obstacles. The answer doesn't necessarily rely on "robots", and there will always be a portion of customers who are resistant to certain technologies. Even if that's only two or three per cent, that could make or break your business if they choose not to visit.

It's about balancing and trying to introduce technologies that work for your business, but that still allow you to maintain the ethos of your restaurant concept and experience.

The restaurant experience, the menu and the vibe all work together and connect with customers on an emotional level, and that emotional connection has always been such an important element of the value of restaurants. Certain restaurants become repositories of guest memories of special moments like birthdays, proposals and celebrations, with some customers feeling invested in the business. How should restaurants manage needed adaptation when customers may wish things would stay the way they've always been?

I think it needs to be done, but slowly. Coming out of the pandemic, consumer expectations are extremely high. Restaurants still play an important role in solving a lot of needs and difficulties in people's lives. Asking how we can make people's lives easier and respond to need is an important part of the equation.
The nostalgia aspect of it is important but we're ultimately looked to as "problem-solvers" for consumers. The answer is most likely to be found by asking how we can solve a problem for the people in our community.
That's really the lens, because if we're not solving any problems, why would people go to your restaurant when there are so many others? I need quality food at the right price point. If that food has to be delivered, the delivery must arrive complete, accurate and at the right temperature.

During these times, restaurants are mainly being asked to respond to people's challenges and problems. People are stressed and overworked. They're feeling budgetary issues. So, the contract has to be: you give up a bit of your money, but in exchange, we're solving something for you. We're going to make your day a little better and a little smoother. We're going to give you a better memory. There's a solution restaurant operators can provide and that comes through in the quality of the food and the experience.

There's no mathematical solution for the times we're in. We need to understand that our customer has changed. They are more demanding, and they are not going to visit your restaurant as often as before. They're not coming for dinner on Monday after work because they work from home. We have to meet them where they are.

People don't always care about our problems; they care about how we can solve their problems. So, if you solve a problem, people will need you.

So, in your opinion, what model or business approach looks best positioned and prepared for the times ahead?

I don't care whether you're a full-service or a quick-service restaurant. It's all about convenience.

We are living in an Amazon world fuelled by convenience and demand. The divisions between different restaurant formats and segments are blending and there's less and less distinction between full-service, fast casual and quick-service.

The restaurants that respond to the spectrum of consumer needs and lifestyles and learn to deliver convenience efficiently will win the day.





The 2023 Foodservice Facts report is here!

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FIERA MILANO

Chef Tawnya Brant on Canadian Food & Entrepreneurship

Chef Tawnya Brant is a Canadian culinary rising star, an entrepreneur, a devoted mom and the plainspoken, straight-up cool sister you always wished you had. Even as she balances motherhood, Yawékon, her Haudenosaunee fusion restaurant in Ontario's Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, and a hectic travel shooting and post-production schedule for her upcoming series on Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), she finds time to chat about life, love and a few of the most important topics on her radar: restaurants, kids' nutrition and Canadian food.



Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Hoover

MM Watching from the sidelines, it would seem your life and career have expanded significantly over the past couple of years. What's been going on?

We're putting the finishing touches on the first season of a new series for APTN, tentatively titled One Dish One Spoon, which is scheduled to launch in early 2024. I'm the host, and it's based around Six Nations featuring local people doing food sovereignty work who don't necessarily get the recognition they deserve. We called it that specifically because the The Dish with One Spoon Wampum belt, which is the area where we live in southern Ontario. The network was thinking of changing the name for the second season because of how much the series direction has changed, but we'll see.

In season one, my sister and I set out to answer the question: "Why should I care about Indigenous issues?" There's a disconnect between everyday Canadians and Indigenous people and we are trying to bridge the gap. I want everyday Canadians to know they were thought of in the making of this type of series, and that we know things are never going to go back to the way they were—we never even said we wanted them to. We have the world we're in, and we have to live with each other. We're at a time now where we have to work together. We don't have a choice because we're in too desperate a state. More desperate than I think most people realize. This is a big part of why Canadians should care about First Nations and Indigenous issues.

We need to connect and repair our food systems. We need to look at genetically modified foods and realize our environment is not going to sustain their growth. Are we going to live a life where all food is grown inside warehouses? If food doesn't grow in sunshine, everything about it is fake, which leads to fake people, right? Our foods are breaking down our bodies. Indigenous people LOVE to say, "food is medicine" but right now it's not. If up to 75 per cent of cancer and disease is related to what we put in our mouth every day, that's a staggering statistic. Our food is making us sick, so how do we fix that?

I've noticed that the "carrot sticks kids" are becoming more the norm. When I work with youth, I see that they're becoming more aware of what they're putting in their bodies. Sure, kids love candy, but once they become teenagers and maybe start to play a sport, they're really starting to think about what they're eating. I can't wait to see what they're like when they get to my age. It's all connected, from food to mental health in the foodservice industry. Now the general public seems to be having this "aha moment" and they're realizing the advocates for clean eating are right.

We can't afford to make mistakes at this point. Food's too expensive, choosing where we're going to dine is expensive... I had sticker shock just going to buy food for my kids' lunches

the day before school started. I spent about $160 just on lunch ingredients. If families are spending that kind of money on lunches, that's a problem and the province needs to look at lunch programs because the nutritional quality just won't be there.

MM What are your plans with Yawékon?

I haven't reopened Yawékon yet, and I'm considering doing a school lunch program. People just can't afford it and, in terms of affordability, going out to a restaurant is more and more like it was when my mom was a kid—a luxury. Any person in my mom's generation can tell you the very first time they went to a restaurant, and what they ate. It's a memory embedded in their mind.

Now, kids don't want to go anywhere because they're sick of it. They've had the chicken nuggets. It's all the same damn menu. Many kids just don't have diversity in their diet. That's one of the things that really scares me. The province should really look at school lunch programs, and if people have to pay for a lunch program, that's fine.

Canada is so multicultural, and kids have such different palates. But kids are also adventurous, and if you put them in a room to eat together, they're more likely to try new things. We need to bring back the community in food and food security. The reality out there right now is shocking. I follow several mom groups on Facebook and an alarming number of moms are saying, "If there's not enough for the kids, I just won't eat today." They'll eat a cookie or their kid's leftover lunch. This is what I'm starting to see, and these are everyday, Canadians who don't have supports for food.

The minute you don't have food, you introduce corruption into your society. I think we're looking down the barrel at that, and people either seem to be okay with it or maybe they just don't know what to do.

MM When it comes to our food system in general, what do you want to see change?

I want to see everyone fed and fed well. In Canada, this is possible, but we're not doing it in the right way. We're doing it in the most expensive way possible, and even as restaurant owners we're being forced to raise our prices all the time.

If you want your business to be here tomorrow, you have to turn a profit, but how much can customers take? We're seeing that tension with restaurants closing every day. We're being priced out of the market, from ingredients to takeout packaging. There's so much that needs to change from the way we're doing things now.

They tell us, "Oh, you're not allowed to use certain takeout containers anymore." Like it's no big deal. You just shifted how half of Canadians eat dinner. It's just not that simple. In Europe or Indonesia, packaging is minimal and recyclable, but we don't even fully understand the concept or how it's done. In developing countries, food is served on a piece of paper or you stand there and eat it at a street food booth and return the plate. That's where this is going, which will mean new challenges for the next generation of restaurants and chefs. I'm not sure they're thinking that way yet or starting to think about training for that shift.

MM You've travelled extensively and have been exposed to many food systems. What aspects of the Canadian system do you feel are unique and valuable?

We have fresh foods and nearly everything we want available in grocery stores every day. I'm not sure how many people know what a luxury that is. There are a lot of places where that isn't the case, including some areas in this country. We've ridden high for so long, but we're seeing the repercussions now. Nutrition, delivery and selection are there for us, but we need to work together to preserve and protect that. Nobody wants to change anything—we like things the way they are—they're fine, right? The question is really whether we're going to be forced to change it, and do we have time. We're all stressed out, worried about bills and life and it's hard to bleed for every cause. But, if everyone took action on one issue or interest that is important to them, we'd be in a much better state right now.

The pandemic was a good preview of what I'm talking about. We had supply shortages and every time you went to the grocery store, food cost more than the week before. Things that were $1.00 went up to $2.00 during the pandemic. Those same items are $4.00 now.

MM What role do you feel restaurants and culinarians can play in this economy?

You can't eat at a restaurant every day, but you can connect people with chefs. If you look at TikTok, the obsession with food is obvious, but are you going to make them? Probably not.

I think there's role chefs can play online to connect with kids and encourage them to appreciate food, try new things and help bring back the simplicity of food. We've spent so much time on making food unique, different and new, but we should be asking how we get back to eating what we need. That doesn't always have to be simple, but it can be simple. Food is for everybody.

> "We've spent so much time on making food unique... but we should be asking how we get back to eating what we need."

MM How would you define Canadian cuisine?

I don't know that we have a cuisine so much as we have regional foods. Those regional foods are typically developed from the ethnicity of the people who first arrived in the area. If you go up north, there are a lot of Hungarians so you're going to see cabbage rolls and shepherd's pies and familiar family foods. In Atlantic Canada, there's a ridiculous amount of poutine and the west coast it's everything salmon. It's like adding Europe and the Middle East together and asking, "What is your cuisine?"

We're finally at a place and time where people are considering Indigenous cuisine within the mix. Over 70 per cent of the food eaten in the world today was originally harvested by Indigenous people from North and South America, which means a lot of the foods we're eating around the world are Indigenous. Within 60 years of its discovery, corn became one of China's largest exports. Indigenous people have never really been credited as stewards of these foods since time immemorial, because we were "just savages", stupid little Indians running around in the trees who didn't know anything. The reality is, the Haudenosaunee gave the world democracy. We thought about the environment, we thought about each other, we thought about creation, we thought about the future—all of these things were considered. We also had caches with 10 years of food. Most people can't survive three days. What the hell are we working on so hard?

MM What aspects of food, and even the approach to food, can restaurateurs and consumers learn from the Indigenous community?

To start, Indigenous people still remember what it's like to be poor. White people were the first to be colonized, and we're the most recent over the scheme of about 700 years. I would challenge restaurants to take french fries off their kids' menu and show me something that's not a chicken nugget, pizza, spaghetti or macaroni and cheese. That's about 95 per cent of children's menus in this country. When you ask kids where they want to eat, they really don't care because it's going to be the same damn menu wherever they go. Our kids deserve better than that, and they need better than that. It's a quick solve for restaurants because they need cheaper food, but we're so much better than that. You can get stuck in that grind and lose your passion for food—that's common in the industry. Having my own restaurant, I didn't want to get stuck in that, and that turned into a seasonal, daily menu, but that's not reality for many businesses.

Sometimes we are okay with being complacent in the restaurant industry. We start to stick to what we know works because we can't afford to stick our necks out. Profit margins are paper-thin, if they're even there at all. Everybody wants to be paid more, and they need more to live, so we charge more. There are so many things to worry about, we aren't worried about our $4 menu item. It's such a rat race in the industry right now.

Being a chef or an operator is a passion, but we're all suckers for punishment too. There aren't any clear answers right now, but I feel we're just not at the "answers part" yet. We're still in the discussion phase. We're identifying the problems and thinking about where we're going. There has to be some way forward. I'd love to see incubators where chefs and owners can share information and ideas. Where we can look for ways to be better and still meet the needs of our customers.

> "Seasonal is beautiful and I think it's worth serving and that it's worth that struggle and fight to have it."

When Yawékon first opened, we served only Indigenous foods, but that wasn't sustainable. I knew it wasn't. Almost every customer comes in with some dietary restrictions. It seems like the world is moving toward gluten-or yeast-free diets, but those are our least expensive fillers. We have to get out of the state of being "mindless eaters" and being more deliberate and thoughtful of others.

On Six Nations, we're taught to live communally. We live in villages of hundreds and thousands of people. You're thought to think of yourself last. You think of your family, your clan, your nation, your community and only then do you think of yourself. One thing you'll see with Indigenous business, one of the first things they think about when they open is who they're going to donate money to. I listen as a business owner and I think the reality is that you're going to be donating to your business. Young entrepreneurs should look at charity five years down the road.

*It's been a lot of change for me. I'm an entrepreneur and I love business. I love talking about businesses and seeing them grow and improve. For years, my job was to go into restaurants and fix problems. It really sucked when I opened my own restaurant and I couldn't fix a lot of my own problems. I couldn't find enough people in my community who were passionate about our food. It's important to me that this food knowledge goes back into my community first, because it needs to. Working with "endangered foods" isn't easy because you don't know what you're going to have day to day. Seasonal is beautiful and I still think it's worth serving and that it's worth that struggle and fight to have it. Knowing now how many people relied on our food made it a really hard decision to close down for the summer. I had to think about it, talk to everyone and their grandmother about it and cry about it, but it was knowing how many elderly people are served by our shop and the only other option they had in our community because they're gluten-free is french fries. That was the only other option they had in our community. I felt like sh*t, but the reality is I have a career outside of that shop. I thought, at two and a half years in it could run on its own, but that's not what happened. It's really hard in a community where you can sit in another shop an get paid $20 an hour; where you can work on your bead work or do whatever you want. It's a real challenge to find people who want to work that hard. Many of us in this industry are suckers for punishment.*

I make my money catering and that's what's been keeping the ship afloat. I don't like doing things that don't make money, right? I volunteer enough of my time, so if it's not working, it's not working. Breaking even doesn't work for me. If everything I'm doing is supported by just one thing, then that's where I need to focus my time and effort.

I want my community to have a daily option, but does that mean I go to other restaurants and ask if they'd do a different menu? We're in the realm of "I don't know," and the answers are going to be different for everybody. I think chefs and business owners have been feeling

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that way for a few years now and they're just happy if their doors are still open, and if they're turning a profit, even better. Just look at the lengths people are going to to "be different." Like square croissants... I admit it, I want to see a square croissant, but is that something I'm going to have every day? Probably not.

When you opened, did you set out to make Yawékon different? What lessons have you learned along the way?

The difference between my restaurant and every other Indigenous restaurant you see is that mine's the only one on Territory. I'm feeding the community and the people; the ladies who want salads at the Band Office every day. I'm not feeding people who are looking for some kind of Fear Factor experience. I'm balancing the familiar routines of everyday lunch with people who want traditional foods for their health and the tourists who want to try Indigenous foods. Other Indigenous restaurants are located in big cities, inside museums or other tourism-based places. That's what makes Yawékon different. We're a small, shoebox of a shop with no stability in the foods I have access to. With all the challenges in this industry, my business shouldn't exist, but it does. It's because I'm willing to take on that personal challenge, but I've learned a lot. And "location, location, location" is definitely a thing. It's part of Yawékon's success. We're located in a main plaza in the middle of Ohsweken in the midst of about 900 people working Band Council jobs. Being centralized in a local area like that is huge, and my business style wouldn't work anywhere else without my specific skillset.

I want to reopen, but not necessarily in the same capacity as before. I know now that if I have to work with unskilled workers, I have to make stations and train on those stations to manage turnover. That's heartbreaking for me, because I wanted to mentor people and other Indigenous chefs. When I started to talk about opening Yawékon, I got all these emails from people wanting to train, and I was worried because I can only have three in the kitchen or we'd be banging into each other. I didn't get a single message back from those people when I actually did open. They lived in communities across Canada and would have had to move hours and hours away, mostly for the love of it, as we couldn't pay a lot.



Photo courtesy of Denneil Annette

At the end of the day, if I can find a way to remain a sole proprietor, I'm going to do that.

What do you think lies ahead on your journey?

I've been in writer's meetings all week for the second season on APTN, which has landed in the "docusoap" category—kind of like a reality series—because it focuses more on me and my sister, family and friends. It's focused on my entrepreneurship journey and we're shooting that now.

I've had hospitals ask me about doing Indigenous cuisine for patients and I would really like to do that. To me, one hospital can open the floodgates to every hospital in the country. If they're offering halal and kosher, why aren't they offering Indigenous foods? It's on their minds, and if they're approaching me, I want to see if we can do that. I'm looking at larger facilities and impacts. There's no reason we can't figure out how to serve hospitals and schools. Even if they're pre-packaged meals they just need to stick in a convection oven and serve, I think it's worth looking into.

The truth is, I was never that interested in high-end food, so the fact I did Top Chef Canada is kind of amazing. They asked me for about two years and I kept saying no because I didn't want to leave my kids for the month of shooting. The next time the opportunity came around, my shop had been open for six or seven months and it was more like, "Please take me—I'm ready to go away for a little while."

How does your family feel about participating in the second season of the APTN show?

I think I've eased them into it enough so that they're like, "Okay—just let me know if I need to do anything." My dad just wants to know if he needs to clean the yard. As long as everybody knows what's going on they're generally pretty cool with it. My fiancee's super supportive, and without him I wouldn't be able to do what I do and raise our boys. He's the reason I'm able to have a career and have a family.

When the shop's open it works out perfectly, but right now it's a little chaotic. We've been travelling a lot and just got back from upstate New York. We did a trip to the Mohawk Valley

to see my paternal and maternal ancestral villages. It was great to be able to take the boys.

There's a Chef Expo in Minneapolis, Minnesota for the Native American Health Conference for about 700 people. They have 14 Indigenous chefs from all over—Hawaii, New Zealand—it's a big scope. I'm excited to go and see some friends.

MM What do you think the future holds for the restaurant industry? What insights can you share with other chefs and foodservice entrepreneurs?

*The reality is creeping up on us that sh*t's going to change whether we like it or not. By the time my kids are my age, food's not going to look like it does now. Already, kids' lunches don't look like they did when I was a child.*

*People look at me and say, "Oh, I want to be an Indigenous chef." They have no idea the hell I've been through to do what I do. Most people don't have a mom who's a Seed Keeper, who's going to raise them on ancestral foods—who are going to put the work in. It took me 20 years to find the self-confidence to say that I'm a chef out loud. That comes from getting respect from the industry. I questioned myself, yet others graduate from culinary school and have no problem owning that title. Well, if they are, for f**k sakes I am too. You can call me "Chef Tawnya".*

Those things are there and they're real. I don't like to sugar coat it. You might get a couple of newspaper or online articles, but what are you really doing? There's a reason you work in a bunch of restaurants before you open your own. You want to see every problem from every angle and learn how you can fix it or even identify it before it happens... or before you're bankrupt. There's a lot to keep track of and it can take you down from behind. You need to be a bit of a sucker for punishment, like to work really hard in 100-degree weather, sweating, lifting 50-pound boxes, knowing that you're not going to be able to do this in old age—these are the realities of the industry. If you don't know anything and aren't contributing to the future of the industry, you have a rough road ahead of you.

*But at the same time, it's so much fun. And if you love it, you f**king love it.*

Yawékon
chef Tawnya Brant

@cheftawnyabrant
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TASTE, TRADITION, & TRANSFORMATION



In the world of gastronomy, cookbooks are more than just recipe repositories, they serve as historical records documenting cultural shifts, culinary traditions and the ever-evolving flavours of a generation. A glimpse into a cookbook from the 1950s gives you a snapshot of that era, from flavours and cooking techniques to ingredients' availability to what was considered worthy of serving to guests and family. Cookbooks are time capsules of culinary heritage, and in Canada, they are as diverse as the nation itself. Each year, the Taste Canada Awards represent the best of Canadian cookbooks, inspiring readers to discover delicious recipes, diverse food stories while subtly documenting shifts in Canadian food culture.

In 2022, the love affair with cookbooks continued in North America, reflecting an unwavering enthusiasm for culinary exploration. According to BookNet Canada, nearly 1.3 million cookbooks were sold in Canada in 2021, highlighting the enduring appeal of culinary literature and a pandemic inspired renewed interest in home cooking. Canadians purchased more than $45 million in cookbooks, but only 23 per cent of those were attributed to a Canadian contributor. Taste Canada is working to change that.

"There so many exceptional cookbooks written by Canadians that people aren't aware of. We've partnered with Indigo to include the Taste Canada Awards shortlisted titles within their on-line catalogues, and in the hopes of seeing more books with their shortlisted, gold and silver seals placed on their covers," says Karen Baxter, Taste Canada's executive director. "We've found that once people know the cookbooks are written by Canadians, they're more willing to purchase them over others. We're a proud nation and we like supporting our own."

When asked about the changes she has seen in the cookbooks submitted, Baxter pauses. "Cookbooks are not stagnant – they tell stories about food and culture. They tell readers about different flavours, document moments and also new identities that are finding roots in Canada," states Baxter. "There are also new ways of cooking, like instant pots and air fryers that we have been seeing, as well as more cookbooks focused on health, wellness and specific diets. We also see evolutions and trends. For example, one of our shortlisted cookbooks this year is *Butter & Flower* which has cannabis-infused recipes," mentions Baxter. As well, the other four shortlisted cookbooks in the Health or Special Diet category are based on plant-based recipes, signalling a shift in consumer interests and at-home cooking preferences. These changes are how unknowingly, cookbooks start to become historical documents. Through the pages there are changes in consumer eating habits and cooking methods.

Shifts in supply chain or home cooking are noticeable based on ingredients that were once challenging to find that are now available in the local grocery store. Pressure cookers and air fryer recipes now sit side-by-side with traditional recipes. But like many family recipes, the stories are what connects the cook to the recipe. "The canvas is constantly being populated with passionate voices," states Baxter. "There are amazing authors that are putting out work that isn't a traditional cookbook. It's a narrative that connects the food to the stories, sometimes, their own personal journey."

One example Baxter cites is *Out of Old Ontario Kitchens* by Lindy Mechefske, a 2019



Taste Canada Gold Prize winner. A journey into the heart of Ontario's culinary history, the cookbook offers a window into the past with recipes, pictures and profiles of people who contributed to the province's culinary history. Rich with photographs and illustrations, Out of Old Ontario Kitchens delves into the culinary traditions of Ontario, from Indigenous foods to the influences of various immigrant books. It explores how ingredients and cooking methods have evolved over time. Mechefske's research into traditional recipes and cooking utensils allows readers to connect with the past through the food people once prepared in these kitchens.

Weaving in recipes with storytelling is makes the culinary narratives category of the Taste Canada Awards Shortlist so compelling. One of this year's shortlisted books is a memoir by Margot Fedoruk, *Cooking Tips for Desperate Fishwives*. Fedoruk shares her story from leaving her childhood home and falling in love to and settling and surviving on Gabriola Island. The book is infused with recipes from Fedoruk's childhood to her new home in BC. *From My Ackee Tree* by Suzanne Barr to *Have You Eaten Yet?* by Cheuk Kwan, *Recipes and Reciprocity* by Hannah Tait-Neufeld and *What we Talk About When We Talk About Dumplings* edited by John Lorinc, these books may not all contain recipes, but they may show you how their personal identities are shaped and welcomed within the Canadian culinary landscape. "Linking food, recipes and traditions with their stories is inspiring, generous and passionate," states Baxter.

The Taste Canada Awards continue to honour outstanding Canadian cookbooks, and with cookbook purchases remaining robust, the role of cookbooks in documenting and shaping Canada's culinary heritage remains as vital as ever. These culinary documents serve as bridges between lifestyles, cultures and lives by allowing people to share their stories, recipes and meals.

The Taste Canada Awards take place on October 30, 2023, at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel. Event tickets are available for those who want a chance to meet the authors and feast on some great food and beverages. For more information about Taste Canada, or to view the full Taste Canada awards shortlist, visit tastecanada.org.

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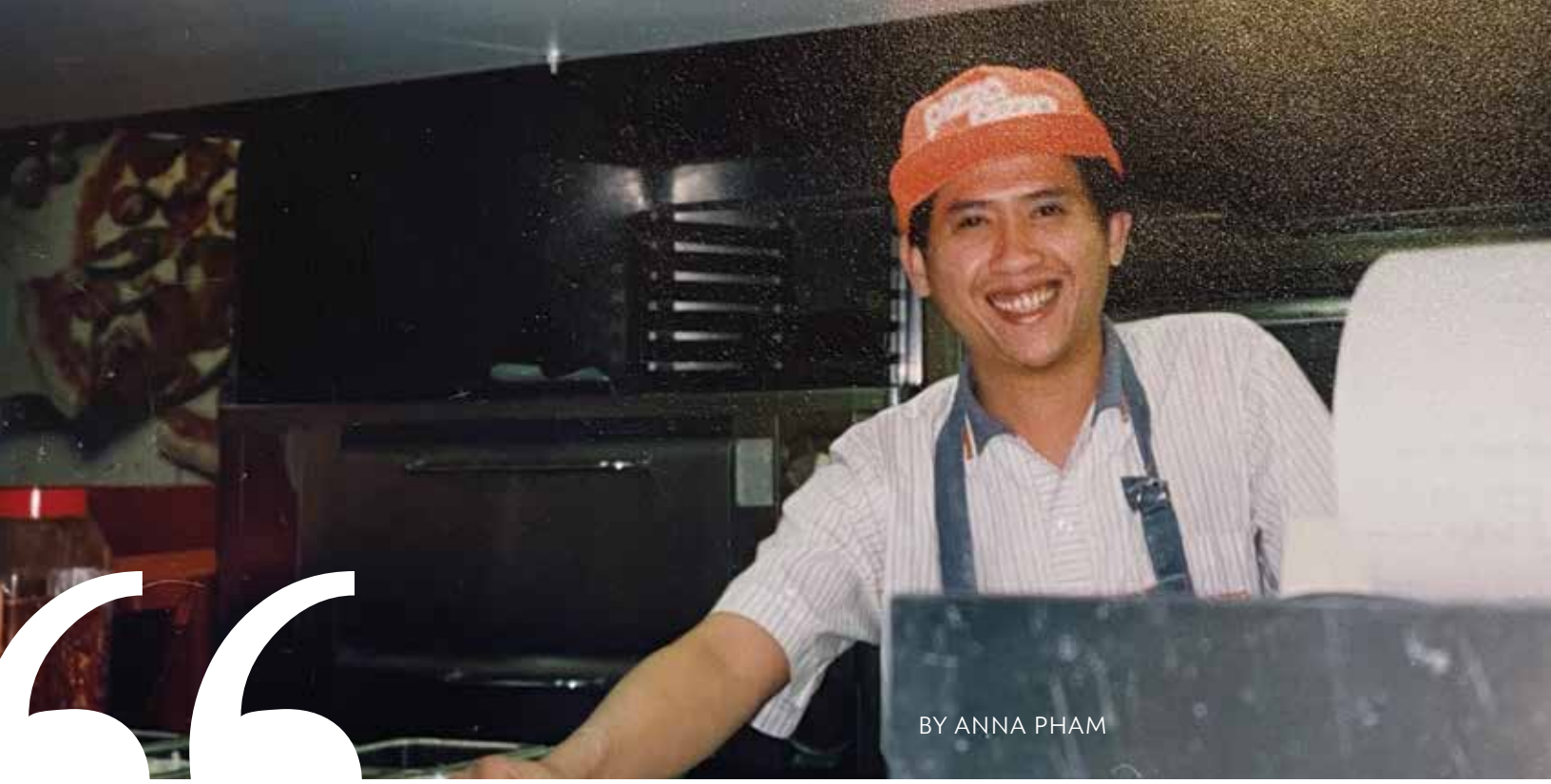


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BY ANNA PHAM

From Refugee to Pizzapreneur:

THE STORY OF RESTAURATEUR PAUL PHAM, AS TOLD TO HIS DAUGHTER ANNA

Paul Pham's story is one of incredible courage, a relentless work ethic and big dreams. Since arriving in Canada in 1985 as a Vietnamese boat refugee, he has never wavered in his entrepreneurial vision. One of the first jobs he got was at Pizza Pizza, an opportunity he parlayed into his own Toronto pizza shops and other adventures as a serial restaurateur.

Paul is also my dad. I'm sharing his story because it illustrates the grit, grace and vibrancy newcomers bring to the Canadian foodservice industry and everywhere they live and work. And, I think there's something in it for all of us.

Anna Pham: Please share the story of how and why you came to Canada.

Paul Pham: I spent most of my teenage years in and out of jail trying to escape Vietnam. It was the mid-80s. I wanted to listen to The Beatles and practice Catholicism, but had to do it in secrecy. My dad, the true hero of it all, would build boats for refugees to escape, but no good deed goes unpunished. He was shot by the Viet Cong and I didn't find out about his heroic death until the end of my ninth time in jail.

I came home to my dad's photo on the altar and vowed to make it out of this alive (Vietnam was, at the time, a communist country). So I did. I know my dad had something to do with that. With zero dollars in my pocket and a little bag with my favourite pair of pants. It wasn't an easy journey. I found myself stranded in the middle of the ocean trying to picture where I would end up. All I could do was count the nights and pray. No water—it was too dangerous to drink sea water—so you had to drink your own urine.

I honestly had no idea what Canada even meant or what it was. We knew about the U.S. and the U.K., especially through music, but didn't know that there was another land of opportunity. We got scooped up at a border and were taken on a plane to Ottawa. We had no idea what an "Ottawa" was.

I couldn't imagine being a boat refugee today. Showing up to a foreign country with no money. Back then, there was still a sense of hope. Surviving was still dreamy. I was so young and so impressionable. Maybe a little too young to understand that I had lost most of my teenagerhood trying to be more than a teen.

Canada set me up with a job working in a factory packaging cookies and an apartment that I shared with five young Vietnamese males. I started from the ground up. It's so funny, the ambition of a business owner. Some were so excited to be able to get a job and get their first paycheque. But for me, the first thing I thought was, "I can't wait to not answer to anyone else." I had to be my own boss.



AP: What were the most challenging aspects of adjusting to Canadian work-life?

PP: Everything and nothing at the same time. I know that sounds weird because the "nothing" part is my sense of appreciation for being able to survive; for being given another chance at life in a country that was painted as hope and everything that I could possibly want, like the freedom to listen to "western music" out in the open!

On the other hand, I was at the bottom of the barrel. I didn't speak much English although I immediately was enrolled in a class (again, thank you Ottawa). There was racism from all corners at the factory, but outside of the factory, my best friends were two Vietnamese guys, a Jamaican guy with the best afro and a white gentleman. They were the ones who convinced me to move to Toronto. "Toronto has better music." "Toronto's got more food." "There are a lot of beautiful women there." "You can be your own boss there." And so we all saved money and moved to Toronto.

AP: Did you always want to work in the restaurant industry?

PP: I don't know if it was specifically food, but I knew I was always a people person. My mother raised me and my nine siblings by selling beef to pho restaurants in Saigon. She was a butcher woman—a strong butcher woman.

My favourite part of it all was when she would have me help with packaging and selling at the stand. She would get frustrated because I'd hold up the line by asking questions and talking too much to the restaurant people picking up. They loved me. I loved them. To me, I looked up to them. They provided our family with money. They seemed rich because they owned their own businesses, they fed the community, and they still seemed very humble.

AP: Please share the story of how you started working in pizza restaurants. Was it a choice or a "happy accident"?

PP: This was a happy accident. We finally all moved to Toronto and of course, the one place that we could afford was an apartment shared with three others in Parkdale. Parkdale at that time wasn't too far off from what it is now... except again, there was still more of a sense of hope for immigrants.

My friend took me to go eat a slice of pizza, which was maybe one of the tastiest things to me. That Pizza Pizza that still exists! It was one of the most popular spots. Pizza was easy to share with a bunch of young bachelors over beers. We'd walk to Ossington and hit up the Vietnamese karaoke bars and then walk home for a slice of pizza. I feel like you probably walked the same path at one point in your 20s.

At the time, I had another factory job packing worm feed and I would much rather pack something that smells good, like pizza.

I became a regular at the Pizza Pizza and I made sure they knew that I wanted to make pizza. I didn't hand in a resume, I just kept showing up and showing interest. So, they gave me a job. Even up to today, I have never created a resume.

AP: From your beginnings at Pizza Pizza, you went to open your own pizza shop. What was it like to open your first restaurant?

PP: It was the early 90s and I had the most supportive wife (who I met in Toronto) and a one-year-old. I was working two jobs (making pizza at one place and late-night delivery at another) and my wife was also working two jobs. Our neighbours in our little apartment on Jameson watched our daughter at a really young age—maybe three months. Imagine today handing off your child at three months?

My two goals were to bring my younger siblings and my mother to Canada and provide them with the opportunities I had, and to buy a house. Owning a business would come right after that. I was in my mid-20s, and these were my goals. By 30, I opened my first pizza shop at Eglinton and Oakwood called 1+2 Pizza & Wings. In my opinion, the most relaxing task is making dough.

Wait...is this what a resume feels like?

I opened 1+2 Pizza and Wings at Eglinton and Oakwood because I love Jamaican people. One of my first non-Vietnamese friends was Jamaican, and he had told me about this neighbourhood. Also, the rent was dirt cheap compared to Mississauga, which is where I had bought a house at the time.

Despite it being a far drive from home, I was eager to serve the Jamaican community. I never felt racism at Eglinton and Oakwood. I felt at home. I made great money. I had a lot of regulars. My chicken wings satisfied the community. The price was right. You would work with me in the summer when there was no school and I still felt like it was safe for you to walk to the corner store by yourself to buy candy.

My siblings lived in Mississauga now, starting off their life, and I had a few Vietnamese friends in the city who were still working in factories. My wife was making great money working at General Motors and we felt strong. I decided that I wanted to create another "me" through my youngest sibling. I don't know if that is selfless or selfish, but I knew I wanted him to have the same path I did... so I invested in him. I opened another 1+2 Pizza & Wings and that was how a second location was born.

Three more locations followed with friends and family. I learned from Pizza Pizza how to create a central hub for taking orders, and I did the same. Eglinton and Oakwood was the call centre. I wanted to control it. I would have one giant Toronto map on a wall, marking out zones. My phone had five lines. When computers came into existence, you could fax out orders as they came in. I had a bit of money invested in all locations and I felt like I had peaked at hitting my goal of being a boss... but sometimes, you can go too far, too soon.

Fast-forward eight years, and we had closed two locations. I decided to move the Eglinton & Oakwood location to the Toronto's Junction

"My friend took me to go eat a slice of pizza, which was maybe one of the tastiest things to me. That Pizza Pizza that still exists! It was one of the most popular spots. Pizza was easy to share with a bunch of young bachelors over beers. We'd walk to Ossington and hit up the Vietnamese karaoke bars and then walk home for a slice of pizza."


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neighbourhood as it was losing its appeal due to rising costs. My favorite regulars were gone, and I wanted to be closer to home. I found a charming spot, still untouched but enough to make an impact. I started to get bored with pizza. Who was I to be bored with pizza? But I was. Call it a mid-life crisis, but I made a lot of crazy decisions that completely took me onto a different path.

I decided to hand over the restaurant to my brother so that I could go to Vietnam and open a 200-seat seafood restaurant, which was Mistake #1. Don't hand your business over to anyone. Mistake #2 was realizing I was now a foreigner in Vietnam and that people there did not accept me, which was heartbreaking. That 200-seat restaurant quickly rose and quickly sank. A lot of money lost, a lot of family issues, a lot of pain.

When I came back, my pizza shop was not the same. The regulars weren't there. The food quality was off. Sales were down by 40 per cent. I knew I was the heart of 1+2 Pizza and Wings but decided to abandon it for another. I was stressed and capital was tight, so I sold all of 1+2 Pizza and Wings to open Tri Resto.

Tri Resto was a collaborative vision. My counterpart spent a lot of his life cooking in Italian restaurants on College Street in Toronto and I didn't want to be a sole proprietor just yet after the big loss in Vietnam, so we partnered to open. Another terrible decision.
We couldn't work together. It put a strain on our relationship and it translated through to how our business was running. Our children kept that place together. When our children worked there serving and such, there was peace. When they weren't there, it was constant fighting. So much fighting that my blood pressure sent me to the hospital. So, I walked away from the business, and we sold it.

Now, I'm helping another brother with a pizza shop called Parma. I work hourly, and I help him a lot. At 61, every day I wake up dreaming about opening my next spot. I feel like I'm fulfilling my need for being an owner through my brothers, but I've learned that it's not the same. However, starting a business now is nowhere close to how it was 10 years ago. Not even 10—it's changed a lot in five. Especially now that I'm 61.

AP: What did your early role at Pizza Pizza teach you that you applied to your own businesses as an owner and operator?

PP: You make the call—whether as a franchisee, owner of your own brand, or a delivery guy. You will always have the option to make your own decisions in life. The people around you will tell you what to do in accordance with their guidelines or offer advice, but at the end of the day, you make your own call, which means your own location will be unique to who you are.

AP: You've had a long career in the industry. What insights would you like to share with other Canadian operators?

PP: It's not easy, and your family comes first. Most of the time, operators are doing it for their family anyways, but sometimes your family might just want more time versus more money. As a restaurant owner and especially as a newcomer, I had nothing at one point and all that really mattered was our family.

Also the idea of scaling isn't all that special. If I could, I would just focus on one really good business versus trying to open many locations or going bigger. I had a very good work-life balance; I gave the one location all of my love; I built great relationships with my community. It was really special.

You can open more locations, but there will also be more cost. You might bring in more money, but your energy output might not be worth it. That energy could go to your family and your health.

AP: What do you feel newcomers offer to the restaurant industry that is unique and/or special?

PP: A level of raw, real grit and hard work you normally don't see in someone who was handed an opportunity. Don't forget, at one point, there was a fight for survival. At another point, we came from nothing.

There is no big break. It's rare to get any sort of investment from someone. Most of the time it's working two jobs and saving up until you can do it.

> "I learned from Pizza Pizza how to create a central hub for taking orders, and I did the same. Eglinton and Oakwood was the call centre. I wanted to control it. I would have one giant Toronto map on a wall, marking out zones. My phone had five lines. When computers came into existence, you could fax out orders as they came in. I had a bit of money invested in all locations and I felt like I had peaked at hitting my goal of being a boss..."

AP: Of all the big changes in the industry throughout your career, what worries you the most, and what excites you the most?

PP: I've always worried about the future of opportunity for business owners. I know you always wanted to open your own place but felt zero support in terms of inflation control and rent control. After COVID-19, it seems even harder for young people to start their own business. You have to get really creative.

What does excite me though is that despite all the changes and how much harder it is, there are still people opening new places. That means the passion still exists in the food industry.

AP: What's next for you?

PP: I can no longer afford to live or work in Toronto. As of right now, I work only three days a week with my brother at Parma, which is a huge change coming from someone who worked a lot.

I'm still thinking about opening another shop, but not in Toronto. I've looked into Winnipeg and also Edmonton—affordable living, affordable business operations, less competition. Did you know that there are people lining up every day for $9 slices of pizza at Badiali's?

I'm not trying to compete with that! I'm proud of operators like that and they should shine.

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A perspective on gratitude and food injustice for every Canadian from the extraordinary Chef Raquel Fox



Award-winning Chef Raquel Fox, aka the "Island Gurl", is the kind of person you wish you could be (or at least hang out with).

She projects a confidence and warmth that envelops you like a warm blanket on a cold night. Her speech is flavoured with certainty and a sense of gratitude and positivity that seems to stem from a lifetime spent listening to and learning from others, honed by examination of her own observations and experiences. She is the very personification of the value of faith in family, belief in lifelong education and a commitment to truth and joy.

Since immigrating to Canada from The Bahamas, Chef Raquel has made it her mission to put Bahamian and Caribbean cuisine on the map. As a young girl, she'd watched her grandmother transform her community through the food she prepared and shared and knew that food would play a central role in her future.

Years later, Chef Raquel has merged into the Canadian food conversation in many ways—as a professional chef, teacher, bestselling cookbook author, F&B innovator and media personality— infusing her cooking with signature dance and rhythmic movements that bring the dishes to life. Her successful line of Island Gurl sauces, available nationwide at Loblaw stores, define her cuisine: just the right amount of heat balanced with tropical fruits and vibrant spices. Here, she provides a gentle reminder of the abundance Canadians have at our fingertips and some loving (and overdue) criticism of how we feed each other in the country she has come to love and call home.



Nine years ago, we made the decision to immigrate to Canada. This was due to my son Rashad, who is on the autism spectrum. At just 18 months old, we were told he wouldn't talk and would never do many of the things other kids do.

As a mother, I was upset. I got passionate, but more importantly, I became motivated to find a solution and prove them wrong. I thought, "Who are these psychologists to tell me this?" So, I did a lot of research and discovered that Rashad had talent as an artist and as a pianist—he can imitate classical music. One day, when Rashad was three or four years old, we were over at a friend's house and a song played on the radio. Rashad went over to their piano and imitated the song note by note. He had achieved more than what the doctors said he could ever do, so I knew this kid was built for greatness.

During that time my husband and I were restaurateurs because food was always part of my DNA—growing up I called myself my grandmother's sous chef. I was using a knife from five or six years old. Food was the centre of family for us. My grandmother was known as the woman who would feed the neighbourhood, and my family had had restaurant businesses before, so it was just so natural for us to get into the restaurant industry.

We opened the Wine Lounge in Nassau, Bahamas and it received rave reviews from USA Today magazine, rated in the top 10 best to visit in The Bahamas. Our concept was small plates and wine pairings, and my husband oversaw the wine distribution, bringing in wines from California, Canada and Argentina. Our marriage really complemented each other's passions forfood and wine. Of course, I was the chef and I designed and created the menu. We also did events at very prestigious places in the Bahamas—clubs like the Lyford Cay Club or the Old Fort Bay, which was home to many celebrities.

When Rashad graduated from school in Orlando, his speech pathologist—who was Canadian—said, "What are you going to do with him now? He's just so great and you can't just let him sit in The Bahamas where there are no resources for him. Canada is the best place for him. You can be a chef and have a restaurant anywhere in the world, so why not Canada, where your son would have a better quality of life?"

Being the mother that I am, in my heart I know that our kids are our legacy. We had to make sure that Rashad was okay. The universe spoke to me, everything came together and I said, "You know what, I am going to go to culinary school, perfect my craft and become the bad Mama Jama I know that I am."

So we packed up, sold the home and moved on to Canada.

I enrolled in culinary school at George Brown College in Toronto and it wasn't long before they knew I wasn't the average student. I really wanted to just get in there, be quiet and become a sponge. I wanted to learn everything I could about French and international cuisines, and perfect my style of cooking. Right after I graduated, I was offered a job as a culinary instructor at the school. I designed the Caribbean course and taught at the school. I was also a coordinator at the PC Cooking School. Things really began to flourish for me.



From Left to right: Rashad, Ruben Jr., Raquel and Ruben Fox

I started my cookbook, *Dining in Paradise: A Food Lover's Dream of Family Style Dining in the Bahamas*, which was picked up by Whitecap Books. It was the first internationally published Bahamian cookbook in 30 years. I had a story to tell and I had a mission. I had a mission to pay homage to my grandmother and to show Caribbean cuisine deserves a seat at the table of fine dining. I wanted to prove that Bahamian and Caribbean cuisine wasn't all just "brown food", as I was told here, more than once. I'd share a catering quote and hear, "Hmmm…it's only Caribbean cuisine—can you really charge that much?" I was upset about that. Like many cultures, in The Bahamas I was raised on family-style dining where we could all come together and enjoy beautiful platters of vibrant, tasty, delicious food together. Sunday dinners were a treasure—breaking bread and enjoying each other's company was a form of mental health support. We all come from humble beginnings, and we all have what we call our "comfort food" that we elevate and now it's at Michelin Star restaurants. Like Oxtail, for goodness' sake—you can't even afford that anymore.

My food photographer, food stylist and I really set out to showcase the range of Caribbean cuisine, to show that it fits in a fine dining setting and looks at home on restaurant-ready plates and crystal as much as it does in our grandmother's homes on floral serving dishes. It deserves to be respected. We captured that.

The book launched so many other opportunities for me. I was voted one of Canada's Top 25 Immigrants by Canadian Immigrant last year and just won the most outstanding female chef in Culinary Arts at the Waterfront Awards.

It's been a wonderful experience. Rashad is doing well and flourishing here and there's community, which I love, and it all ties in with food.

My grandparents were farmers, so I know the importance of eating locally and sustainably and how beautiful it is to just watch crops

grow. There's a real sense of pride in harvesting what you've planted and knowing that your cuisine isn't harbouring any herbicides and pesticides—you want the produce with the little worms because that's truly organic. My next cookbook will be a true celebration of seasonal produce and eating locally.

Growing up with farmers makes it easy for me to connect with local producers here. I work with many Ontario farmers, which is really what supporting local is all about. I'm a spokesperson and recipe developer for Foodland Ontario. Seeing a Caribbean recipe on the government's website is such a beautiful thing to me because diversity defines Canadian cuisine. To see Caribbean food respected and shown to be healthy is powerful because that was another stigma against Caribbean cuisine: "Oh, it must all be fried foods."

There are a lot of misconceptions that I was surprised by and now I'm constantly working on changing the narrative. Most seemed to just categorize all the Caribbean islands together, yet each one is unique. It's not all just hot and spicy cuisine. It's a constant challenge, but I'm having fun with it when I appear on television, speak on the radio or when I'm talking to people, I'm constantly showing how we have so many similarities, especially our history.

My niche as a celebrity chef is to talk about the history on our plates, and you'd be amazed by how that connects people. Viewers are constantly reaching out to me with similar stories about their ancestors. When I had just moved to Canada, I learned about how in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia they have the very-popular Blueberry Duffs, which are a steamed pudding. The Bahamian national dessert is called Guava Duff, which is very similar. We both inherited these from Europe, from the English Figgy Pudding; the concept of steaming bread or a roulade with fruits in it served with a delectable, luscious sauce. The Guava Duff recipe is the heart of ancestral cooking, dating back to an 18th century colonist who taught this recipe to local Bahamians. My traditional recipe style focuses on the first settlers of The Bahamas, the Indigenous Lucayans, whose diets consisted of seafood, animal protein and root vegetables. Being able to share the history of Bahamian cuisine and all of its cultural influences on a regular basis reminds me of why I love this industry so much. It's amazing how food connects and unites us, regardless of our differences.





Starters of Cocobread and tableside-poured White Bean and Provision soup on the line at The Chef's House

Yet even with so much personal and professional growth, there's work to do. Food insecurity is a topic that I'm passionate about. No one in Canada should be struggling with food insecurity, especially when people have so much. I would really llike to see farmers of all ethnicities working together to eradicate it.

I really love what Black Creek Community Farm is doing right now under Chef Bashir Munye. There are very few farms in Toronto, and he has this wonderful initiative for feeding the community because everyone has a fundamental right to food. They're really focused on getting people into education around how they can grow their own food. With such a huge diversity of Caribbean people in this country, especially in Toronto, we need to have our produce available in the markets as well, instead of having to import it. There's no reason why when farmers are planting their asparagus and potatoes that they can't also plant Caribbean sweet potatoes, some callaloo, some okra—foods from our original country. The beauty of being Canadian is that Canada allows us to be both Bahamian-Canadian, Jamaican-Canadian or wherever we're from. We want to see that reflected in the supermarkets; we would love to see some of our healthy, high-nutrient vegetables, roots and tubers as well. That's what Black Creek is doing. Canadians are very supportive, so hopefully we will see greater ingredient availability in the community and more farmers really contributing to food injustice.

Every time I go on air I just preach about how important purchasing local is and how to look for Canadian agriculture symbols. It's better for the economy and our health because when produce travels a certain distance, it has been sprayed with certain chemicals to make sure it looks good when it arrives in the market. They're picked when they're too young, so they don't contain the full nutrients and vitamins.

Educating people on the importance of buying Canadian, eating seasonally, and supporting local farmers really is my passion. I'm blessed to be able to do this work and I'm grateful for the opportunity to spread the gospel of good food.

Follow Chef Raquel Fox:
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THE RE-SEASONING COALITION

Chef Raquel Fox is part of The Re-Seasoning Coalition community of Black Canadian chefs and food professionals. Learn more at **thereseasoning.org** and follow them **@trscoalition**

Celebrating Local Agriculture & Restaurants in Ontario



From October 1-8, the Ontario government held its inaugural Dine Ontario (#DineOnt) event to celebrate the province's 25th Agriculture Week. This new initiative drew guests to nearly 130 participating restaurants across the province with the promise of special dishes representing the best of food and drink grown, raised and produced in the province, including special all-Ontario pairings.

Lisa Thompson, Minister of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs shared the government's investment and excitement in the weeks prior to the event: "As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Ontario's Agriculture Week and the introduction of Dine Ontario, we are planning a concerted effort across the province to demonstrate the value of growing and producing good quality food and beverages close to home - with the end result being an amazing dining experience in a local restaurant. By participating in Dine Ontario, we are supporting Ontario's farmers, food processors, distributors, chefs, brewers, and restaurants, as well as strengthening our local communities."

Eager to support the event, Restaurants Canada partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and Foodland Ontario to help with restaurant outreach and promotion. Tracy Macgregor, Restaurants Canada's Vice-President, Ontario notes this important initiative couldn't have come at a better time. "Restaurants are the tastemakers and experience providers that bring locally grown food and drink to life, so this collaboration was and is as natural as it is timely. Restaurants need all the support they can get right now, and this event is a great new way to bring out guests to try some great special dishes that really celebrate the quality and craft of our local agriculture and restaurants."

Macgregor also credited OMAFRA with recognizing the importance of further partners in the agricultural food chain. "The local food community starts with the farmers, but their success relies on the efforts and successes of a wider group from transporters and processors to brewers, distillers, winemakers, restaurants and culinary tourism venues. This is where the wonderful foods and beverages grown and produced in Ontario are transformed, elevated and introduced to our mutual end customers. We're all in this together and it's a group effort. We thank the Ontario government for investing in this initiative and we hope to see it grow from here."

There was a participating farm to table venue within reach of most Ontario communities from Prince Edward County to Windsor to Timmins, with a team of ambassador restaurants including The Royal Hotel in Picton, The Drake Devonshire in Wellington and Ration | Beverley in Toronto, and Restaurants Canada hopes to see more Ontario restaurants on the 2024 Dine Ontario list. "This year was a great success, and there's plenty of room to grow from here," Macgregor says. "Working together is the best way to scale our local economies and get people out to experience local restaurants. Our restaurants are a reflection of our culture and our quality of life and everyone benefits from that."







RATION BEVERLEY
@rationbeverley | Toronto, Ontario

Ration Chef and Founder Jef Edwards was thrilled to participate in the first-ever Dine Ontario event. From its beginnings as a pop-up concept in 2019, Ration has evolved from its roots as an exploration of the Canadian culinary landscape through the lens of fermentation. Jef shares the story of Ration's development: "I had done the first couple installments in collaboration with Secret Diners and Mother Cocktail Bar but then the pandemic hit, and we had to cancel the rest. In an effort to prevent our inventory (as well as many suppliers' inventory) from going to waste, we worked with Mother to set up a direct-to-home grocery delivery system which was hosted through an online ordering portal. From there, business grew. We proceeded to develop our own line of preserves and plans for a restaurant began to unfold."

"The idea behind Ration the restaurant was to deep dive into Canadian wild foods, most of which I forage with my team within a couple hours of the city," Jef shares. "Fermentation was our vehicle for creating dynamic flavours from our farmed products but very quickly after opening we found fermentation to be a wonderful medium for implementing zero waste initiatives and sustainability very quickly became the main focus of the restaurant."

Ration has taken farm-to-table, seasonal cuisine in an interesting direction with its culinary approach, with a zero-waste tasting menu and signature Food Lab. When asked about how Canadians should think about local and seasonal food and the relationship between farmers/producers and restaurants, Jef points out that the way we think about seasonality has changed. "Through fermentation and preservation, we can capitalize on the nutrients of our summer seasonal vegetables all year round. Using local ingredients at their peak during their growing season or for preserving is a great way to gain familiarity and trust with the farmers and foragers we shop with. Building a relationship with farmers and suppliers allows us to choose the best people with the best products for our needs. Just like restaurants, home cooks who look to source their products through local, independent producers are helping to maintain diversity in the economy which ultimately leads to diversity in the products we get to use on our menus."

Building awareness of local food and restaurants is central to the success and vitality of our food system, and Jef was excited to participate in Dine Ontario and for what the collaboration could mean in the longer term. "I would like to see a greater awareness towards the importance of shopping locally. From stimulating the local economy and supporting local independent business to maintaining diversity in the products available to us. Now that we have greenhouses capable of growing tropical fruit in Ontario, we can save on transportation costs and environmental damages. There are so many benefits anyone can get on board with. When consumers build stronger direct relationships with local farmers and producers, they put pressure on larger grocery chains and that benefits everyone, especially in this economy. We'd love for restaurants, farmers and consumers to interact more and enable communities to experience fresh foods while cooking at home or attending farm tours and dining experiences hosted by city chefs at local farms."



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“Serve a good person a good oyster, and you’ll have them for life.”

Before heading over to PEI’s International Shellfish Festival, Anna Pham reconnected with **Rodney Clark**, **Canada’s Oyster King**, her previous boss and lifelong friend.

BY ANNA PHAM



In the heart of Toronto’s bustling culinary scene, down a set of stairs, there is a hidden treasure that has been shucking its way into the hearts of city dwellers and visitors for an astonishing 37 years.

Rodney’s Oyster House is more than just a restaurant; it’s an ongoing epic whose first volumes were written by one man, who would probably cringe to say that’s true. Rodney Clark’s first business mistake was believing that he could do it himself, but when he learned to see the value in every person he met along the way, he found the secret to success. I had the privilege of meeting this artist-turned-restaurateur when I took on a job at Rodney’s back in 2013. Fresh out of school with the itch for opening my very own restaurant one day, I walked into four years within an establishment that has completely pivoted my career and the way I approach life.

This past August I decided to take a seafood-inducing trip to the east coast. The first person I thought of was Rodney. I had the intention of stopping by for a charisma check, but knew that I would not leave without some sage words of wisdom to carry with me through this life and beyond. With one text to his daughter Bronwen Clark, now operator of ROH, I was welcomed with open arms.

I wish I could share with you the amount of warmth and peace I felt when I sat next to Rodney, both of us comfortable in two cushioned rocking chairs. The window next to us reveals a backyard leading to red sand and a briny, seaside breeze. I might’ve been on drink number three by then, and he was coughing more than usual. In true Rodney humour, he follows his coughs with “This will be the last interview I ever do…” *fakes death* “…and collapses in front of her… and Anna Pham will have a story of a lifetime.” I will refer to Rodney as “Rodney” in this article, rather than “Clark” as this was a conversation was between two humans who have made some sort of impact on each other, rather than two strangers in a formal interview.

Our conversation that day was all over the map, but always came back to one thing: that the not-so-secret sauce for a fruitful “food idea or business” contains two key ingredients: the product you back and the people you keep.

Unlike me, Rodney never envisioned himself as a restaurateur. The oyster kind of brought him there. Anyone who worked at ROH knew that in the mid-80s, Rodney had boxes of oysters coming off the back of a truck, sent by his dad all the way from PEI. Beyond being an artist, he also wanted an excuse to connect. He would bring oysters to affluent homes, shucking privately for folks who knew what an oyster was while building new relationships that would soon help pave his way to “The Oysterman” empire.

He recalls early days and early learnings with typical honesty and candour. “I started delivering to private homes because these people knew what good oysters were and then they would say, “Hey—my daughter is getting married on the weekend, can you come open some?” And then the catering came in, and I didn’t know what that meant. I would charge $20 and a bottle of wine… and then I would write their name on each bottle. And when you look at the bottles, you can see where it came from.”

One contributor to his wine collection was Lady Eaton. Rodney tells me, “Mrs. Eaton would never go down the basement into her cellar. She had a butler whose name was Simpson that would head down and pick out one of her finest for me. Could you imagine that every morning? Greeting a Simpson? “How are you doing Simpson?” I met all these people that way and I wasn’t trying to sell them something; I was trying to introduce them to a good oyster. So, I worked at it that way and that was how it started. Then, the catering chef hired at the events would say “Boy, I don’t get oysters that good…I’m not getting those in my restaurants…Do you want to send some to me?” and so I started connecting with chefs to bring them oysters.”

With an investment from a woman named "KVO", Rodney went from a refrigerated truck driving to West Virginia to do catering to finding himself opening of a humble oyster bar in Toronto in 1987. As with many operators' stories of the ups and downs of openings, not much has changed. If you look up articles from these early days, one from the Toronto Star from December of that year notes early struggles and opening delays, followed by an impeccably timed government ban on the sale of shellfish, including oysters.

When I ask where he feels operators should look for inspiration and the state of the industry, Rodney's frustration as a maverick Canadian operator lingers. "I have to look at other countries. The bureaucracy in the government of Canada—there are too many people with a salary involved in government bodies and policies to uphold—will squash a young person's food idea real fast."

On Operations

With just 11 seats at the bar, two tables of four, and a high top, Rodney was fresh into the restaurant business. He often says with a full heart that he owes the success of his business to KVO and Ann-Marie Celestine, his partner and business manager at Rodney's Oyster House; two women with unbeatable business management brains. He offered me a few tips he inherited from them: "You have to make controls or people will run right over you." and, "Trace every cent we spent on an oyster. What steps were involved, and how much did those steps cost?"

After so many years in the restaurant business, Rodney has some wisdom of his own to dispense:

"You have to have bums in seats and you have to move them three times a day. The first flip is for the operation, the second flip is for the cost of the operation, and the third—and there might be some—is for you."

He also notes that there is much to be observed and learned about the success and operational health of a restaurant by taking a look at what's left on customer plates. "The dish pit is the most important place. I always walk into the dish pit and think: What food is coming back? How much food is coming back? Why aren't people eating all the rice sides? You can tell how your restaurant is working by going to the dish pit. You don't have to go to the accountant. It's right there before your very eyes."

On Planet

Rodney's east coast lifestyle and perspective inherently translated into his restaurants before "sustainability" was even a buzzword. Farmed oysters take the pressure off wild oyster populations, satisfying consumer demand without further depleting ocean stock. They also help seed wild oyster populations, feed marine life and clean ocean water. "The start of it all is the oyster," he asserts. "Bivalves like oysters, if farmed expertly, can have a net positive environmental impact. The ecological benefits of oyster agriculture are numerous, starting with a growing process with almost no greenhouse gas emissions and uses little water, feed, fertilizer, or food, all the while providing high protein, high zinc, and high magnesium!"

Creative and forward-thinking, Rodney elected not to use plastic or paper gift cards. Instead, he took his artistic skills to the table and handmade every single one on the inside of an oyster shell. "I thought: Why don't I give them a painted shell they can put up on their shelf and stare at for six months before bringing it in to use? The memory of this shell reminds them of the satisfaction, and it leads them to the next step with you. It's the satisfaction that comes from going above…which will have them come back to you. Anything good in life, should come back. If not, cut bait."

Rodney also believed in protecting the water oysters (and his livelihood) live in. He started the Ontario Oyster Festival, a massive seafood festival and fundraiser in the heart of Toronto that lures people in for a day of oyster slurping and icy vodka luge shots. Held in the alley beside ROH, Rodney's intent was to cover the operating costs to make sure the donation was maximized. "We cover operating costs—a third of the money perhaps—and we donate the rest to an environmental group where the water ends up. We've done environmental defense for many years. I recently went to a small group in Halifax called Ecology Action and they're doing incredible work."

Rodney's approach shows that being sustainable isn't just about ethics; it's also about being creative and genuine in securing a restaurant's profitability, reputation and relevance in an ever-changing industry.

On People

Beyond and above Rodney's balance sheet are the people. Not his clientele, but the people on his team. "I always said, "You work with us, not for us." I try to instill the fact that you service guests with "What would you like?" vs. "This is the menu." If there are any questions, I try to answer them or get them answered. I try to find some bond with my team to make it interesting."

Rodney is great at forging this bond. When I was employed with ROH, my aunt in Vietnam owned a quail egg farm and a bad virus came through and wiped out half her quails. This was her livelihood. Rodney not only found a newspaper clipping that addressed the virus, he also sent my aunt money in VN currency as a way of providing a bit of support. To him, the gesture may have been small, but for me, it set a standard for future employers and for what it means to be a leader and a full human. There are staff members who have been there for 20+ years and, while the money is good, I'm sure it's not just because of the money.

The Sri Lankan folks in the kitchen often told me about a story Rodney likes to share with them about the statue of George Pope. George was the cousin of James Pope who was Premier of PEI from 1825-1885. He was a PEI-born Tamil scholar known for his contribution to translating the bible into Tamil and also for translating several important Tamil-language texts, some of which influenced the teachings of Gandhi. It was a wondrous thing to hear, and many Christian Sri Lankans would visit PEI to honour said statue. This was Rodney's way of connecting with people.

As an industry, we want to believe that every operator will always lead with their heart. Before we headed over to the Canadian Oyster Shucking Competition together, I wanted to share with Rodney my observations on the current state of foodservice. Operators are losing their passion, they're dealing with labour shortages…there's inflation and there's the aftermath of a pandemic. If Rodney's 37-year-old self decided to open up an oyster house today, what advice would he give to this young and vivacious, hopeful entrepreneur?

"Every morning, look at joy and happiness. The other things are a part of business. They pick up their momentum by you worrying about them, so just do your best job. Pay your bills, know your work, and enjoy it. It's a riot. It's a true fun experience, making sure that people have what they want. You've got to find what you want to do, whether it be selling fudge, ice cream or oysters."



A Simmering Legacy:

Food Day Canada Comes of Age and Steps into the Spotlight

BY CHRIS SZEGO

The first iteration of Food Day Canada was the World's Longest Barbeque, which was created by Anita Stewart along with her family and supporters, to support beef ranchers and farmers during the BSE outbreak. Since then, the event has evolved into a national affair, with a deeper and broader lens. Aiming to inspire and engage, Food Day Canada praises the entire food chain, from Canadian farmers, butchers, chefs and restaurants to home cooks, economists and gardeners.

Anita Stewart was a food activist and educator, who defined both the study and practice of Canadian culinary tourism. The first Canadian to earn an M.A. in gastronomy, she wrote and contributed to many award-winning cookbooks and other works over the course of her career. A journalist, food historian and media personality, she also chaired and steered the very first pan-Canadian alliance of food professionals. In 2012, Stewart was named Canada's first Food Laureate at the University of Guelph, where she provided food advocacy and ambassadorship, boosting the niversity's already prestigious reputation for culinary research and technology. According to her family, her mantra was: "Canada IS food and the world is richer for it."

Extolling everyone from farmers, fishers and other primary producers of original ingredients to the creators of complex and spectacular dishes as well as the final consumers who enjoy them, Food Day Canada also encourages the growth and examination of our unique food culture. The event also promotes research and education, respect for the environment and sustainable practices, food sovereignty and security, and diversity, equality, and inclusion across our food system.

This year marked the 20th anniversary of Food Day Canada and the first year the event received official federal government status. On August 5, 2023, this year's Food Day Canada, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Lawrence MacAulay announced Bill S-227 had received final assent in May. The Food Day in Canada Act officially declares the Saturday before the first Monday of August as 'Food Day in Canada' every year, "which celebrates all the hard-working people across our food systems and recognizes the variety of the high-quality, world-class food that they produce."

This year's anniversary event set astonishing participation and awareness records in an appropriate nod to the strength and value of Anita Stewart's legacy and life's work and an idea that has found its time.



Food Day Canada at 20

Chef Jeff Stewart is the son of food activist and benevolent disruptor, Anita Stewart. In the weeks following the 20th anniversary of Food Day Canada, we connected to capture his thoughts on the event and the importance of the ideas that have driven it to official status as Food Day in Canada, under Bill S-227, the Food Day in Canada Act.

MENU magazine in conversation with Chef Jeff Stewart

MM Food Day Canada has grown steadily over its 20-year history, but it seems to have accelerated this year. What is Food Day Canada's mandate, and what feels different about this year?

JS: *Food Day Canada is my mom's legacy, and it's here to support the study and promotion of Canadian food. The cool thing about Canadian cuisine—more so than in other countries—is that it evolves. What evolves more slowly perhaps, are the ingredients we have here and how that sets the tone for regional and seasonal cooking throughout the year. We have such distinct seasons, regions and diverse populations in Canada—we enjoy quite an amazing food system here.*

I think we're in a moment where external factors are compelling us back to times when our food choices were not necessarily "simpler," but perhaps more conscientious. People are giving more thought to food origin, availability and seasonality for a whole variety of reasons, one of them being cost. There's huge food inflation right now, in part due to the performance of our dollar and economy,

so it's more expensive to buy from outside Canada. Not only that, when you spend locally, the money is reinvested into the local community and there's a positive ripple effect. That's just one of the reasons to buy from local farmers rather than overseas wholesalers or distributors.

Buying local is also more sustainable. The "food miles" or how far food has to be shipped to get here and the carbon required to move that food over tens of thousands of kilometres is greatly reduced by local sourcing. People are also concerned about climate change, and we need to start looking at ways to create environmental benefits. Local food is a way that's always been there that's maybe been forgotten along with many other things. We're in harvest season now and I look at what mom taught me about pickling, preserving and freezing and preserving the harvest. In January, we may not have the abundance coming out of the garden, but we still have food we can rely on that's going to carry us through the winter.

MM The Canadian restaurant industry has a long tradition of local, farm-to-table, seasonal restaurants. What are you seeing in the industry that really excites you?

JS: *Chef Michael Smith at The Inn at Bay Fortune in PEI has an amazing Chef's Harvest educational cooking series. I'm not sure if people have forgotten how to do this or if they never learned it in the first place because they didn't need to, but many chefs are embracing the idea of putting down the harvest and extending the season so there's less reliance on foods from outside areas. That takes knowledge and that takes time.*

I look at Warren Barr out at Pluvio—he's making his own miso; he's got his own kojis and ferments going. He's got all kinds of other creative, unique things happening in this little, tiny restaurant in Ucluelet, B.C. There's also a great, small independent restaurant group in Guelph, Ontario run by Court Desautels, The Neighbourhood Group. They operate The Wooly Pub and Borealis among others. Court, his chefs and his restaurant managers do a great job of identifying what the public needs and wants and they put it together in a system that works to support the local community, economy and agriculture. To me, Court is another one of the shining stars with multiple concepts in a small, independent chain working to create social good.

I'm seeing all of this in relation to the ability of our country to feed itself – the idea of food sovereignty. There's a lot of different factors that play into food sovereignty, including the knowledge and skill people need to have, without getting into the complexities of the Canadian agricultural system. I'm seeing people doing some interesting work teaching the next generation of cooks, chefs and home cooks. At Toronto Metropolitan University, they've got an amazing rooftop garden and a series of classes to train the next generation of Canadians to feed Canadians. The University of Guelph is hosting the 'Deep Dish Dialogues', where they're bringing a series of different chefs in to discuss pressing issues around food sovereignty and food security as well. Consumers are increasingly concerned about these things.

Bernie Casavant at Lakehouse in Kelowna, B.C. has started a cooking school as part of the Lakehouse Home Store and they're doing all sorts of chef-led, hands-on cooking classes and private events in a bespoke space they just built as part of their retail experience. It's just brilliant. I look at how chefs and restaurants and how they've been able to move their business model along into things like classes and other ways of engaging their followers and customers.

Some chefs have seen great opportunities in retail, like Ryan Crawford in Niagara-On-The-Lake, Ontario with BarBea and Ruffino's Pasta Bar & Grill and the Gastrohomestead, where he's looking at the whole idea of vertical integration. He has a not-so-small farm where he's growing for his restaurants. He also has a retail outlet and a farm stand as well. There's so many elements working together to grow the concept and potential of local food.

MM How would you describe the response to this year's event?

JS: *We were amazed this year leading up to and during Food Day Canada's 20th anniversary with the amount of interest we saw from the general public. We have broken our media engagements numbers every year, and in 2020, the last year mom was with us, she was over-the-moon excited because there were about 15 million media impressions through social and earned media as well as print publications. Last year, we quadrupled that to 72 million and we couldn't believe that was possible.*

Just today I got our final numbers from our media impressions for 2023, and it was 230 million. That's incredible. I knew we were very busy, but that just blew me away. There are so many people who are interested in this. I don't see this dialling back anytime soon; in fact, I see this as becoming more and more of a concern for people.

MM Why do you feel the event has been so successful and what do you hear from restaurants that take part in the celebrations?

JS: *Food Day Canada is meant to be fun. It's free and doesn't cost restaurants anything to participate. Restaurants always mention that it's a great way to talk to their staff about what really matters to them – supporting local, supporting the community and getting people involved and showing their talent in action.*

People are interested in learning more and getting involved and I'm excited about what that means for Canada. There are so many culinary geniuses across Canada, and Food Day Canada wouldn't be where it is without them and without the support of groups like Restaurants Canada, MENU magazine and those who are willing to stand up in their businesses and say, "You know what? We see that there are better ways of doing things, and we're going to do it." It can be risky sometimes, but it proves to be worth it in the long run, at least from where I'm standing.

Learn more about Food Day Canada and how your restaurant or foodservice business can take part at: www.fooddaycanada.ca

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MOLSON BREWING COMPANY:

Canada's Pioneering Brewer & Modern Beverage Innovator



In the illustrious annals of Canadian brewing history, no tale is as captivating and enduring as that of Molson Brewing Company. Now formally known as Molson Coors Beverage Company, this venerable brewery has woven its threads into the very fabric of the nation, from brewing to banking.

Founded in 1786 by John Molson, an enterprising English immigrant, Molson Brewing Company is the oldest brewery in North America. From humble beginnings in the heart of Montreal, John Molson quickly established himself as a brewing visionary in the young Canadian nation driven by tenacity, entrepreneurial spirit, and an unwavering commitment to crafting the finest libations.

The early years witnessed an unyielding pursuit of perfection, with Molson's beer gaining a reputation for unparalleled quality. The brewery, nestled along the St. Lawrence River, became a symbol of the burgeoning Canadian identity, embodying the spirit of resilience and innovation that would define the country for generations to come.

As decades rolled on, Molson Brewing Company expanded its footprint, crafting a variety of brews that reflected the changing tastes of Canadians. The brewery, under John's descendants, remained resolute in maintaining its position as a trailblazer, even during times of political and economic upheaval.

Fast forward to the 20th century, Molson Brewing Company was not merely a name in the brewing world; it had become a cultural icon. Its lagers and ales were the drinks of choice for Canadians, bringing friends and families together around tables across the

nation. The iconic red "Molson" label was not just a logo; it was a symbol of national pride. Sophia Lal, Senior Marketing Manager, Molson™ acknowledges that Molson is a leading brand with deep Canadian roots embedded in the history of the country. "Whether it's celebrating the brand's traditional Canadian heritage with its connection to hockey through hockey partnerships that date back decades, or new ways of celebrating being Canadian like with our latest pop up, 'The Molson Exchange'; our aim with the Molson brand is to ensure every (legal drinking age) Canadian knows there's a Molson beverage with their name on it and that celebrates what's important to them."

Lal notes that restaurants and bars have always been and continue to be central to Molson experience and connection with Canadians. "Restaurants and bars across the country are one of our main avenues of bringing our brand experiences to life, so ensuring we have a wide portfolio of Molson products available (i.e. Molson Canadian, Molson Ultra, Molson Export, Molson Exel) in as many Canadian bars and restaurants as possible, ensures that we have a wide offering of high quality products for our consumers that have been brewed for centuries in Canada."

In more recent years, Molson Brewing Company has not just embraced change; it has shaped it. The merger with Coors Brewing Company in 2005 gave birth to Molson Coors, an international brewing powerhouse. Yet, amidst the evolution, the essence of the original Molson legacy remains intact – a commitment to quality, a dedication to innovation, and a bond with its beloved Canadian audience. "John Molson's legacy is one to be inspired by," Lal says. "Not only did he found the Molson brewery, but he also introduced bottle deposits, helped build the first Canadian steamship, spearheaded the building of Montreal's first public hospital, opened the Molson Bank in Old Montreal, funded the nation's railway, and inspired seven generations of the Molson family to give back to their community in their contributions. He also serves as inspiration for the employees of Molson Coors today, and of the Molson™ brand. Though we're building different types of communities—those around hockey, backyard beers, and inviting everyone in—his core tenet



of community building is at the heart of the brand. From a Molson Coors company perspective, you can see his values are reflected in ours – being bold and decisive, people first, celebrating together (over a beer), learning every day and taking accountability. Without these values, none of his great accomplishments would have been possible."

Today, Molson Coors stands as a testament to Canada's rich brewing heritage and a guardian of tradition while embracing the future. "Managing a historical brand really is about being a caretaker of the legacy," Lal points out. "We must be true to our roots as a brand, and clear in what it means in today's context and with today's consumer. It's an honour but also a responsibility to steward a brand that's been around for 237 years, and one that we want to be around 237 years from now."

Molson Coors has more skin in the game than any other brewery in the country, and a unique perspective on the evolution of Canada over the company's 237-year history. When asked which changes to the industry have had the greatest effect on the Canadian beer landscape, Lal hones in on the breadth and variety of options the industry now offers. "From a consumer perspective, choice has never been more prolific for alcoholic (and non-alcoholic) beverages. It's something that we're conscious of to ensure that we have a portfolio of beverages that suit Canadians' needs today. There are also high expectations for brands to deliver amazing experiences, advertising and joy—especially in the beer world. We love to help meet and exceed those high expectations."

As the brewer's story continues to evolve, one thing remains clear: its legacy is a reflection of Canada itself—a tapestry woven with passion, innovation, and a thirst for excellence that will stand the test of time. Raise a glass to Molson Coors, for its history is Canada's history, and its future is as promising as a freshly-poured pint.





Canadian Spirit: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE BEST BAR EXPERIENCES

BY CHRIS SZEGO

“A great experience is about people, not the bar.”



Josh Lindley was a latecomer to the bar industry. After touring the country with artists from an independent record label, he learned a lot about maintaining creativity on a budget. He started as a barback at The Drake at 25. Today, having completed stints at Bar Isabel, Campagnolo, The Harbord Room and Chantecler, Lindley can often be found at Civil Liberties and Ahma.

Jessica Blaine Smith is a photographer who started shooting professionally in 2003. Though based in Toronto, Smith and Lindley often travel for work and pleasure. A trip to Australia brought them to Eau de Vie in Sydney, where an engaging chat with the bartender resulted in a wholly unexpected adventure. The encounter solidified the idea that what makes a bar experience truly extraordinary is not the bar itself but the people working behind it.

When they returned home, they decided to combine their skills in a project to shine a spotlight on the talented people who make the bar industry so special. In 2016, they created Bartender Atlas. “There are tons of websites based on ‘The Best Bars’ in the world,” says Smith. “But none that focus on the people.”

A directory, resource and events calendar all in one, Bartender Atlas is dedicated to showcasing the intriguing and hardworking people behind the bar, hosting profiles of more than 2500 bartenders in 250 cities around the globe, more than 900 of whom are from Canada. The directory is easily searchable by place, bar, or name, so you can find out about bartenders wherever you happen to be.

Each profile on Bartender Atlas gives readers an idea of who that bartender is, and what kind of experience they might have. “If you read about someone, learn their approach and what they like, it’s an extension of what you should be getting at a bar: genuine engagement,” says Lindley. “You don’t go to a bar to just drink, you go to do something. Through Bartender Atlas, you can get to know who you’ll be interacting with ahead of time.”

Tourists search Bartender Atlas to make choices about where to spend their leisure time and dollars. “Bartenders are generally friendly folk with a wealth of knowledge about their hometowns,” remarks Lindley. But tourists are not the only users. Managers often check profiles when hiring, looking for evidence of interested, engaged talent. A profile is also an excellent opportunity for cross-promotion, as both the bartender and the bar they work at are mentioned. “We have a really high google ranking,” Smith adds.

Bartender Atlas also provides a platform for community building and connection. Bartenders post photos and recipes of their custom cocktail creations. There are educational sections devoted to spirits and non-alcoholic drinks, book and resource recommendations, tips for the home bartender, bar hop reviews and more. It’s designed to be easy for bartenders to join.

"It's a simple Google form," says Smith. "Many of the bartenders use their Bartender Atlas as part of their portfolios, in the media or on Instagram. It's a way for bartenders to raise their profile."

There's also a Google calendar for bar events in Ontario. In addition to running their own bar events, whether independently or in conjunction with brands, Lindley and Smith also attend as many as they can. "We run a lot of events and we go to a lot," says Smith. "It's a great way to meet the community where they are."

Community connections foster creativity, innovation, and interaction. "Bartender Atlas reminds you that you're not on your own. It helps to create the family," says Lindley, "And that's what you want in your establishment: a family."

We used Bartender Atlas to contact established bartenders across the country, asking them for insight, actionable advice and to refer us to emerging bar talent.

Halifax, Nova Scotia



Jeff Van Horne is a business manager and mixologist who loves hosting guests and providing an experience that goes beyond food and drink. Based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, he is the co-owner of Dear Friend and The Clever Bar Keep, a cocktail catering company. Van Horne got his start in the industry as a summer job. "Once I worked my way up to being behind the bar, I was captivated by how much there was to learn, and tapped into creativity I didn't previously know I had."

When the pandemic hit, Van Horne and co-owner Matt Boyle were building Dear Friend, which opened in July 2020. "Opening during the pandemic was like opening a bar on another planet. The restrictions forced us to get creative. Our survival depended on building an outdoor patio space, so we rented parking spaces in the parking lot behind the bar. During lockdowns we lobbied the provincial government to legalize to-go cocktails. Learning how to produce a to-go cocktail inspired our third business, Barkeep Cocktails, one of the first premium canned cocktail companies."

Van Horne has a specific recommendation for operators: get a small shop vacuum. "Suck out the drains on your sinks: it'll save you from emergency service calls. And vacuum the condenser coils on your fridges, freezers, and ice machines. You'll save money on your power bill, extend the life of your equipment, and save the planet."



Lingjie Xue is a recent graduate of Nova Scotia Community College's Hospitality Management program. She met the co-owners of Dear Friend at a school job fair. A powerhouse behind the bar, she has the distinction of having sold more Patron tequila shots than anyone else in the province.

"The hospitality industry suffered a lot during the pandemic. So many bartenders left the industry." Knowing how work at a bar can be physically and mentally challenging, Xue would like to see owners and management teams put more thought into employees' needs. "To check in with them, have one on one conversations, listen to their voices. The more support people are given, the more they want to work and are willing to stay."

Xue believes that customer-centered service and personalization are the keys to creating a great bar experience for guests. The taste of food and drink is critical, of course, but so is attention to detail and the needs of customers. "Vegetarian and gluten-free choices, as well as specialty drink offers," says Xue. She also recommends careful consideration be paid to all aspects of bar design - not just the layout and furniture, but also the lighting, the music and even the scent. "And clean! The bathrooms have to be clean!"

She's also a fan of special events. "It's fun to make food and cocktail matches for the event theme. Events give us a chance to attract first time guests – for regular guests, they get to try something different and new."

"As a bartender, I want to join and be part of a community," Xue says. "Bartender Atlas is a community for all the bartenders and cocktail lovers out there. Through it I can meet different bartenders all over the world and check out new cocktail recipes. Then, when I travel, I can visit those bars and meet my fellow bartenders."

Montréal, Quebec



Manu Ruiz is known in Montréal's bar community for his incredible work ethic, though originally, he got into the business by necessity. "I just needed a job. As time went by, I found myself loving the work, and decided to make it a profession." Today he is the creator of many cocktails, including the Curryous Joy, a drink with tropical vibes containing curry powder, proof against Montreal's winter chill.

Today Ruiz runs the bar at Rouge Gorge. Known for superbly prepared sharing plates and the depth of its wine list, Rouge Gorge also boasts an exciting cocktail menu created by Ruiz. During the pandemic, he oversaw the merging of the cocktail bar and the wine bar into one house. "We believed that one bar offered the best experience for our customers. And it helped us keep on most of the staff."

Merging the two teams meant merging the expertise on both sides, creating opportunities for the team to learn from different experiences. Educating and training the next generation of bartenders is something Ruiz enjoys. "They're all very committed, very different in bartending style, very passionate. It's beautiful to watch them work and grow as people."



Lily Tanguay-Therrien was an assistant manager at an Asian chain restaurant. Tired of fast-food service, she was ready to live a new adventure. "I gave myself the objective to find a new job in a nice place. I was lucky and I stumbled across the beautiful Rouge Gorge. I started back at the bottom as a busser but was promoted to barback in only two months." Now she's a full-time bartender.

Special events, like live music, is something Tanguary-Therrien would like to see more of in bars. "A lot of concerts and events were cancelled from 2020-2022. I think people want to discover new artists. Especially in Montreal since we are a city full of culture." Unique events can help attract – or re-attract – guests. Especially in higher end establish-

ments. "I started working in the industry at the peak of COVID-19: I saw all the survival tactics." But take-out isn't the best option for higher end establishments. "Serving nice dishes in cardboard boxes kills the whole eating out experience."

Tanguary-Therrien is glad to see work conditions improve in the industry. "Bars and restaurants have started to offer health insurance to their staff. We work long hours on our feet, and we often need to go see specialists so it's nice to have part of that covered. It also sends the message that your employer wants to take care of you and cares about you, which also ensures that you can stay in the industry for a longer time."

She considers attentive service the most important element bartenders can offer their guests.

"I will go back to a place if I had a wonderful service and had a great chat with the staff even if the food or drink wasn't the best. But I won't go back to a place if I have bad service, even if it's the greatest meal or drink I've ever had."

Toronto, Ontario



Evelyn Chick is an award-winning and highly accredited specialist in the bar and beverage scene. The owner and operator of pop-up event space Ahma and Simpl Things, she is also the founder of Evelyn Chick Projects, a creative consultancy and curator of world-class hospitality experiences. "Like everyone else, I was working in hospitality for another stream of income while going through university. I started as a host and eventually worked my way up the ranks."

During the COVID-19 shutdowns, Chick focused her energy on Evelyn Chick Projects. She hosted virtual cocktail demos, classes and educational videos, getting enough traction to start another business: Love of Cocktails, which makes cocktail gift sets and now holds in-person cocktail classes at Ahma. "My strategy was to bring interactive, approachable bar experiences to guests at home. It was exciting for them to try something creative without a physical bar space."

A passionate entrepreneur, Chick understands the pressures of the business. "It's tough out there with inflation." She suggests getting creative with the perception of value in each dish or drink and introducing circular use of ingredients. "Most importantly, invest in the people who work in your space. Provide them with tools for growth and longevity. Staffing is difficult at the moment, so why not invest in the people you know you can keep?"



Morgan Beveridge was initially attracted to the bar business by the lure of fast cash and the sense of belonging, a chance to make ends meet while feeling like part of a vibrant community. A discussion with a chef ignited a passion for the art of flavour and the importance of understanding the nuance of every food and beverage ingredient. "The greatest lesson I've learned in this industry is that I know nothing and have the opportunity to learn everything from my peers."

Today Beveridge works with Chick at Ahma, Simpl Things and Love of Cocktails. "Our industry is known for its transient nature, which is part of what makes it beautiful," she says. "However, it might also be why we're missing out on potentially exceptional candidates." Looking at a wider pool opens many doors, especially for an industry with a staffing crisis. "Why would someone with a degree in organizational behaviour or intercultural relations apply for an entry level job with you? Because you're hiring. Most of the time, the best talent comes from unexpected places. The aim is to give employees a chance to use the skills they've acquired through other means to benefit your establishment and industry."

Beveridge is passionate about creating a sense of community. "I firmly believe that rising tides raise all ships." This includes making recommendations to local businesses. "If your neighbours don't succeed, where will your patrons go when they're done with your spot? By fostering a spirit of collaboration, we can collectively address larger issues and create a stronger, more resilient industry."

For customers, she believes a great bar experience requires a real hospitality welcome. "Once you nail that, you're set." For Beveridge, it comes down to extending a sense of both comfort and invitation. "Gone are the days when guests wanted to be as far removed from the experience as possible. They want to be fully immersed."



Jenn Abergel started as a golf club barback at 17. She transitioned into bartending as a side gig during her university years and never stopped. When let go from her job as a paralegal, she got the idea to sell cocktail boxes while people were stuck at home during the pandemic. "Quench Bar was actually founded during lockdown," says Abergel.

With people trapped indoors on their phones, Abergel used technology to get her start. "Our first project was an advent calendar box during December. Each night I would make cocktails on Instagram live and made many connections. We then did similar boxes for other holidays – Valentine's Day, Easter, etc." Now that restrictions are in the past, Quench also runs mobile corporate and private bar events and provides mixology lessons.

Abergel is a big believer in the power of delegation. "Having a team you trust is key. Know your personal strengths and weaknesses and find a staff to help balance those out." She counts herself lucky to work with many talented bartenders. She also believes it's imperative to always look for ways to be innovative. "New flavours, new garnishes, new techniques – something that adds flair to your business." Today's clients and guests expect new tricks. "So much of our lives are on social media these days, the last thing you need is for your drinks to look redundant."



Jana Gravelsins got her start only two years ago. Though she began as a server, there was an opening and a need for an immediate new bartender. "I was eager to learn and just sort of fell into the role naturally. I really enjoyed it and had a knack for it." Today, the former professional jump roper works at Quench Bar.

"Working for a female-owned and operated

*MUST BE LEGAL DRINKING AGE.



company has really brought me so much joy and taught me so much. Jenn Abergel is such a powerhouse and an amazing mentor. She's really taught me to be able to stand my ground in an industry where it is easy for people to make you feel small. Everyone deserves a Jenn in their life."

Gravelsins understands the importance of social media like Instagram and TikTok as an online marketing tool. "Adapting and learning how to use it can really be make or break. It's a great way to bring awareness to your business and stay relevant with the younger crowd."

She turns to quality over quantity, especially when it comes to fresh juices. "Don't be afraid to get in there and DIY. Make your own garnishes, thrift some vintage glassware, look for deals on things like bar spoons and strainers. Have fun and experiment with the little things while keeping quality in the bones of the drink."

"A bar should be a place where you feel welcome and happy. It should be a judgement-free zone!" Making everyone feel like an equal at the bar is one of Gravelsins priorities. "Going to sit at a bar can be intimidating for those who don't do it very often." She never wants customers to feel like they're below the bartender, or worse, a burden. "I try to make sure every guest has the exact same experience and is treated like they're my friend. Who cares if you don't know your beers or your classic cocktails? We should be here to teach. I'm happy to teach them and sometimes they even teach me things in return."

Victoria, British Columbia



Shawn Soole got into the bar industry by accident. A junior handyman at a 4-star hotel, he was hurriedly pushing into black-and-whites when extra staff was needed for a wedding. "I clumsily worked that wedding, learning how to pour beer and hold a tray, and somewhere in that mess, I fell in love with the industry."

As lounge manager at Clive's Classic Lounge, Soole has overseen the implementation of several bar experiences with solid profit margins including a supper club pairing food and cocktails, Bon Vivant society tastings; and monthly residency with a three-day guest spot for a visiting bartender. "People are looking for experiences, not just a drink or dinner."

The pandemic taught Soole to focus on what he could accomplish, rather than on what was happening in the industry. Taking care of his team was his priority. "I stayed on hourly pay during the pandemic and cut my hours. I couldn't do anything about a slow sales day, but I could make sure my team got the hours and tips they needed to get through it."

Soole, who is also an author of two books about Canadian cocktails, is also the founder and principal of Soole Hospitality Concepts, a full-service consulting firm offering services for bar design, menu development, business operations, training and more. He also helms the Post-Shift Podcast, which shares stories from the industry's top talents.

Brant Porter, Bar Manager at Bartholomew's Public House began his career in foodservice very early. At age 11 he was washing dishes at his cousins' Thai restaurants. By 19, having worked front of house for a few years, he was desperate to step behind the bar. "I watched my cousins make brightly coloured vodka and fake fruit concoctions people gushed over, and that seemed to me the pinnacle of hospitality." A YouTube video led him to try making a daiquiri. "After making three with the same recipe and getting three completely different results, I knew there was more to bartending than met the eye." He went searching for a mentor and ended up working under Soole.

When it comes to helping your margins, Porter advises calculating all your true costs. "Once you know exactly what your true costs are, you can make more informed decisions on how to manipulate your margins." He also links efficiency to profit. "Your busiest hours should also be your most efficient, and your systems should allow you to receive, fulfill, and settle drink orders as fast as possible, without loss of quality or service."

Currently, he's interested in how to improve customers' sense of safety. "Investing in proper training, such as sexual violence prevention and workshops geared to understanding the lived experience of queer and trans folks, BIPOC, and people with disabilities in hospitality spaces is an important step to making your business safer for guests and workers alike."

When it comes to great guest experiences, Porter thinks the most crucial ingredient is the honest intent of hospitality from the host. "And your guest's willingness to accept it. You could be in the most run-down dive bar on the planet and have the greatest time of your life if the bartender really cares." Creating spaces that have a balance of familiarity and intrigue means guests can try new things in a comfortable space. "From there, it's the little things that matter most. Whether it's remembering a name or a handwritten list of places to visit in your town, the intention and joy of giving good service and connecting with people makes the best bar experiences."



FAVOURITE COCKTAILS

Josh Lindley: My 50/50, invented by Evelyn Chick. Akvavit and Fernet and cucumber. It's made for someone like me who has tried everything, and loves the idea of swapping out classic ingredients for something more esoteric and weird.

Jessica Blaine Smith: During the pandemic, Josh created a cocktail I'm obsessed with: the Faith Alone, made with Giffard Caribbean pineapple, mezcal, and cedar bitters.

FIRST DRINK I LEARNED TO MAKE REALLY WELL:

Jenn Abergel: A mojito! I liked how it is somehow a labour of love to have to muddle fresh ingredients, so it was the first drink I wanted to master.

Morgan Beveridge: A Paper Plane – only because I had made it very poorly before. My first cocktail menu featured a Paper Plane WITHOUT LEMON JUICE

Evelyn Chick & Jeff Van Horne: Classic gin martini.

Jana Gravelsins: A blueberry basil mojito.

Josh Lindley: Bourbon whiskey sour. I was at the Drake then, and they were interested in staff amelioration.

Manu Ruiz: The Old Fashioned, because it was the first one I loved drinking.

ON TAP AND ON THE MAP

GROWING PARTNERSHIPS AND MARGINS WITH CANADIAN BEER



Founded in 1943, Beer Canada's mandate is to champion the interests of the Canadian brewing industry, from coast to coast. As the advocacy group for equitable regulation and trade policies, Beer Canada also educates on responsible consumption, promotes Canada's distinct beer culture, and helps nurture a dynamic domestic and international marketplace that celebrates Canadian brewcraft.

Collectively, Beer Canada's members brew 90 per cent of Canadian beer, so who better to speak to what's going on in Canada's vibrant brewing industry than CJ Hélie, president of Beer Canada?

BEER CANADA BIÈRE

A beverage alcohol industry veteran, CJ Hélie was drawn to the opportunity to manage the Beer Canada's advocacy efforts during a period of fundamental restructuring of the Canadian beer industry. Having evolved over time at pace with changes in the marketplace and industry at large, today Beer Canada is the new, one-stop association representing Canadian brewers at the local, domestic and international levels.

Recruited into the leadership role to "put some meat on those bones" and build a successful organization under the new mandate, Hélie is excited to see the innovation suppressed by decades of red tape find its moment. "It's been a very heavily regulated and taxed industry since coming out of Prohibition, and I think that has created challenges in terms of competitiveness and investment; however, that's not new. Beverage alcohol companies have learned how to excel in that environment. Now, the consumer is evolving and becoming more demanding, and we're seeing that the big trends in consumer products are also true in beverage alcohol—convenience, choice, variety—all those things are key drivers of the market. That's why you're seeing this level of industry innovation, all these new products and all this new packaging. It's a very competitive industry, and you have to stay on your toes to succeed."

As consumers continue to pressure companies and brands for increasingly personalized product options from seltzers to no/lo and beyond, brewers are having to juggle a much larger world of product development possibilities. The days when industry market shares were primarily divied up among dominant brands and established

beer styles are over. "I think complexity is here to stay. Dominant national brands will always have a huge place in the marketplace, but people want to have that variety. We see this variety in terms of flavour profiles, alcohol content and really on every other marketing axis. I think the no/lo trend really just scratches the surface—there's a lot more growth to be had there. Between 2015 through 19, it was growing double digits, 10 to 12 per cent a year. In the last four years, it's grown to 20 to 25 per cent volume growth a year. It started from relatively small base, but it's exploding at the moment and, what people don't understand from the outside, is the amount of investment that's required for a brewer to enter that space."

The pressure to diversify isn't a phenomenon unique to restaurants, it's affecting the entire F&B industry. Consumer demand has fragmented into episodic or occasion-led pressure for brands to innovate and respond to what people want in a given place, moment and time. For restaurants, this translates into having the right beer lineup to meet the moment, but what's the right mix? "You need non-alcoholic options, and you need to think beyond the designated driver to the many reasons to have and feature non-alcoholic beers. Draft continues to be a point of differentiation when people visit restaurants and bars. While the draft product is similar to bottled or canned, the experience is much different. On-premise operators should consider the experience they're trying to offer their consumers and highlight the unique qualities of your beer offering and integrate them into the experience. You don't necessarily need to go as far as pairing your beers, but your brands should be complementary to your cuisine. For example, if you're a roadhouse, there are certain beer styles that go best with burgers or steak. In Canada, most of our beers are barley based. That's the backbone of most of our beer, but we are the food basket of the world, and wheat is a huge grain as well. A lot of Canadian brewers will have a wheat based blonde ale or similar that would be perfect for an Asian restaurant, for instance."

Thanks to the early arrival and success of brewing powerhouses in Canada, beer is part of our national brand and a source of national pride. "Beer is a natural product based on our fabulous grains and pure, clean water, so it's an easy path from there to quality beer," says Hélie. "Our brewing tradition goes back to before Canada was a country. We've been able to brew superior products and place among the best in the world in brewing a whole range of beer styles. We can take those styles and traditions, tweak and improve them to make them our own. That gives us a unique perspective and ability to meet the needs and desires of Canadian consumers who also are coming from all those regions in the world. So we respect the traditional brewing methods, and the quality controls, but we push the boundaries in terms of innovation, more than lots of other places."

Hélie also promotes the margin-boosting properties of a strong domestic beer program, noting that operators can boost profits with made-in-Canada beer due to lower labour output and food costs. "The current economics of the restaurant business make it challenging to earn profit. Beer typically has much higher margins than food and takes little time to educate the customer and serve. About 20 to 25 per cent of beer volume is consumed out of home, which is double the spirits and wine ratio. Also, the social nature of beer can increase time spent and cheque size. But perhaps most importantly, beer does not travel all that well. If you want it fresh, you're sourcing locally. Fresh food and fresh beer go hand in hand and brewers and operators are part of the local community economy, generating jobs and investment and bringing the neighbourhood together. We're tied to the hip of the food industry, so we need to find ways to cement those bridges to be successful together."

Another big reason for operators to connect with local brewers is the opportunity to enhance their experience with special, beer-led events designed to bring new customers into the restaurant. "The 'meet the brewmaster' angle works," Hélie insists. "People love to understand the creative process and hear stories about how that brewery came up with the artwork for their label and the local artist behind it or learning how a particular brew came to be. People are so interested in the story behind the story, and there's great opportunities behind that."

A few weeks ago, on October 4th, Beer Canada hosted Canadian Beer Day, a "day to celebrate Canadian beer and the people who brew it, sell it, serve it and drink it." The event was originally conceived as a way for industry players to work together to target legislators and regulators, but this year Beer Canada took a different approach. "Canadian beer has been taken for granted a little bit," Hélie explains. "It's been around for so long and we've been so successful—we wanted to take a step back and ask if we're doing everything we can to nurture and grow Canadian beer as an asset so that the benefits we've enjoyed for generations will be there for future generations. From the farmer who knows that they will be able to get a premium price for their barley, wheat, corn or oats to the packaging companies, label companies and all other affiliated industries that exist in part because beer is being made local in Canada. So, what we've tried to do in the last two or three years for Canadian Beer Day is to tap into a pride in Canadian beer. We did some research a while ago asking Canadians about 30-40 distinctly Canadian industries and brands to learn how they felt about them. Lo and behold, the top three were Canadian beef, Canadian maple syrup and Canadian beer."

"I knew it, but to see it sort of in quantitatively like that blew me away. Now, Canadian Beer Day is a means to try to tap into that and say, "Yeah, we make great beer and we're proud of it, and let's make sure that we're doing everything we can to support the industry to make sure that it's here for another hundred years." The response we received from on-premise operators looking for that experience was fantastic. We have these kits available to help them put on Canadian Beer Day events in their restaurant anywhere in Canada.

"It's just another opportunity to forge those partnerships between the local brewing industry and the local foodservice industry."

Learn more about Beer Canada:
www.beercanada.com

Learn more and find out how to participate in Canadian Beer Day 2024*:
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THE FUTURE IS ROUND: Building a Circular Foodservice Economy

BY CHRIS SZEGO

With one out of every seven Canadians facing food insecurity and 50 per cent of food in Canada going to waste each year, it's clear why food waste is a major concern. From farmers to distributors to operators to customers, there's a growing interest in sustainability initiatives.

While individual steps towards waste reduction are always a good idea, the time has come to think bigger by envisioning a new, more sustainable model of business production. A circular economy—a system based on the cyclical reuse and regeneration of materials with an emphasis on environmentally sustainable production—is quite possibly the sector's best way forward.

Traditional economies move in a straight line: resources are extracted, then used, after which the remains are disposed of. A circular economy disrupts the traditional cycle, but unlike most disruptions it puts something better in place, recovering value from resources in as many places as possible. The result drastically reduces waste and redirects effort away from extraction to reuse.

Not only are circular practices more environmentally astute and sustainable, they can also be economically beneficial. At the micro level, individuals who reuse objects like portable cups are automatically taking part in circular economies. At a macro level, when businesses turn to circular economy approaches, treating resources as valuable and looking at waste as an opportunity, they often come up with innovations that serve people and the planet, as well as profit.

The Future of Food

Recognizing the need for a change in attitude and practice, governments at both the federal and provincial levels foster many circular economy initiatives and strategies. These programs are reimagining how we deal with food, from production through to consumption, to boost production, increase efficiency, save money and even reach new markets.

In 2020, the municipalities of Guelph and Wellington County launched Our Food Future, an ambitious project aiming to create the country's first circular food economy. Funded by the Government of Canada, the Smart Cities Challenge and the local municipalities, they began their transformative experiment with three main goals:

- To increase the area's access to nutritious food by 50 per cent
- To steer the rise of 50 new circular food businesses
- To increase the economic benefit of food waste by 50 per cent

Through collaboration, new partnerships and the application of technology to collect and harness data, Our Food Future has seen astonishing results, including the reduction of food waste by 86,458 tonnes, and the recovery of edible food worth $641,467. In addition, 23 new products or services were created from diverted food waste, and 243 local businesses established or improved their own circular practices. It's a dazzling demonstration of the possibilities when food entrepreneurs and experts come together to solve complex food-related challenges.

While cutting down on food waste can mean re-examining the portion sizes offered to customers, the ingredients used on a menu to see if there are ways to use scraps for fermenting or to make stocks, it can also represent looking at food waste in a different way. The

University of Guelph's composting program sends kitchen waste from on-campus foodservice operations to the on-campus organic farm to be turned into rich compost. The compost is then used on the farm to grow produce that in turn is used in the campus dining halls. While many municipalities offer composting programs for residents and small businesses, Miss Bao Restaurant & Cocktail Bar in Kingston, Ontario takes composting to a new level. Owner Bellen Tong's zero-waste restaurant uses an in-house composter to produce fresh compost which is then traded with local farmers for discounted fresh local produce. For Bellen, her investment in her restaurant's composter saves her from paying for waste management fees to the city and and is now less vulnerable on fluctuations in cost of goods.

Single-use no more

The early days of the global pandemic demonstrated the fragility of the supply chain and underscored the necessity of local food and product sources. This spurred a strong resurgence in home and community food garden projects. The concurrent rise of takeout meals also made the need for sustainable food packaging an immediate priority.

December 2022 saw the introduction of the first phase of federal regulations prohibiting the import, manufacture and sale of specific single-use plastics, including some bags, cutlery, service ware, ring carriers, stir sticks and straws. The full ban comes into effect in stages beginning December 2023 through December 2025. The staggered timeline was intended to give operators time to deplete any existing inventory and allow for public education campaigns to build consumer awareness. What the regulations and timeline did not do, was take the necessary steps to mitigrate the disproportionate effects of the ban on foodservice and ensure the tools for success - like public education and appropriate recycling infrastructure - were in place. It's a little like tasking a single player on a multi-disciplinary team with conceiving and executing the entire play.

In July 2023, B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman announced new provincial rules and regulations for single-use items. Mark von Schellwitz, Restaurant Canada's vice-president of western Canada, is glad to see a consistent provincial standard. "Not only does it harmonize waste management practices, but it also avoids a patchwork of different bylaws which would lead to increased cost and red tape for foodservice operators."

In a recent analysis of the new rules and regulations, Bruce McAdams, associate professor, Hospitality Food and Tourism Management and Emily Robinson, post-graduate researcher and Food Education Manager, at the University of Guelph, explain that the "single-use" part of the ban is as important as the "plastic". "Offering alternative materials to food service operators is certainly a step in the right direction. However, as an effective long-term solution, the government needs to offer support for the integration and growth of circular systems."

Kelly Higginson, CEO of Restaurants Canada, notes operators now have new, more sustainable packaging options to choose from. "Foodservice operators can select from a wide variety made from environmentally friendly materials like bamboo, corn, oats, paper and even rice," Higginson says. Though the switch won't come without a cost. "The price of some items could rise as much as 125 per cent." Luckily, there are other, more circular options.

A new approach to packaging

While recyclable packaging items are a move in the right direction for takeout service needs, there's an even more sustainable, circular approach: reusable packaging.

To ensure reuse is environmentally superior, reusable packaging must be used more times than its sustainability breakeven point, after which each use of the packaging has less environmental impact than its single-use equivalent. The sustainability breakeven point is a critical measurement of the effectiveness of a reusesystem, and must be carefully assessed. An essential aspect of any reuse system is the return of the item back into circulation. The return rate is heavily dependent on consumer behaviour, with consumer convenience central to a return system.

According to Sharewares, a Vancouver-based reusable food container company, 441 million takeout containers and cups are sent to landfill in the Greater Vancouver area every year. Their reusable container model aspires to dramatically reduce that number.

Businesses can order the reusable containers and cups they need from Sharewares. The price for each item includes a wash fee and deposit. Operators recover the deposit fee when customers borrow the containers when purchasing meals or drinks. Customers then get the deposit back when they return the containers, by simply scanning a QR code on the container and return bin. Customers can return the cups and containers to many different locations, and Sharewares collects them for sanitizing. Then the cycle repeats.

Sharewares' durable and lightweight cups and containers are made from 100 per cent recycled plastic. Customers aren't required to wash them before returning, though it's always appreciated. Even individuals without smartphones can participate as they have a physical location on 3rd Avenue in Vancouver which provides cash refunds for those who choose not to access the program through an app.

Headquartered in Guelph, Friendlier operates on the same model and under the same responsible principles, delivering and sanitizing takeout cups and containers for foodservice operators across southwestern Ontario. Their lidded containers are responsibly sourced, microwave-friendly and dishwasher safe. Each container can be used up to 100 times, and when it reaches the end of its utility, Friendly ensures it is properly recycled.

Created to make the switch from single-use to reusable packaging easy, and to make a sustainable circular approach both affordable and convenient, these innovative Canadian companies understand that the longer resources are kept in circulation, the better. Recycling is good, but reuse is better. Keeping resources in circulation interrupts the linear extract-use-dispose cycle. Reuse also requires less energy and minimizes the operator's carbon footprint, resulting in a reduced environmental impact along several vectors. And of course, much less trash ends up in landfill.

Between them, Friendlier and Sharewares provide containers to many different types of foodservice operators, from bakeries, meat markets and restaurants to office buildings and cafeterias. The potential is there, but we have yet to see adequate support to help fund a trial that tests reusables at scale and in high-frequency environments or that addresses the social, logistical and economic barriers to a full conversion.

Connecting planet, people and profit

Striking a balance between everyday existing operations and making new circular changes may be daunting, but LEAF, believes that sourcing ingredients that produce minimal by-products, waste and end of life products are an easy way to incorporate circular processes. Looking at how items that arrive at the restaurant, from packaging, using post-consumer material, whether they were made in Canada or made with upcycled materials is an easy way to identify opportunities for change. LEAF offers an Approved Supplier Program where they certify foodservice suppliers who have a demonstrated commitment to the environment.

While the idea of participating in a more circular economy poses many benefits, the idea of implementing these ideas in an operating business may seem daunting. LEAF suggests small changes that incrementally add up to long-term savings. The easiest changes might be on the menu and focusing on food waste. Less food waste means less food needing to be sourced, less money spent on ingredients, less food that needs to be packaged in takeout containers.

Today's eco-conscious customers are equally interested in sustainability issues as they are in excellent eating experiences. Given the choice, they prefer to spend their dining dollars in restaurants that share their values. Employees are also more excited to work for a business which dedicates itself to sustainable initiatives and solutions. Adopting a circular system is a commitment to environmental amelioration that can a lso help ensure your own financial sustainability.

Spotlight on Maple Leaf Foods

Menu spoke with Maple Leaf Foods for key insights on their processes toward achieving carbon neutral status that would be relevant for Canadian restaurant operators. What were the drivers, the major challenges, the key learnings and the top innovations the company encountered and overcame throughout their journey.

MM Maple Leaf Foods is the world's first major carbon neutral food company. As a leader in this space, please briefly outline the company's sustainability journey and identify the key drivers behind the company's commitment to sustainable practices across its operations.

We began our sustainability journey in earnest in 2013 with a commitment to build a better future for the next generations. Drawing on this commitment, our next step was to establish a company-wide sustainability program and to set ambitious goals in four key sustainability areas:

(i) Better Food – Our dedication to food safety;
(ii) Better Care – Our passion for animal welfare;
(iii) Better Communities – Our mission to reduce food insecurity in Canada; and
(iv) Better Planet – Our efforts to create a more sustainable food system.

Since establishing our goals, we have been working hard to deliver on our commitments and have deeply integrated our sustainability pillars into our business and execution strategies. We have also designated members of our senior leadership team to be responsible for championing our purpose to Raise the Good in Food and our vision to become the most sustainable protein company on earth, while at the same time encouraging and empowering all our team members to contribute their ideas and actions to make an impact.

There have been several important milestones on our journey so far. One of these milestones was the establishment of the Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security in 2016. The Centre was created with a mission to cut food insecurity in Canada in half by 2030 by working with partner organizations and raising awareness for all.

One of our proudest achievements was becoming the world's first major carbon neutral food company in 2019, having been the first food company in Canada to set ambitious science-based targets (approved by the Science Based Targets Initiative) to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Our sustainability commitments are central to our business and guide us each step of the way. During the pandemic, it was more difficult to advance our sustainability initiatives at the pace we intended. As we look to accelerate our work this year, we have deployed a Sustainability Execution Task Force that is focused on near-term reduction and optimization opportunities to reduce our environmen-

"One of our proudest achievements was becoming the world's first major carbon neutral food company in 2019, having been the first food company in Canada to set ambitious science-based targets (approved by the Science Based Targets Initiative) to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions."

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tal footprint, and are exploring longer-term, high-impact greenhouse gas reduction technologies to help us on our path to meet our emission reduction targets. We continue to accelerate our work in anaerobic digestion and regenerative agriculture within our feed grain supply chain.

MM What were the major challenges, the key learnings and top innovations Maple Leaf Foods encountered and overcame throughout the process of achieving carbon neutral status?

Committing to carbon neutrality means that as an organization, we first developed an understanding of our entire carbon footprint within our operations. We now understand the emissions sources and impacts across all direct operations, as well as the emissions associated with our electricity consumption and our supply chain.

We also developed a robust offset procurement policy. Offsets allow us to take accountability and effectively neutralize our residual emissions that we are unable to avoid, reduce, or replace within our operations. Having a solid policy in place ensures we are sourcing credible, high-quality, and impactful offsets.

Along the way, some of our challenges included ensuring we had the right process and methodologies in place to align to the various methodologies that exist on how to account for our emissions. We really wanted to make sure we were "getting it right" and had a high degree of rigour. That is one of the reasons we also opted to get our emissions inventory audited by an independent third party.

MM How did Maple Leaf Foods prioritize which areas to focus on to achieve its goals? Which were the toughest processes to transform to hit the targets and why?

Maple Leaf Foods prioritizes the areas that we have the largest environmental impact: electricity, natural gas, water, solid waste and food waste, most of which are connected to our greenhouse gases. We have set ambitious targets to reduce our electricity intensity (2014 baseline), natural gas intensity (2014 baseline), water intensity (2014 baseline), solid waste intensity (2015 baseline), and food waste intensity (2016 baseline) by 50 per cent by 2025, as well as the emissions associated our direct operations and electricity consumption by 30 per cent by 2030 and our supply chain emissions intensity by 30 per cent by 2030 (2018 baseline).

In the past few years, we have implemented several initiatives across our operations that have led to gradual reductions in our environmental impact including, a national LED lighting retrofit program, equipment efficiency and optimization upgrades, ammonia heat recovery and wasted heat recovery systems, condensing economizers for boilers, composting and recycling programs, control measures and closed-loop systems for water use and improvements to storage, handling and employee training to reduce food waste.

> "We are also committed to re-evaluating and re-prioritizing our approach to environmental sustainability to align with latest evolving climate science. We are focused on longer-term, high-impact environmental projects that will have the greatest impact on our performance."

As a Company dedicated to growth and expansion, we understand there will be fluctuations in our year-over-year environmental performance depending on the timing of new construction projects and longer-term transformational environmental projects. We are also committed to re-evaluating and re-prioritizing our approach to environmental sustainability to align with latest evolving climate science. We are focused on longer-term, high-impact environmental projects that will have the greatest impact on our performance.

Some of the challenges we face are the length of time that high-impact, larger scale projects like anaerobic digestion or regenerative agriculture take to finance, fully implement and commercialize. As a result of these challenges, together with delays on some initiatives due to the pandemic and post-pandemic supply chain challenges, it might take us longer to meet our goals than we'd originally expected.

MM Most people agree that sustainability is a priority; however, the economics remain the greatest obstacle to change. How should foodservice companies think about introducing circularity to company processes? What operational areas did Maple Leaf Foods find to be the most easily adapted? Which were most profitable and how?

We believe that sustainability, shared value and company profitability are not at odds with each other. As part of our goal to reduce our environmental footprint, we've had to find lots of opportunities to reduce our utilities consumption. Over the long run these savings add up and the planet benefits too.

When we became carbon neutral, Maple Leaf Foods developed an 'internal price on carbon.' Each year, we invest in offsets to neutralize our emissions and we now have a "price tag" on carbon. When new capital projects are evaluated, we consider this price on carbon in the overall evaluation. For example, if electrifying a process and moving away from fossil fuels in our facility will reduce X amount of CO_2, this will act as a cost savings and not require investment in additional offsets to neutralize those emissions, thereby making that capital project more environmentally friendly and leading to more of these types of investments!

The other side of this is the commercial aspect. We believe that doing what's right for the environment and society also creates the ability for us to become stronger strategic partners to our customers. Increasingly, having robust sustainability plans and commitments are becoming table stakes, so whether we are providing products to a business, or you are providing a product/service to a guest at a restaurant, being a company that is leading and acting in the fight against climate change and other sustainability imperatives becomes an invitation for them to patronize your business. People want to support companies that are taking accountability and investing in our collective futures.

Here's a strong example of circularity in our operations—in our pursuit to reduce solid

waste and divert it from landfill, we've partnered with a local company that takes organic waste from some of our manufacturing facilities and converts that waste, through anaerobic digestion, into renewable energy and organic fertilizer. To bring this closer to our own operations, we are exploring the feasibility of investing in our own digestors as well.

In 2022, Maple Leaf Foods published its first integrated annual report. Please explain the integrated approach to conceptualizing and operationalizing the core business, corporate sustainability and the company's broader business outlook and strategy.

Maple Leaf Food's evolution to an integrated report better reflects the integrated nature of our business and shows the interconnectivity between our efforts, our performance and our business strategy. Publishing an integrated report places a greater focus on shared value and sustainability, concepts that are now woven into the fabric of our business. We have been applying an integrated thinking approach to our decision-making and operationalization for many years and continue to identify ways to break down silos within our business.

Our Maple Leaf Blueprint demonstrates the integrated nature of our business strategy on a page. It defines our purpose, to Raise the Good in Food. **Raise** means to move forward and constantly improve. **The Good in Food** represents everything that is good about our business including how our food is made, to what's in the food and what that means to the people that consume it and how it impacts society and the environment. Our purpose is why we exist as an organization.

The Maple Leaf Blueprint also defines our vision, which is to be the most sustainable protein company on earth. Our purpose and vision are inherently connected to and activated through our four strategic sustainability pillars: Better Food, Better Care, Better Communities, Better Planet and our six shared value strategies: Lead in Sustainability, Eliminate Waste, Broaden our Reach, Embrace a Digital Future, Invest in our Brands, and Invest in our People.

Ultimately, strategizing, operationalizing and working cross-functionally to deliver against our sustainability pillars and shared value strategies are how we will thrive as a business and create the greatest value for our stakeholders.

How has the journey to carbon neutrality enriched the company? Has it reduced friction/improved culture/returned new or accelerated profits?

Our people and other stakeholders have shared positive reactions and sentiments to our achievement of carbon neutrality. Being the world's first major carbon neutral food company is embedded into our company culture and our people take pride in working for a company that makes sustainability and responsible business practices a priority.

We have a "Carbon Zero – made by a Carbon Neutral Company™" logo on the packaging of some of our leading brands, including Maple Leaf®, Greenfield Natural Meat Co.™, Lightlife Foods® and Field Roast Grain Meat Co.™ so that consumers know that they are making a responsible choice buying a product made by a company that cares about the planet. A stand-out achievement is in our sustainable meats business, and specifically Greenfield Natural Meat Co.™, where we marked seven consecutive years of delivering quarter-over-quarter growth – an impressive track record that is completely aligned with our vision to be the most sustainable protein company on earth.

Having invested in and achieved a goal of this significance, are you able to share three bottom-line benefits of building circular economies that would be applicable to restaurants or foodservice businesses?

Three bottom-line benefits of building circularity within your business are: environmental impact reductions, monetary value and increased reputation with a competitive edge. The idea of circularity is to create sustainable production and consumption practices that reduce resource use, waste, and ecological harm by employing a circularity model rather than a linear one. Identification of opportunities to incorporate circularity into practices and products is a great way to achieve targets and reduce environmental impact. Reductions in sourced material, consumption and disposal lead to reductions in costs.

The circular economy is changing the game for businesses and brands as well. As society continues to be concerned about climate change and environmental protection, the public positively views companies that choose sustainable solutions. Embracing the circular economy can significantly improve a brand's image and reputation while increasing its value.

"Three bottom-line benefits of building circularity within your business are: environmental impact reductions, monetary value and increased reputation with a competitive edge."

ROBERT SPENCER HOSPITALITY:

Engineering Circularity & Resilience Into Farm-to-Table Operations

Chef & Proprietor: Paul Shufelt | Groupex member since: before 2015 | Edmonton, Alberta



Edmonton-based restaurant group Robert Spencer Hospitality is the brainchild of founder Chef Paul Shufelt. It is also an impressive example of how engineered, intentional circular economies can work within a restaurant enterprise.

Shufelt has been in the restaurant industry for nearly 30 years and says he fell in love with the meritocratic culture of restaurants during his first gig as a dishwasher in highschool. He enrolled in college to study engineering, but soon realized he "didn't love it" and left for the Canmore-Banff area to work at a golf course and then at Buffalo Mountain Lodge. "That's when I started to take the craft seriously," Shufelt shares. "I applied for my apprenticeship and, when I graduated, I pursued an opportunity in Switzerland, where I combined the foundational elements of what I'd learned at school and in the business up to that point. When I returned, I thought I'd be in Edmonton for a few months, but that was in 2002, so..."

Shufelt worked with an Edmonton restaurant group for nearly a decade, opening restaurants, working as corporate chef and quickly becoming a partner. He credits this chapter of his career with teaching him the ins and outs of a kitchen and a restaurant which gave him the right mindset for running a successful business. "Eventually, I grew tired of being a passenger on someone else's ride," Shufelt explains. "I signed a lease in 2015 and started working on Workshop Eatery. We wanted to be hyper-seasonal and offer from-scratch cooking—cooking "like mom used to" and making preserves and freezing ingredients at peak to use during the winter."



Warm, welcoming and unpretentious, Workshop Eatery opened in November of 2015, and by its second year, Shufelt started to look around for his next opportunity. Responsible use is a large part of his philosophy, so he found ways to work with local farmers and to use the whole animal within the restaurant. "We were doing that with pork, poultry and duck, but we couldn't achieve that with our beef program because the restaurant concept lent itself to the nicer, quality cuts and less well to the grind and stewing meat. That's where the concept for Woodshed Burgers came from. We wanted to be able to go to farmers and buy the whole animal and use it all. We worked with Jeff Nonay at Lakeside Farmstead and proudly serve his beef. We wanted to grow that relationship and serve his burgers. It was also a lot of fun for me. Workshop is more finessed dining, whereas Woodshed is more what a chef might eat on his way home — more casual, creative, indulgent and fun."







Woodshed Burgers opened in the summer of 2019, followed by a partnership with the City of Edmonton to take over three local golf course restaurants. Then, like everyone else, they started to hear rumbles of something called "coronavirus" and by March, they were scrambling. Woodshed Burgers enjoyed success with a hard pivot to delivery, and for awhile Shufelt converted Workshop Eatery to a Woodshed Burgers location. Based on success with the takeout and delivery model at that location, Shufelt signed a new lease for a second, Woodshed Burgers in Edmonton's South side. "We went from about 40 employees to 120 in roughly 90 days," Shufelt recalls.

Building a circular economy across his growing restaurant group, he then opened Hayloft Steak & Fish in March of 2022. "Hayloft really allows us to do that whole animal use program under one roof and a different style of steakhouse to Edmonton as well. We don't have a prime rib, a tenderloin or striploin every night; we have select cuts that change by the day. We believe in using the whole animal. We might have some tenderloin or a ribeye, but I just put in a Texas smoked brisket, so we have different cuts you might not see every day. Our trim cuts are used at Woodshed Burgers and so we've really taken things to the next level. We render our fat to make tallow candles for the tables and we also use that tallow to do our french fries in the deep fryer. We've taken on the challenge of using as much of the animal as we possibly can."

Ethical cooking and close relationships with farmers and suppliers are important to Shufelt and he notes that while there are cost savings, there is also a lot of work in maintaining his system. "We have a direct line to Jeff, who raises our beef, and there's an elaborate spreadsheet we work on between our businesses. We'll have anywhere from five to eight animals on the go at a given time. It's been a huge process, but I sleep well at night knowing we're good partners to the farmers and we're being responsible stewards of the products we use. They're being managed as efficiently as possible and they're not going to waste. There is a responsibility on the restaurant side to do as little harm as possible and waste as little as possible. I have a daughter, and I need to be part of that solution."

Shufelt nurtures direct relationships with all of his suppliers and farmers and has grown as an entrepreneur and a culinarian. "I want them to be able to call me if they have 200 pounds of weird-looking carrots that taste amazing but won't sell at the market. I'll find a use for them—pickle them or make soup. We work together and help each other. We just started working with a bison farmer, and they've never had a restaurant take a whole animal. Many of these "suppliers" are my friends. We're working together, sharing information and skills instead of just ordering and providing product."

Shufelt acknowledges that even with their vast garden beds and direct relationships with local farmers for proteins and produce, Robert Spencer Hospitality group of restaurants also relies on strong relationships with conventional restaurant suppliers. Shufelt credits the organization with giving smaller operations cost saving opportunities via their rebate program that facilitate investment in other areas of their business. "Groupex really benefits small businesses like us. From our linens, our dish chemicals, payment terminals, garbage collection services, they go out and do a lot of hard work to make it affordable for the small guys to source products and services at prices comparable to larger organizations. That allows us to keep doing what we're doing and make better choices in other areas of our business, like the beef and pork programs."

Shufelt joined the Groupex Canada board of directors in 2022 to represent the perspective of independent restaurants. "We're a little bit different, and Groupex wanted that different opinion. I'm happy to help them out so they can keep doing the good work they're doing and grow and evolve. It's important to me to be part of the solution and contribute to making things better and more manageable for smaller restaurants. I'm as frugal as they come. To me, it's not about not spending money, it's about spending money wisely. I can't think of a group or purchase that's more affordable than joining Restaurants Canada and taking part in Groupex to redeem the benefits. My annual dues are covered in the first two weeks of rebates."

groupex CANADA

Established in 1984 by a small group of independent restaurants, today, Groupex is the largest foodservice account in Canada with some of the leading branded suppliers such as Pepsico, Diversey, Canada Bread and Gordon Food Service. Groupex uses the buying power of its national membership base to negotiate savings on essential restaurant supplies and services. Members save thousands of dollars on beverages, food, operational and financial programs.

Learn more at:
groupex.com

The Federal Single-Use Plastics Ban:

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

In June 2022, the federal government announced a ban on single-use plastics in restaurants and retail. Simultaneously, provinces and even some municipalities have been introducing their own stewardship regulations and bylaws banning plastic. This patchwork of regulations means foodservice operators need to keep informed to stay compliant.

The Single-Use Plastic Prohibition Regulations (SUPPR) came into effect on December 20, 2022, and prohibits the manufacture, import and sale of the following six single-use plastic items:

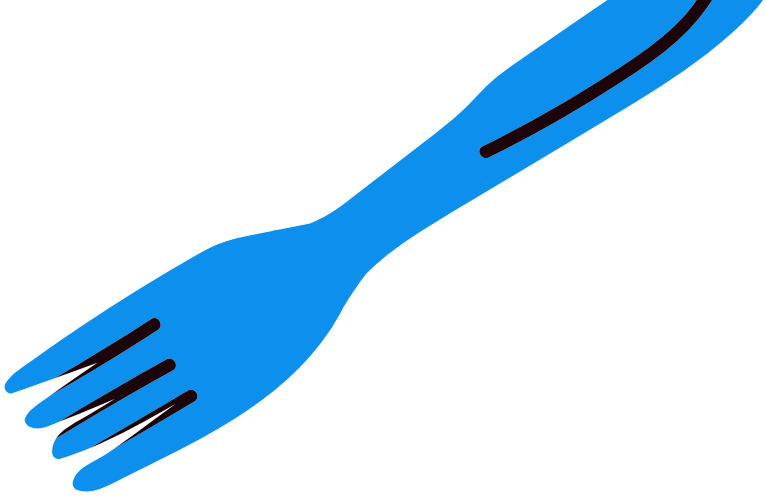
1. Checkout bags
2. Cutlery
3. Ring carriers (for drinks)
4. Straws
5. Beverage stir sticks
6. Foodservice ware and packaging made from or containing specific plastics in the shape of clamshell containers, lidded containers, cartons, cups, plates and bowls and used for serving or transporting prepared food or drinks (i.e., not requiring further cooking or preparation)



THE TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPPR

Single-use plastic item	Manufacture and import for sale in Canada	Sale (e.g., sale, offer for sale, lease, supply)	Manufacture, import and sale for export
Checkout bags, cutlery, straws, foodservice ware, stir sticks, straws*	December 20, 2022 (passed)	December 20, 2023	December 20, 2025
Ring carriers	June 20, 2023 (passed)	June 20, 2024	December 20, 2025
Flexible straws packaged with beverage container	N/A	June 20, 2024	December 20, 2025

**Single-use plastic flexible straws that are not packaged with beverage containers are excluded under certain conditions.*



While the SUPPR applies across Canada, there are still differences between jurisdictions as many provinces, territories and municipalities have their own regulations regarding single-use plastics.

Regulations by Jurisdiction

BRITISH COLUMBIA:

Recently announced regulation as part of Clean BC Action Plan includes:

- Ban on all plastic checkout bags
- Fee to be charged on paper and new reusable checkout bags
- Prohibition on the automatic distribution of foodservice packaging made from polystyrene foam, PVC or compostable plastic
- Ban on all packaging made from oxo-degradable plastic.

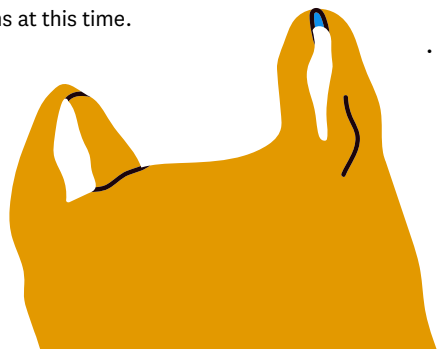
The regulation was announced in July and will come into effect in December 2023.

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR:

Amendments to the *Environmental Protection Act Regulations* banned all single-use plastic bags.

NOVA SCOTIA:

The *Nova Scotia Plastic Bags Reduction Act* banned all businesses from providing single-use plastic shopping bags, subject to certain exemptions. The government has the authority to regulate other "single-use products" as well but there are no further regulations at this time.



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND:

The *Plastic Bag Reduction Act* prohibits businesses from providing plastic checkout bags to customers. An Act to Amend the Plastic Bag Reduction Act eliminates the mandatory $0.15 fee for paper checkout bags, but retains the minimum $1 fee for reusable bags.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES:

Regulations under the **Waste Reduction Recovery Act** banned single-use retail bags (definition captures single-use plastic and paper bags).

- Exemptions: prescription drug bags, take-out food bags and produce bags.

The program charges a fee of $0.25 per bag on all non-reusable plastic, paper, and biodegradable bags (subject to several exemptions) with a fee transferred to an Environmental Fund.

YUKON:

The *Reduction of Single-Use Bags Regulation* prohibits the supply of new single-use bags (definition captures single-use plastic and paper bags).

Exemptions: prescription drug bags, take-out food bags and produce bags.

What This Means for Many Operators:

- Replacing plastics with non-plastic equivalents for certain essential products.
- Using wood, paper and moulded pulp fibre options to replace single-use plastic cutlery, stir sticks and straws.
- Using more recyclable plastic alternatives (not prohibited in SUPPR), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), high-density polyethylene or polypropylene and strawless lids for cold drinks.
- Exploring options like reusable containers for takeout and delivery meals.

There are alternatives to single-use plastic explored in this edition of Menu magazine, and for Restaurant Canada members, taking advantage of Groupex may help offset some of the costs associated with switching to single-use plastic alternatives.



For more information, visit the Resources section of Restaurants Canada's website to download the Decoding Canada's Plastic Regulations for Foodservice Businesses toolkit.



Big Little Ideas

For Earls, Sustainability is All About the Journey

MENU in conversation with Claudia Vorlaufer, Chief Procurement & Supply Chain Officer, Kimberley Hume, Senior Interior Designer and Leanne Babcook, Intermediate Interior Designer at Earls Restaurant Group

The first Earls restaurant opened in Edmonton in 1982. Since then, Earls has managed to grow into an empire without losing its foundational values of family and community. Each location is a unique reflection of the community it serves.

When we meet with members of the Earls Environmental Committee, It's clear that engagement and belonging are successful components of the restaurant group's culture.

Claudia Vorlaufer, Chief Procurement and Supply Chain Officer has been with Earls for 19 years and summarizes the Earls operating culture and thinking that led to the creation of the committee. "As an organization, I think part of Earls' fabric is about always trying to do better. When we know better, we do better. We began to address issues like trans fats earlier than others, but we didn't necessarily feel the need to talk about it because we did it because it was the right thing to do, not a promotional opportunity. Sustainability has been an aspect of our business that has always been there, but not with consistency or as a true lens for the organization. It has always landed in procurement and supply chain in some way or another, from tracking energy consumption working with BC Hydro or Fortis or trying to compost more and reduce waste. We've had multiple programs in play. I think what the Earl's Environmental Committee has been formed to do is help create a new lens through which we make decisions for the company."

The team notes that timing played a large role in earning the attention and momentum of the leadership and extended team. "It took us a good eight months to get to a place where we could bring our plan forward to our executive group in order to create our first Business Resource Group (BRG)," Kimberley Hume, Senior Interior Designer, recalls. "Timing was so key. As Claudia said, environmentalism has always occurred at Earls, but it became apparent as we went on this journey that environmental sustainability was living mainly with individuals who had passion for it or within a particular department where it was ingrained in the work they do, like Claudia's. Over my nine years at Earls, I've been part of several groups that never really gained traction be-



cause the timing wasn't right, but now it's part of the natural growth and evolution of Earls as a company."

Having reached a point of clarity and resolve around its social and people impact, it was a natural and intuitive evolution for the company to broaden its focus on the planet and environment. Hume also acknowledges that highly visible and galvanizing social justice incidents and movements including the murder of George Floyd and the pandemic compounded the urgency of culture-impacting ideas and initiatives. "It felt that everything that happened around us at that time set us, as a company, down a path where we're more mobilized to create social equity, have these conversations and formalize employee resource groups," says Hume. "We all cared about these things before, but now we're mobilized, organized and talking about them. We've assembled groups and we're so much more intentional and loud about it. Including everyone in the conversation has been really key for us."

Coincidentally, the seeds of Earls successful approach to ingesting and centring values-based operational thinking were sown during the pandemic. Hume had been part of the COVID-19 reopening committee which had representatives from every Earls department. "We'd never had to do this before, so we asked ourselves as a group, "How do we reopen restaurants?" and "How do we make sure people are safe?" The value we got from bringing unique people and perspectives together was so key and gave us a clear and effective model we could adapt for this work."

Earls head office staff worked in an inter-disciplinary fashion to develop ways to keep the business running and as many staff as possible on the payroll. "When the going gets tough, we get creative…really creative," Vorlaufer says. "We pivoted the business into grocery stores and we've now launched products into retail for the first time ever. We had these small subcommittees that met almost daily to figure out where and how we needed to adapt. At one point, one of our suppliers had about 122 cases of chopped romaine lettuce in BC they were going to have to discard because there were no buyers. They asked if we could do anything with it, and we gave each of our customers a free Caesar salad. It's a part of the Earls spirit to take a tough or tricky situation and find a way to grow from the experience. That time was so tough for the industry, but it really had us focus on our people and what's important.There were so many social issues on the frontburner at that time, but those led to the birth of this initiative."

The formal design of the committee and its proximity to established business processes and rhythms has been central to its success and effectiveness. Unlike grassroots or "fringe" employee projects, the model was the same as any other priority business initiative. "It's not just people with passion pursuing a goal," says Vorlaufer. "What's the difference between an Employee Resource Group (ERG) and a Business Resource Group (BRG)? A BRG is fueled by business initiatives and this is where it needs to live because where it sometimes dies is when the implications to the viability of the organization exceeds the potential positive impact. Sustainability is a very broad topic that has to encompass people, prosperity and planet. Our success came from timing, our model and gaining full alignment from the executive team. It was a gap that needed to be filled, and here we are today."

As a future-committed company, Earls has prioritized sustainability and social impact, moving them from "nice-to-haves" or "extras" to core business endeavours. Hume and Leanne Babcook, Intermediate Interior Designer, approached the COO in search of an executive sponsor, and Vorlaufer was a natural fit. "We had a couple of other founding members," Hume recalls, "but the first body of work was determining how to form the group and getting the buy-in from the entire executive team to provide representatives from every part of our organization. That alone was the first year of our work, but by the time we got to the presentation stage, support was unanimous."

The BRG had the green light, but where to focus their efforts and what to tackle first? They needed to recruit like-minded new members from across the Earls enterprise, so they started to seed the idea with a positive "whisper campaign". "There was a lead-up to actually creating the committee," Babcook says. "As we started to gain a little more momentum and gather members from each department, the chatter throughout the office started to get people really excited and I think that's one of the reasons it was so easy to attract other members. The same approach has brought in ideas from other people that

Earls



Claudia Vorlaufer



Kimberley Hume



Leanne Babcook



have led to the projects we're working on now and hope to work on in the future."

From the outset, the team recognized the risk of getting lost and losing momentum in "big work" or chasing the massive reporting that overshadows the real, impactful work. The team wanted to make an impact in every Earls restaurant, but where to start?

Hume and Babcook had attended a Habitat for Humanity session during Design Week on "unbuilding" in the restaurant industry, learning how to decrease waste in construction design, processes and materials. "It really inspired us," says Hume. "It set us on the path of creating this team made up of people from every part of our company."



With five new stores opening this year, the committee embraced the opportunity to assess their development and construction practices around waste management and reduction and recycling. "When we get our merchandising items into the new store, we are very intentional about all of the packaging materials," says Hume. "We reuse or recycle not just the cardboard boxes, but the plastic and other packaging within them. We reuse the difficult-to-recycle packaging materials in our planters and pots so, when you see our beautiful foliage or faux or even real trees, know that the planter is full of styrofoam underneath. We try and divert as much of that waste as possible and we bring in experts to recycle any soft plastics and foams that can't be re-used on site. It's easy to recycle the cardboard and just put the plastic in the garbage—we're trying to re-use or recycle every single piece of waste we're responsible for."

The committee also reviews supplier contracts and sets firm expectations with general contractors on how waste should be managed on construction sites. "You always end up ordering a certain amount of extra tiles or material to make sure there's enough for cutting and matching, but it's tragic when you see full tiles in a trash bin," Hume notes. "We're exploring the possibilities and starting to audit and get tighter on our sites. "Making the easy things hard" has been a kind of a new catchphrase for me, in terms of how to start thinking about these things."

Since the inauguration of the committee and their early projects, the team has been regularly receiving calls from across the organization with ideas on where they could apply the same critical thinking to improve sustainability across not only operations, but the supply chain. Earls employees were realizing the company had sufficient scale to influence supplier packaging design, beginning with their oyster cups. "Our oyster cups arrive individually packaged, but we don't need them to be," says Vorlaufer. "Every single piece of cutlery we order comes in its own wrapper. I would get all of these random emails from stores pointing out ways we could reduce packaging. We've always had a piece in our procurement to supply chain RFP documents that identifies environmental considerations. It essentially says, "Hey, if we're down to two suppliers with comparable programs, we're going to lean toward the one that is more environmentally responsible and does more for the planet. Now, looking at the packaging is part of our primary process. We've just introduced a new napkin at our stores. It's as compostable as the previous one, but we'll be using less because they're made of a better fibre. The supplier was packing them in smaller units than we'd previously been receiving, which would have meant more shipping and more packaging to do that.
So, we went back to the supplier and asked that they pack them in larger boxes to reduce the waste around the product. We're really focused on using less from beginning to end."

Getting in on the ground floor of major organizational sourcing decisions is another important success factor, a lesson the resource group members recently learned. Earls was in the midst of making a significant sourcing change and, though the team jumped at the chance to research alternatives and made a presentation, it came too late to implement. "It was disappointing for the committee," Vorlaufer admits, "but we know this is not easy work. The work we did, while it came too late in this instance, has led to positive changes to our process. Getting involved at the right time and having representation from across the organization makes a huge difference."



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There is no plan on the horizon to market the committee or its efforts to consumers — for now, this work is strictly internal and connected to the people and planet components of the business strategy. There's also no overarching profitability KPI on the committee's work at this time. Vorlaufer acknowledges environmental sustainability initiatives often cost money before they return dividends. "If you save the right amount of money, it gives you money to spend on other things. What we're trying to do is find the right balance. We are not interested in greenwashing or mislabeling projects when the motivation is actually profit from the start. I believe everything in business has to have an ROI, but that ROI does not always have to be profit."



Later this year, the team plans to conduct a full audit, heading down to one of the stores to receive and unpack an entire order to explore additional opportunities to reduce packaging waste. While this may sound like a chore to some, the team's enthusiasm is palpable and highlights the value and effect of this work on the Earls workplace culture. Participation and the incremental success of these early sustainability-focused projects has increased job satisfaction for the founding committee members. "The amount of inspiration, pride and even joy I feel leaving our quarterly committee meetings fuels me," says Hume. "I have a very cool job as a designer, but working at a place that is committed to something greater than ourselves fuels a new level of passion for me. I think it's a no-brainer that there's real benefit to the company in this work. There's been a hunger for it, and people's happiness matters. People want to work for a company that cares about their impact and that cares about happiness. People want to work at a place that cares about those things and will stay at a place that cares about those things."

Babcook notes that a large number of Earls' hourly partners are members of Gen Z, a demographic with strong environmental values. "The younger generation is looking to work with companies with values that align with what they truly believe in. It's inevitable that environmental sustainability is going to be something potential employees are looking at when they're looking for work. That's not necessarily a huge driver behind the work we're doing, but it's definitely something we've thought about. Being Gen Z myself, I think it's a really cool opportunity."

Having the opportunity to engage with different people and departments has expanded Babcook's perspective within the company. "I really love getting on calls with the whole committee and interacting with people in different



"...working at a place that is committed to something greater than ourselves fuels a new level of passion for me..."



departments to catch up on what they're working on. Just getting a view into their day-to-day makes a difference to my own work."

As a senior executive, Vorlaufer acknowledges that this work has given her a new lens on sourcing and procurement. She recalls a recent business review meeting with a buyer where there'd been discussion around using a larger pack size for avocados and they were trying all these things. I was sitting there thinking, "Oh wow, so we're using a bigger box but because of that decision, we're using the same box that was used at source, so we're not bringing a new, virgin box into the mix anymore. Not only is this great in terms of a bigger pack size, but there's also a further opportunity to reuse packaging from the start of this product's journey instead of recycling the original box and repacking the avocados into new, smaller boxes with pretty branding on them.
I wouldn't have had that lens before. That's the impact."

People and companies can be overwhelmed by the "big stuff,", Vorlaufer admits. "Some people think that to have an environmental sustainability program you need all this big stuff, and we'll absolutely get there. But we've started with learning how to make change and start a movement right now. That's what's made everyone excited. It's made it come to life and it feels really purposeful. What we're uncovering is that there are so many close-by opportunities and simple things we can do every day that will have a significant effect on how we show up on recycling and using less. There's so much low-hanging fruit."

Sharing Earls' journey toward embedding sustainability thinking into their operations with the industry at large is important to the committee members. "We all have so much to learn in this space, says Vorlaufer. "At Earls, when we know better, we do better; we're always evolving. We want to share our learnings with others in the industry because let's face it, aspects of our industry are inherently wasteful and we have such a huge opportunity to reduce our wasteful practices. Gathering different perspectives and ideas has generated real ingenuity and new thinking. We can do that as an industry."

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WE ARE WHAT (AND WHERE) WE EAT.



Consumer attitudes toward animal care and welfare are changing minds and menus. How to help understand the shift and how to respond to growing consumer interest and questions about how the foods we love are grown, raised and produced.

According to the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity's 2022 Public Trust Research Report[1], most Canadians say they are comfortable consuming animal products, but with a caveat: they should be humanely raised.

The same report notes that roughly four out of 10 (38 per cent) Canadians said they were, "concerned about the humane treatment of farm animals," and six out of 10 (59 per cent) strongly agree that "If farm animals are treated decently and humanely, I have no problem consuming meat, milk and eggs." Overall, 34 per cent of consumers strongly agreed that Canadian meat, milk and eggs are derived from humanely treated animals, an increase of nine percentage points from the organization's 2021 research report. This is a significant increase; however, it is also clear the topic of animal welfare is polarizing, with entrenched beliefs on both sides.

A 2023 Bryant Research study[2] on consumer attitudes toward cage-free eggs in Canada revealed that transparency about the welfare of the animal products they purchase and consume matters, with 87 per cent agreeing "stores and restaurants should be transparent about the types of eggs they use in their supply chains." As an indicator of the general sentiment, 79 per cent said "grocery stores and restaurants should commit to banning cage-sourced eggs altogether."

While ethical sourcing can increase menu costs, the study also suggests consumers accept higher costs for conscientiously sourced products, with 81 per cent saying they would be "more likely to purchase from outlets committed to sourcing only cage-free eggs," and 80 per cent stating "grocery stores and restaurants should adopt animal welfare standards that would improve life for chickens in meat supply chains."

In this climate, the public may expect restaurateurs, chefs, restaurant brands and other foodservice leaders are some of the most discerning and influential consumers. As professionals, surely, we stand behind not only the sensory qualities of the food (the "deliciousness scale") on the plates we serve, but also the ethics of agricultural practices and menu selection that are adding new and important dimension to menu creation and foodservice brands. Consumer expectations are changing, and there is growing expectation restaurants have "vetted" their supply chain to provide humanely produced proteins and dairy products. MENU went to the sources to provide nuanced perspectives on the big question of animal welfare and how it translates to the plate and to profit.

[1] *Canadian Centre for Food Integrity, 2022 Public Trust Research, (Guelph: Canadian Centre for Food Integrity, 2022) at 17.*

[2] *Bryant Research, Canadians Support an End to Cage Confinement for Egg-Laying Hens (June 2023), online: Bryant Research <https://bryantresearch.co.uk/insight-items/end-cage-confinement/>*

HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL CANADA

PERSPECTIVE: THE HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL/CANADA

Humane Society International/Canada (HSI/Canada) works in more than 50 countries on education, advocacy, science and research related to animal care and welfare. One of their largest campaigns is focused on ending the international dog meat industry. They rescue, rehabilitate and rehome farmed canines in countries around the world, finding them forever homes through local humane societies and shelters, which operate in a separate, but complementary manner.

When it comes to farm animal welfare, Riana Topan, senior campaign manager, describes HSI/Canada's scope: "We are not a vegan advocacy organization. We advocate for better standards for farm animals, and we advocate for more alternative, animal-free food options. We work with food companies on their animal welfare policies as well as universities and institutions on serving more plant-based options because there's so much demand."

While Canada's Criminal Code bans animal cruelty, Topan notes that many consumers are surprised to learn there are virtually no laws in Canada that govern how farm animals are treated. "The federal government regulates animal slaughter and animal transportation—two things that happen after animals leave the farm," Topan points out. "There are provincial animal cruelty laws, but there are often exceptions written into those laws for generally accepted agricultural practices. There is recognition that inherently there will be some animal cruelty written into the system."

The National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) is comprised of a consortium of stakeholders including commodity groups, industry advisors and several animal welfare groups that develop Canada's *Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals* on a consensus basis. The NFACC library includes distinct *Codes of Practice* for a range of farmed animals from dairy cattle and poultry to mink and salmonids.

HSI/Canada does not sit on the NFACC, but they do participate in consultations and provide research and guidance on the *Codes of Practice*, preferring to advocate for strong, legally enforceable legislation. "The *Codes of Practice* are supposed to govern how animals are treated on farms. But they are not laws. They are enforced by the industries that write them, and there is no legal obligation for a farmer to follow them. This is why there's so much emphasis on processors, retailers and restaurants. We rely on them heavily to make sure that what's happening in their supply chain is humane. Restaurants have a really big role to play."

"Adopting sourcing policies that eliminate some of the worst forms of animal cruelty is a strong first step operators can take," Topan says. "The key issues we recommend as a starting point in developing a good animal welfare policy are eliminating confinement systems in egg and pork production and improving conditions for chickens raised for meat. A lot of restaurants have already moved to cage-free eggs, which is a strong first step to improve the physical and psychological welfare of laying hens. In the pork industry, gestation crates confine pregnant sows for months. Moving to cage-free eggs and pork is a positive, as is considering the *Better Chicken Commitment*."

The *Better Chicken Commitment* (BCC) is a chicken welfare policy based on science and focused on addressing issues related to fast-growth, high-yield breeding and chicken housing, stocking density and slaughter practices. A&W Canada, Campbell's, McDonald's, 241 Pizza, Aramark, Boston Pizza, Chipotle, Coffee Time, Compass Group Canada, Denny's, Harvey's, The Keg, Kellogg's, Nestle, Pita Pit, Sodexo, Starbucks, Subway and Swiss Chalet have all committed to varying levels of BCC compliance for their Canadian broiler supply.

Topan encourages operators to create direct relationships with suppliers and to visit farms to learn more about their animal welfare practices. "A lot of companies will do site visits to understand the reality on the ground—'where is this food coming from? What does the system look like? ' Just knowing the questions to ask can be helpful in representing the products you serve. That's also where organizations such as ours come in. Restaurant owners are busy, and we can help provide information on what to look for."

FARM ANIMAL WELFARE – WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Developed by Humane Society International's resident farm animal welfare scientist, the following guidelines are recommended to ensure better treatment of farmed animals. If the answer to any of the below criteria is "No," operators have the option of looking for an alternative supplier or requesting their supplier make changes.

1. **Non-Confinement:** Are animals such as laying hens, gestating pigs (sows) and calves raised for veal are not confined in cages or crates?
2. **Higher Welfare:** Do we use farms or suppliers with higher welfare breeds of chicken that grow more slowly and have been tested by the University of Guelph and approved by the Global Animal Partnership?
3. **Adequate Pain Relief for Farm Procedures:** Are animals tail docked, castrated, debeaked, dehorned or disbudded without adequate pain relief (analgesia)?
4. **Humane Slaughter:** Is controlled atmosphere stunning used when slaughtering chickens and is CO_2 stunning for pigs avoided?
5. **Animal Welfare Certification:** Are suppliers certified by Humane Farm Animal Care or the Global Animal Partnership?



As increasing numbers of consumers demand information on food origins and farming practices, communication of progressive animal welfare and sourcing policies can help qualify menu prices and promote shared values. "This is a topic that really matters to people," says Topan. "If you've made a commitment to eliminate cruelty in your supply chain, you should identify your targets and share your progress toward them with customers on your website, in your annual report or on social media."

With Gen Z prioritizing sustainable development as a core demographic value, there's little debate animal welfare will continue to increase as an important issue in the foodservice sector. As more foodservice companies seek ways to transition their menus to feature best-practice based offerings, HSI/Canada can help, Topan explains. "We have a program called Forward Food that works with the foodservice industry on making plants a bigger part of their menus, offering everything from recipes to tips for success. In a fast-food setting where chicken nuggets and tenders and fries are core, a plant-based meat might make sense. KFC has a plant-based chicken for example, that's in line with the food they already serve. A place that does a lot of scratch cooking might do something more creative with legumes, vegetables or whole grains. There's so much out there and so many ingredients that aren't used regularly – so many colours, flavours and textures. No matter how someone labels their dietary habits, what's important to remember is that there's benefit to everyone for eating this way. If we don't address our food system, we're facing a climate catastrophe. It's about making a better, more sustainable food system for people and for animals that is appealing to everyone. It's about good food on the menu that's rich in plant-based ingredients and that may have responsibly sourced animal protein. We want to move people away from adding a few plant-based items to draw in vegans and toward committing to menus that offer a range of delicious, planet-forward dishes that align with a plant-based, plant-rich or flexitarian diet. Operators will have the business earned from that approach and can save money by relying on lower-cost ingredients."

Topan clarifies the goal of HSI/Canada is not only to protect and improve the welfare of farm animals, but to also help the food industry move towards higher-welfare production. When the cost and effort required to raise an animal well is better understood and valued economically, animals, farmers and restaurants win. Topan also acknowledges the global demand for meat is rising. Topan states this is not environmentally sustainable. "The more animals you have in the system, the harder it is to ensure good animal welfare. By reducing the number of animals in the food system it also means the animals that remain there can experience a better quality of life. It's a two-pronged approach. We're here to make things better and more sustainable for everyone."

As consumer demand for customization grows, Topan suggests leaning in by using animal-based proteins and products as options, rather than core ingredients. "If the base is plant-based by default, customers can add meat options as they like, which allows restaurants to cater to their customers' diets and manage bottom lines and demonstrate that they're a responsible business. Consumers are looking for flexibility more than ever and it's starting to be on the radar of financial organizations and investors."



PERSPECTIVE: MAPLE LEAF FOODS

Maple Leaf Foods is a Canadian company in a class of its own. In operation for more than 100 years, it employs 14,000 people, operates 27 manufacturing facilities, and posted $4.7 billion in sales in 2022. That's impressive scale, but that's not the most compelling part of the story.

Maple Leaf Foods is the world's first major carbon neutral food company and is "on a journey to become the most sustainable protein company – not just in Canada – but on earth." As part of this journey, they have committed to crafting their products from humanely raised animals, safely and sustainably.

Dr. Kathleen Long, vice-president, animal care at Maple Leaf Foods, explains that as a producer of animal protein products, Maple Leaf Foods has an ethical and moral obligation to ensure animals in our supply chain are

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treated with care. "Meeting these obligations is central to our animal welfare commitment, and a key reason why we have made care of animals a fundamental pillar in our sustainability strategy."

Maple Leaf Foods makes it a priority to engage in multi-animal welfare conversations and engages with representatives across the entire food system value chain, from farmers to industry groups to animal interest groups. "The insights we gain from customers, consumers, animal interest groups, peers and experts play an important role in informing our animal care standards. For example, many of our customers have adopted animal welfare standards and commitments, and we work in partnership with them to meet those commitments. We value the opinions of animal interest groups as they bring an important perspective, one that often challenges the status quo and helps the food industry to become better."

Maple Leaf Foods is also proud to be an associate member of the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC), the multi-stakeholder organization responsible for establishing Canada's animal welfare *Codes of Practice*. The NFACC uses a rigorous scientific review process combined with a multi-stakeholder engagement in developing *Codes of Practice* to ensure Canada's animal welfare standards are robust for animals such as poultry and pork, all commercial famers selling to federally inspected plants are required to be audited for compliance with these Canadian programs. Farms are audited by their provincial association auditor, and then a third-party audit is conducted to ensure effective program implementation nationally. Reports of these third-party audits are shared with industry stakeholders to demonstrate program effectiveness. Where opportunities are identified, the national and provincial associations are accountable for addressing them. In some provinces the NFACC *Codes of Practice* are incorporated by reference into regulation, demonstrating their importance as foundational standards.

"The NFACC's *Codes of Practice* form the basis for many national species' animal welfare programs, such as the Chicken Farmers of Canada Animal Care Program," Dr. Long shares. "Maple Leaf Foods is active in many animal welfare organizations including the International Poultry Welfare Alliance, the Global Coalition for Animal Welfare, and animal welfare committees and working groups associated with our local industry organizations.

"We are a company that prides itself on continuous improvement, and improvement in animal care benefits from a collaborative approach and information sharing amongst stakeholders," says Dr. Long. "We are always evaluating our standards and practices in the context of new scientific advances and the broader industry to continuously improve the care we provide for our animals."

"Transparency is a critical part of our sustainability journey," continues Dr. Long. "We have been providing detailed reporting on our sustainability performance, including animal welfare, for many years. We believe that it is important for companies to be transparent about their practices and performance, and we lead by example. Most recently, we published our inaugural integrated report, which offers a comprehensive review of our overall operational, financial and sustainability performance in a single report. We continue to advocate for transparent animal welfare reporting by our provincial and national associations, as well as by other companies."

It makes sense for a food company to work with its partners in its supply chain to ensure quality-based standards can be achieved, and Dr. Long acknowledges these standards are equally as important for restaurants. "Foodservice companies face the same high level of expectation and scrutiny from their customers, the public and animal interest groups as others in the food industry. As users of animal protein products, these companies have a responsibility to ensure they are sourcing from supply chains where animals are well cared-for, with adequate validations and assurances. Foodservice buyers and operators can expect that their end consumers care about animal welfare, and that it is an important part of their social responsibility as companies."

SUPPLIER INVESTMENT IN ANIMAL WELFARE – WHAT TO LOOK FOR

As a food production leader, Maple Leaf Foods shares two key indicators that can make it easier for foodservice operators to identify companies that have taken steps to improve animal care.

1. **Transparent Reporting:** It is readily apparent from a company's communication materials whether they report transparently on animal care targets and performance. Strong reporting indicates a company knows their supply chain, and improved performance over time means they are making progress toward their objectives.
2. **Presence of a strong auditing and certification program:** Auditing programs should encourage finding areas to improve, and there should be evidence of progress in addressing those opportunities over time. Some companies will also achieve a certification status, which is further evidence that a robust program has been implemented. In Canada, our national poultry and pork welfare programs mandate third party audits on a cyclical basis as a way of ensuring effective program implementation.

HIGH LINER FOODSERVICE™



PERSPECTIVE: HIGH LINER FOODS

High Liner Foods is a seafood company with a storied history that spans over a century. Its journey is one of transformation from a small east coast Canadian fishing operation to a global seafood leader.

The company was founded in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, in 1899 as Atlantic Fisheries Limited and was then a modest enterprise focused on capturing cod and other seafood in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic. After steady growth, product diversification and expansion to offer frozen seafood, in 1967, the company adopted the name "High Liner Foods". This identity came to signify a commitment to excellence and a focus on high-quality products that would soon become synonymous with the High Liner brand. Since then, the company has evolved into an international brand, maintaining its connection with the fishing expertise of Canada's maritime regions while providing seafood to the North American market.

The importance of sustainability in the Atlantic Canada fishing industry dates back to its early beginnings, as the region's abundant marine resources provided a vital source of livelihood for coastal communities. Indigenous peoples and early settlers recognized the need for responsible practices to ensure the long-term health of fish stocks, but these practices were not universally upheld, leading to the decimation of the industry. "High Liner Foods has a long legacy of sustainability," says Josh Austin, senior manager, sustainability. "But our current vision of sustainability traces its roots back to the early 1990's with the collapse of the Canadian North Atlantic cod fishery. Poor management of the fishery resulted in overfishing, and ultimately closure, of an important resource for High Liner Foods and all the Canadian Maritimes. This instilled in High Liner Foods an understanding of the importance of strong fishery management, and we have become strong advocate for organizations and programs conserving fishery health. Since then, we have implemented strong social ethical standards for our suppliers to follow, committed to various environmental goals and embraced DE&I initiatives as our stakeholders continue to evolve topics important to them."

High Liner Foods sustainability practices have been embedded in their operations for more than two decades and, in 2021, the company adopted its new purpose, Reimagining Seafood to Nourish Life. "This has served as our North Star for every decision we make and action we take across the organization, including in sustainability," says Austin. "We always ask what impact our decisions or actions will have and feel strongly those impacts should promote healthy people, communities and environments."

Austin points out the benefits of choosing sustainably sourced seafood are shared across the value chain, from fishery to end consumer. "Sustainable sourcing is important for both the environment and operators' businesses. The environmental impact of sustainable sourcing is likely obvious: resources that are managed and harvested in a sustainable manner will likely be available indefinitely, supporting the food, economic and cultural benefits a diverse marine ecosystem provides. Sustainable seafood is also important to consumers and can benefit an operator's bottom line. According to Nielson IQ, 93 per cent of consumers are more likely to buy products with sustainability credentials."

As consumer awareness of sustainability credentials increases, demand for sustainable options in the on-premise will follow suit. Restaurants that anticipate the needs and preferences of their guests will benefit most. "To attract guests or promote repeat visits, operators must be cognizant of their guests' expectations," Austin states. "Guests expect to find sustainability at the forefront of their menu choices, and/or expect operators to be purchasing within categories and from vendors who demonstrate a commitment to sustainability."

Austin notes that as sustainable product options increase, there are additional positive benefits for foodservice. "When thinking about cost savings, operators can purchase products that are versatile and can be prepared with less-skilled back-of-house staff," he says. "This can drive cost savings in both preparation and stocked pantry levels. Operators can also explore other options like buying frozen products. Seafood that can be prepared from frozen can also help reduce waste and ensure portion control is maintained through the preparation process."

WHAT SHOULD OPERATORS LOOK FOR WHEN SOURCING SEAFOOD?

Seafood is often seen as a more sustainable protein option than many land proteins, but it's important to understand what to look for, or what questions should be asked to ensure you're serving the most sustainable seafood products.

Eco Certifications:

Eco certifications play an important role in seafood procurement as they are based on best fishing and aquaculture practices. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), OceanWise, Monterey Bay Aquarium's SeafoodWatch, Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) and High Liner Food's Responsibly Sourced are a few of the certifications or recommendations that indicate a product has been sourced from a fishery or farm that has met specific sustainability criteria. These certifications may appear as labels on product packaging, or buyers can ask their suppliers if a product has any of those eco certifications. Products without these certifications might not be sourced from a sustainable fishery.

High Liner Foods' Responsibly Sourced Label:

High Liner Foods' Responsibly Sourced label requires products to meet strict criteria. These products must be MSC/ASC certified or undergoing full certification assessment, recognized by the GSSI benchmark, OceanWise™ recommended or rated Best Choice or Good Alternative by Seafood Watch™. Alternatively, products can also be labeled as Responsibly Sourced if they are from a public, credible fishery/aquaculture improvement project, which are meant to provide incentivization and support to achieve certification. Between 96 and 98 per cent of High Liner Foods' products meet Responsibly Sourced requirements, so buyers are encouraged to reach out to their High Liner Foods account manager to find the sustainable seafood to meet the needs of the menu.

High Liner Foods is particularly proud of the work it has done to help launch the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI), a public-private partnership focused on "turning seafood into a driver for good to preserve oceans for future generations and drive forward more sustainable seafood for everyone." Now a decade old, the includes 90 stakeholders from 21 countries across five continents. "With so many sustainable certifications available in the seafood industry, we recognized the need for an organization to benchmark all the certifications to provide clarity of, and confidence in, all the many certifications," Albanese shares. "High Liner Foods, along with other industry partners, created GSSI to do just that. GSSI reviews the many sustainability certifications available and benchmarks them against the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recommendation fishing and aquaculture best practices, ensuring seafood customer and consumers are empowered to choose the certification that best represents their needs."



Learn more about High Liner Foods at:
www.highlinerfoods.com

Learn more about GSSI at:
www.ourgssi.org/what-we-do/

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Source: Technomic. Canadian Centre of the Plate Report. 2021

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Canadian Cattle Association

PERSPECTIVE: CANADIAN CATTLE ASSOCIATION

The Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) represents approximately 60,000 beef farmers and feedlots across the country. The non-profit federation encompasses nine provincial cattle associations and provides regional representation to a farmer-led board of directors. They are the voice of Canadian cattle farmers to government, industry, media and the public on topics from environmental sustainability and animal care to federal government advocacy. They also create or provide valuable resources to beef farmers including animal care standards.

Leigh Rosengren, chief veterinary officer for the CCA explains animal care standards for Canadian beef cattle are robust and detailed for all beef farmers and ranchers in the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle*, developed by the NFACC. "All NFACC codes are developed by a diverse group of stakeholders including ranchers, veterinarians, researchers, food industry experts, animal welfare groups, and regulators," Rosengren says. "These codes are intended to be reviewed on a 10-year cycle. Provincial law further regulates basic standards for the care of animals."

Livestock agriculture is a challenging business, and a healthy animal is the return on investment. "The success of our industry relies on healthy, well-cared-for cattle," Rosengren points out. "CCA works in partnership with beef farmers, ranchers and industry stakeholders to continuously improve animal care standards through research, communication, and education."

CCA president Nathan Phinney represents the third generation on his family's cattle farm that was established by his grandfather near Moncton, New Brunswick. The first president from east of Ontario, Phinney is proud of the role beef farmers play in the environmental stewardship of Canada's grasslands and is eager to share the farmers' perspectives on animal care. "Canadian beef cattle farmers and ranchers take pride in how they raise their livestock and are unwavering in their commitment to ensuring the health and welfare of their animals, while caring for their land. It goes without saying that animals that are healthy and well cared for also perform better, but there is also an intrinsic value to animal care. For Canadian farmers and ranchers, cattle are not only providers of our livelihood, but fuel our passion, and are a part our family histories. The importance of providing good care for our animals has been instilled in us and we continue to look for ways to improve our practices."

FIVE FREEDOMS FOR ANIMAL WELFARE UNDER HUMAN CONTROL

Here are five freedoms that outline aspects of animal welfare under human control. The *Code of Practice* is centred around protecting these principles. While these principles are intrinsic to most livestock handlers, they have helped identify specific areas for continuous improvement.

These freedoms must be upheld:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury, and disease
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour
5. Freedom from fear and distress

Several cattle behaviour experts have been instrumental in the design of improved animal handling techniques and systems. For example, Bud Williams, an Oregon livestock farmer, designed a low-stress cattle handling system called the "Bud Box" based around the principle that cattle like to return to the direction they came from when they reach a dead-end. Williams was also well-known for training other producers in low-stress cattle handling techniques based around the natural patterns of cattle movement.



The "squeeze chute" is designed on animal behaviour principles proposed by Temple Grandin, An American academic and animal behaviourist, and reduces cattle stress by providing a gentle, comforting squeezing feeling during on-farm animal handling or veterinary procedures. Producers have widely adopted the squeeze chute because it also protects the safety of cattle and handlers alike.

The *Code of Practice* defines standards for all beef farmers and ranchers in Canada, but there are also a number of voluntary programs farmers can take part in for continuous improvement. One example is certification through Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) and the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB). VBP+ offers training in best management practices for beef cattle farmers and ranchers in Canada, including environmental stewardship, animal care and employee and community engagement. VBP+ also offers voluntary third-party auditing on-farm to verify implementation of these practices. For more information about VBP+, head to verifiedbeef.ca.

As of September 1, 2022, approximately 1.75 million cattle were under the management of VBP+ certified operations, and around 6,500 farmers and ranchers were trained in the VBP+ program. These producers are all knowledgeable about low-stress handling, pain management, high-quality cattle health protocols and effective monitoring of cattle. Certified farms and ranches have been through a third-party audit to verify knowledge and implementation of these principles.

Cattle care and comfort remain priorities for the Canadian beef industry, and one of the most important animal care measures widely adopted on Canadian farms and ranches in the past few decades is vaccination. Vaccines are essential tools to prevent common cattle diseases and the symptoms associated with them that can cause discomfort for cattle. Producers have invested in vaccination to prevent disease from affecting cattle health and wellbeing.

One of the main questions consumers ask about animal care is about the environment cattle spend their time in. "In Canada, beef cattle spend most of their lives outside where they are able express natural behaviours and live in a herd environment," says Phinney. "Sometimes, cattle are housed inside if the humidity and precipitation of the region are high. In these cases, cattle still live in a herd environment and the conditions of their environment (temperature, humidity, etc.) are closely monitored to ensure maximum comfort."

"We have worked for generations to find and raise cattle that do well in our environment as their offspring also tend to do well," Phinney notes. "Canada is such a diverse country, and this looks a bit different as you cross the country, but the foundation is the same."

Restaurant owners and staff can learn more about animal welfare and sustainability in Canada's beef industry at:

Canadian Cattle Association
www.cattle.ca
Learn more about beef farming in Canada and watch their short film on environmental stewardship, Guardians of the Grasslands (www.cattle.ca/sustainability).

Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB)
www.crsbcertified.ca
The CRSB is a great resource to learn about the steps Canadian beef farmers are taking for environmental stewardship, animal care and community involvement. Their website also contains general information on the Canadian beef industry, as well as profiles from farmers certified with the program.

National Farm Animal Care Council
www.nfacc.ca
NFACC publishes the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle online. Since all animal care standards in Canada are based around this document, it is a great resource to find out the most up-to-date standards for animal care nationally.

Accounts payable and receivable automation platform for Restaurants Canada Members.

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Notch is a Canadian fintech company that's simplifying invoice management, accounts payable, accounts receivable and ordering for the food and beverage industry. Find untapped profit by streamlining operations and boosting efficiency, predictability and profitability.

Already integrated into operations at The Butcher Shoppe, BevPRO, Oliver & Bonacini Hospitality, Alo Food Group, Browns Restaurant Group, and Craft Beer Market restaurants, Notch offers a focused suite of integrated, co-efficient digital tools and solutions designed to meet the unique needs of food and beverage companies, from small eateries and large, upscale dining establishments to breweries, wine agencies and food suppliers.

"Notch has engineered a holistic, streamlined AP/AR solution for the food and beverage industry," says Dylan Erlendson, Vice-President of Sales. "Food and beverage companies can easily digitize their end-to-end accounts payable and accounts receivable process, with competitive payment processing rates, and ordering, bills and invoice management."

"Instead of taking that paper invoice, signing for it, keeping a paper copy on an office clipboard to eventually enter it manually into their accounting and inventory management software, staff can take photos of their invoices using Notch-enabled optical character recognition (OCR) scanning technology to turn paper copies into digital invoices," Erlendson explains. "This saves countless hours and rekeying errors and has a 90 per cent invoice scan accuracy rate, with machine learning built in to accommodate new invoice styles."

Notch is compatible with most accounting and inventory management software. "Notch is perfectly designed to integrate with any tech stack out there," says Erlendson. "This eliminates the idea that you have to send a cheque in the mail or do COD to a supplier at the restaurant's back door. You can order digitally, receive and catalogue your invoice digitally and pay digitally."

On the accounts receivable side, businesses that are billing foodservice providers benefit from "pull" payment methods, helping them reduce risk and get paid on time. Digitizing the payment process provides enhanced visibility, accurate data and faster payment turnaround



"Streamlining the ordering and invoice entry process allows our teams to focus on providing guests with uncompromising quality and service."

- Eric Schrank, Manager, Business Operations, Oliver & Bonacini Hospitality

"It's going to save your team a lot of time and allow chefs to do what they like to do, which is cook, organize kitchens and really focus on quality control instead of sitting on a computer for seven extra hours a week."

- Quentin Meloff, Operations Manager, Aloette

"I would advocate for this technology to anyone in our industry still putting pen to paper."

- Stacey Weisberg, President, The Butcher Shoppe

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Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

DEBT MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR RESTAURANTS



BY DAVID HOPKINS
PRESIDENT, THE FIFTEEN GROUP



Restaurateurs (and small business owners in various other sectors) across the country have made it through probably the most challenging time of their careers. COVID absolutely pushed small business owners to the limit in terms of stress, patience, adapting – the list goes on. While there were many government supports to help restaurants through, they weren't sufficient or in place long enough for the restaurant industry to rebound.

Restaurant owners had to do whatever they could to keep their business afloat – which meant taking on debt and, in many cases, a lot of debt. Even many of the best restaurants pre-pandemic still required debt support to make it out the other side. And while they can now consider themselves a proud business owner who survived COVID, they now have many new challenges: inflation pushing up product and labour costs and the tremendous challenge of finding staff within the restaurant sector (which pushes wage costs up even higher). However, the most significant challenge restaurant owners face is looming debt repayments.

The industry is known to be a challenging one to begin with. The average Canadian

EBITDA % in restaurants pre-COVID was approximately 4%. This means that if you owned a restaurant that was doing $1.5 million in sales, the average profit was about $60,000 per year – and this is the average; many operators were doing much worse than that, with many at a break-even profit level at best. So now, layer on the tremendous amount of debt operators took on to make it to the other side and combine that with skyrocketing interest rates, and you have a real problem for these small business owners.



What is EBITDA?

EBITDA is Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization. It is the cash flow that a business generates before any interest payments.

For example, take a restaurant owner making $60,000 yearly in profit pre-COVID. Let's say they took on $200,000 in debt to make it to the other side. That debt may have come in many forms – it may have been through their bank, or it may have been a BDC COVID em ency loan. It may have been a line of credit or some private loan with an extremely short repayment timeline. Whatever it is, it is debt that needs to be repaid. So, let's say, for example, it is a loan with their bank or with the BDC and was over 48 months. That means the debt repayment (including the interest) is approximately $58,500 annually. That entirely wipes out any profit that the above restaurant was making. If they had to take on $300,000 of debt to make it through, their annual repayments would be closer to $87,886. That doesn't make for a great scenario with them now in a negative cashflow position, even though they were safely profitable pre-COVID.

*According to Restaurants Canada, twice as many restaurants have gone bankrupt in 2023 as in 2022 – and this massive debt obligation is a large part of the reason why. So what is a restaurant owner to do?

The best or most practical solution is to figure out a way to reduce the debt payments. Say, for example, that the restaurant that took on $300,000 in debt and was paying $88k back each year for 4 years was able to restructure that debt. Let's say they now have $220k left outstanding on the loan (as they have already paid a chunk of it back). And let's say that they could refinance that to repay the remaining balance over the next 7 years. Those annual payments would now be approximately $34,000/year. It is still a lofty amount to repay but manageable, with $60,000 of positive cash flow each year to service that debt.

So what must one consider when dealing with lenders on making their payments work?

1. **Most lenders want to make it work.** A lender does not want you to close and/or default – that is not a great scenario for them as a lender. Some lenders are more open to working with you than others for sure. For example, the BDC is a bank set up to support small businesses – they are more likely to restructure debt than a traditional bank as it is part of their "mandate."
2. **You need to have a plan.** No lender is likely to restructure debt because you ask them to. While a lender may be open to restructuring, they need to see a plan that makes sense. If you are just going to close your doors in 6 months, it is better for a lender to keep getting their higher payments until that point (why lower the payment and get less money over the next 6 months). A lender needs to know that your proposed payment structure works and is manageable.
3. **Your plan needs to be realistic.** If your last year's financial statements show that you lost $20,000 EBITDA and your debt payments are $88,000 per year, and you want to restructure your debt payments to $34,000 per year, your plan can't just be "we are going to make better sales next year and therefore be profitable." You need a detailed and realistic plan that convinces the lender that what you are proposing is achievable.
4. **Your plan needs to support the debt payments.** Lenders generally want to see a 2:1 Debt Servicing Ratio. This means that if you have $30,000 in debt repayments (including the interest on that debt), they would want to see $60,000 in EBITDA. A plan that shows only $32,000 in EBITDA would not be strong.

What are the Makings of a Good Plan?

1. First, you need the detail in numbers. While you run a restaurant, it is, first and foremost, a business. Your profit is a number, your debt is a number, and your loan repayments are numbers. You can't just have a vision; you need numbers that support that vision and are detailed and realistic. Developing a budget that ties to historical results and implements your proposed modifications is essential – and the more detailed, the better. The more



a lender sees that you understand every aspect of your "business" in detail, and the more that everything makes sense in the numbers, the more confidence they will have. Ideally, your plan will show the next 12 months' performance month by month and then a 5-year projection.

2. Your plan should detail the changes you are making that will modify your EBITDA (and these should then be reflected in your budgets). Examples of details include:

   a. We have re-engineered our menu with modest price increases, adding $30,000 to the bottom line with the same guest visits. (Providing further details of the menu changes would be great support).

   b. We are closing for lunch Monday to Friday, as an analysis of this meal period indicates that we are losing $20,000 of profit contribution by being open for lunch.

   c. We are extending our hours of operation on Friday and Saturday by one hour. Based on historical data, this should add $20,000 of revenue per year, of which $10,000 will fall to bottom-line contribution (generally, 50% of incremental revenue in a restaurant goes to bottom-line profit.)

   d. We have adjusted our take-out containers and packaging to save expenses. Last year, our takeout supplies cost $40,000. With our new packaging and supplier, our total cost should be $26,000 – a savings of $14,000.

All of these changes total a $74,000 increase in profits. And all of them are concrete changes – they are not a "we are going to be busier" rationale.

So, if you are a restaurant that lost $20,000 last year and has $60,000 in annual debt servicing (principal plus interest), submitting the above plan to your lender (in a detailed and well-presented fashion) with a request to spread out your debt repayments may be well accepted. With these concrete actions in place, your EBITDA can realistically be $54,000 (a $74,000 increase on the prior year). Although it won't cover your current debt servicing of $60,000 per year, it gives you good and sufficient coverage for $30,000 in annual debt servicing.

What are the best ways to increase your bottom-line profit?

The Fifteen Group has more than 20 years of experience helping restaurant operations be much more profitable. Here are the most common things that we recommend and help our clients implement:

1. **Menu Engineering –** Properly engineering a menu will generally add 2-3% of sales to bottom line profit. For a $2 million in revenue restaurant, that is an additional $40,000-$60,000 profit each year without any negative guest impact. This is the easiest way to add profit to your restaurant business. Keep in mind, though, that you need to use proper techniques. Check out our Menu Engineering Webinar to learn more.

2. **Service Periods –** Most restaurants we have consulted for are losing profitability by operating non-profitable service periods – lunch is often a big one. If you are open during the week for lunch, ensure that you are making money at it. We have encountered several restaurant owners who think they are profitable at lunch but are losing upwards of $60,000 in profit by being open then.

3. **Analyze Expenses –** Review every expenditure and ensure it is necessary and there is no more efficient way of achieving the same need. Many operations do certain things just because it is what they have always done – that doesn't mean it currently makes sense to be doing it now. And if it does make sense, then review your suppliers and different options.

The Fifteen Group is North America's leading hospitality consulting company. For more than 20 years, they have helped over 1,000 restaurants make a lot more money. Restaurant Profit maximization is one of the core functions of their business.

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15

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Turning Passion Into Profit

Chef Dacyion Reid

Owner:
Dacy's Gourmet Kitchen
Toronto, ON



Chef Dacyion Reid, owner of Dacy's Gourmet Kitchen, graduated from culinary school during the pandemic lockdowns. She's always dreamed of running her own shop, but circumstances forced her hand. After friends urged her to just put herself out there, Reid crafted her first menu, and then sat on it for about a month. "There's criticism and then there's…the other stuff. I was afraid no one would order my food. I was afraid if they did, they wouldn't like it. I was afraid of the unknown. But eventually, I put it out on social media. I think I got 17 orders on that first menu, so I thought, "Okay…this could be something." I sent the menu to friends, then they sent it to their friends, and before I knew it, I started getting about 50 orders a week. After that, people started to approach me to do private dinners for birthdays because no one couldn't go out. I was forced to put myself out there and create my own lane, but I have no regrets. It's created a lot of opportunities."

Soon, Reid was applying her signature Jamaican cuisine to a bespoke lunch delivery service for a group of employees at a large shipping company. She'd prepare the orders and a friend would play courier, dropping them off inside the facility. Her lunch business was going well, but her lunch courier left. So, Reid pivoted again to focus on catering rather than take a position in a restaurant, working for someone else. "I'm a single mom of two. Working a twelve-hour shift in somebody's kitchen is not feasible for me. Also, I've spent so much of my life making somebody else's dream a reality. I feel it's my time to build a legacy for my kids, whether or not they choose to work in the industry. It's about showing them that if you have a dream or a passion, no matter the obstacles, you keep going. They see me, and they are watching me."

Reid learned the ropes of entrepreneurship on her own and on the fly. It took a lot for her to find a champion in herself. "It was me, alone, learning as I go. Each week, I'd learn something new and apply it — like riding a bicycle. As the months went by, I found I could take off the training wheels. From the get-go, I used *Interac* e-transfer to get paid. It was easy, and during the pandemic, people didn't want to exchange cash. It was perfect and







still is. Payments go straight to my account, and I get a notification message that lets me connect the payment with the order and share pick-up details. I don't touch any cash and when I need to buy supplies, I just use my card."

Reid encourages other hopeful entrepreneurs to get informed, trust themselves and stay focused on their business vision. "Do research. Go on business websites and search ideas like your own to learn from other business owners' stories. They're not all going to be pretty, but you're not looking for pretty. You're looking for a blueprint of what to expect. Even before then, you need to believe in yourself enough to put yourself out there. It's scary, but if you put good energy and intention out there, good will come back to you. Since I put myself out there as a chef, I've learned to see success not only in numbers, but in opportunities and open doors I never thought would be open to me. Finally, ask for help and recognize that you're going to hear "no", but that's not the end, it just means "not right now."

Working for myself means constant learning, and I love my job and have real passion for what I do. When you have that passion and love combined, it's a different kind of feeling. Like when an actor or an artist goes on stage, they get this adrenaline. I see food as sexy. I've tried it all. I tried social work. I tried business administration, but I've always been around cooking. I've been cooking since I was seven when my dad brought me into the kitchen at his restaurant. While I've always been around food, I ran away from food. I thought I was going to help everybody—that was my passion. I'm still helping people, but in a different way. Because food to me is not just eating, it's an experience and the community that you bring together. It's a universal language."

"When you have a passion and a love for it, and then life gives you lemons, you have to use the whole lemon," Reid counsels. "You make lemonade, and you save the skin to make lemon pepper."

@dacysgourmet_kitchen

Canadian entrepreneurs are embracing the nine-to-thrive as Canadians seek to turn their passion into profit.

As more Canadians take on side hustles to earn additional income, a recent survey* from *Interac* Corp. reveals a 'nine-to-thrive' effect taking place. While the initial motivation to launch a side hustle is often financial, more than half (55 per cent) of those surveyed say that it turned out to be more fulfilling than expected, with three quarters (76 per cent) intending to continue their side hustle alongside their main job, and almost two in 10 (17 per cent) planning to go all in, turning their passion project into their career.

***Interac* e-Transfer®** plays an important role in supporting these entrepreneurs, with nearly two thirds of those polled (62 per cent) using the service for business-related payments, contributing to 25 per cent transaction volume growth year over year.

The *Interac* **From Dollar One hub** includes tips on building financial confidence and how to avoid burnout alongside practical instructions on the role *Interac* products, like *Interac* e-Transfer, can play in meeting a business' key milestones.

Learn more at: interac.ca/en/dollarone

**The Interac survey was conducted among 500 Canadian entrepreneurs, a sample comprised of 362 side hustlers (i.e., do work outside of their primary employment), 82 small business owners (with 0 to 4 employees), and 56 freelancers. It was fielded by CICIC Research from August 9th to 16th, 2023.*



PERFECT HOLIDAY *OR* PERFECT STORM?

Recognizing & Managing Seasonal Stress for Foodservice



The holidays are a time of great joy and celebration for many, but for hospitality and foodservice workers, the holiday run-up can bring a unique set of challenges and stresses.

As de facto "holiday experts" foodservice employees bear the brunt of our collective dreams of the ultimate holiday meal, party or event, and it's a lot. As demand for restaurant and catering services surges in parallel with guest expectations, foodservice employees are counted upon to meet these heightened needs. The human cost of delivering the perfect experience or working last-minute booking magic can find themselves emotionally and physically drained.

First, there's the increased workload and long hours resulting from the flood of holiday reservations. Then, there's the pressure of hyped-up and often impatient customers seeking holiday perfection, which can escalate service tensions. But, the greatest challenge of all may be the demand on foodservice workers' time and the resulting sacrifice of time spent with their loved ones and on their own well-being. When you're on tap to deliver everything on your guests' wish lists every day, how do you prioritize your own?

Melanie McGregor, Manager, Quality Improvement and Development at the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) acknowledges that while the holiday season is experienced by different people in different ways, foodservice employees are more likely to be exposed to many key stressors. "Everyone's experience around the holidays will be unique. Some people will be extra stressed, some won't. It seems that foodservice and hospitality would be industries where things would get busier around the holidays."

Common holiday stress factors include increased demands in our personal lives and/or work lives, increased financial challenges, family and social issues, drinking and eating more, high personal or social expectations, and recent losses of loved ones. With restaurants and foodservice in the eye of the holiday storm, McGregor points out that these common or broadly experienced holiday stressors may be compounded and enhanced within the sector, and that recognizing when stress is becoming overwhelming is important.

Telltale Signs You or a Colleague May be Experiencing Stress

There are many signs and they can vary from person to person. Stress can affect how we think, feel, and act. Here are some of the common signs:

- Changes in eating/sleeping, fatigue, exhaustion;
- Mood swings, irritability, anger, frustration, helplessness, feeling overwhelmed, crying;
- Overreacting, blowing up;
- Difficulty focusing and making decisions;
- Isolation, bottling things up;
- Avoidance, procrastination;
- Rushing from one thing to another, racing mind;
- Racing heart, poor circulation, weakened immunity, high blood pressure, heart attacks;
- Losing hair, skin problems;
- Headaches, stomach upsets, grinding teeth, muscle tension;
- Increase in substance use or addictive behaviours (gaming, shopping, gambling, etc.).

Living a completely stress-free life is not a realistic goal, McGregor points out. “Stress is a part of life that we will all experience, but there is a fine line between the everyday stress that we can get through and stress that is challenging our ability to live our lives. If our regular coping strategies aren’t working or if we don’t know how to cope, some additional help can make a difference. If we notice that our day-to-day life is being disrupted by what we are experiencing (e.g. having trouble getting out of bed, missing work, not wanting to socialize or do things we usually enjoy, increased conflict), that could mean that more help is needed.”



Help keep your holiday stress in check:

Have reasonable expectations. Just because it’s the holidays, it doesn’t mean that problems and challenges disappear. Do what you can and don’t fixate on what you can’t. Recognize that you only have so much to give and need to choose where to put your energy.

Prioritize self-care. Make sure you are getting enough sleep and keeping your eating and drinking in check. Give yourself permission to enjoy the season while striving to balance indulgence with healthy choices.

Know what matters to and is meaningful for you. Focus on what is important to you rather than giving into pressure from others to do what you don’t find fulfilling. If you find cooking a turkey is causing you stress and you don’t like it much anyway, make a different choice.

Communicate and ask for help. You don’t need to do everything yourself. If you’re feeling overwhelmed, ask for others to pitch in, such as making a holiday dinner a potluck or passing the shopping list to someone else.

Build in down time. We can’t go, go, go all the time without giving our bodies and minds chances to rest and recover. Plan to take some time to relax and give yourself permission to put the to-do list aside for a bit.

Holiday stress can lead to exhaustion, stress, isolation and sadness, and it’s crucial for operators to support employees and recognize their staff’s often extraordinary efforts during the holiday period. Offering additional training on conflict de-escalation, highlighting mental health and wellness programs, incentives and supports or simply making considerate scheduling to ensure staff get enough time off during the holidays can go a long way in helping staff feel cared for. Taking the time to appreciate and reward great individual and team work can help motivate and fuel staff through demanding times and increase their ability to manage challenges and tough moments.

Even with increased awareness and prioritization of mental health in recent years, holiday pressure is going to cause stress, and McGregor encourages operators, managers and anyone experiencing stress to reach out for help. “There are a number of supports that can make a difference, including counselling to help develop new coping skills. A good place to start is contacting your primary care provider, your workplace Employee Assistance Program if you have one, friends or family who may have experienced something similar, and/or your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association.”

If you or someone you know is in crisis or needs help, visit: cmha.ca/find-help/

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