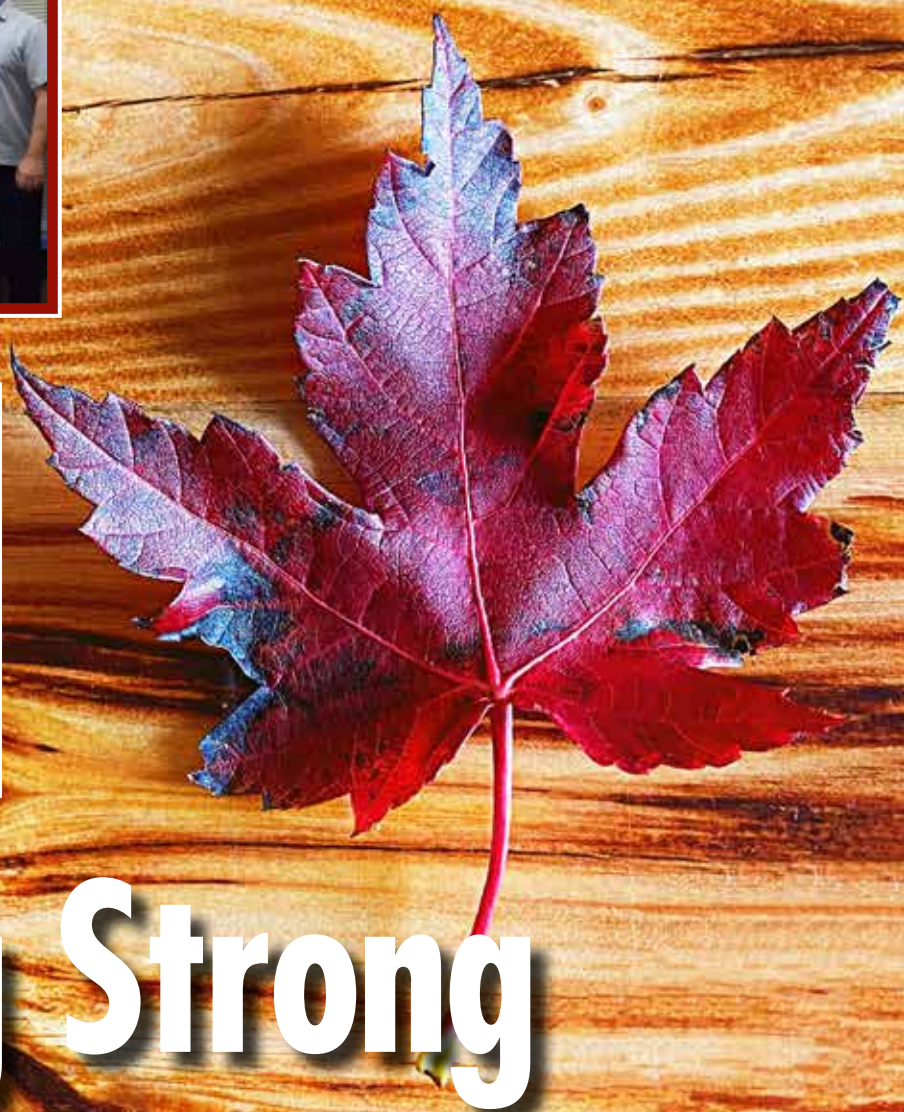


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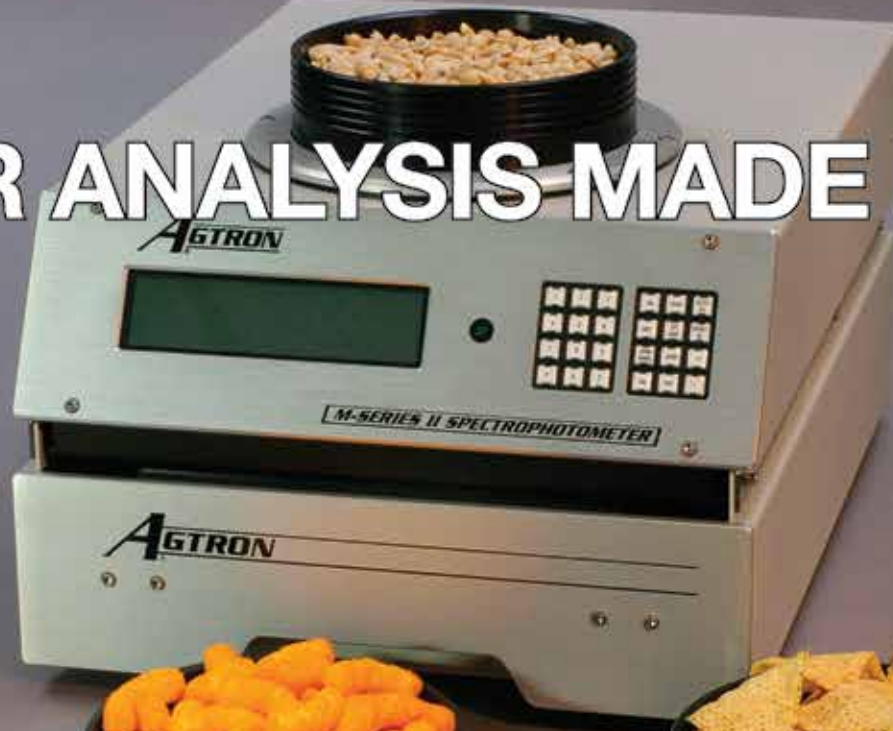
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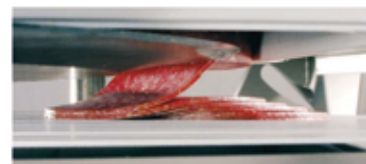
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contents



Up Front

- 7 Board of Director's Message
- 7 AFPA Board Members

Features

- 8 The Impact of COVID-19 on Alberta's Food Processing Industry
- 10 Five Keys to a Rigorous Food Safety System

Food Safety

- 12 COVID-19 and the Rising Need for Food Safety Software

Workplace Safety

- 14 The Food and Beverage Industry MUST Embrace Health and Safety!

AFPA Member Profiles

- 16 Valbella Gourmet Foods
- 17 Wabi Sabi Brands Ltd.

AFPA BENEFITS

- 18 Corporate Members
- 18 Affinity Members
- 18 AFPA Online Directory

19 Index to Advertisers



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On the cover: Featuring Calgary Co-op and Calgary Italian Bakery

A note from Calgary Co-op: Calgary Co-op is pleased to partner with many local vendors, including Calgary Italian Bakery. Sourcing products locally is as important to us as it is to our members. Creating our own brand was about ensuring we reflect the unique needs of our city. Our Cal & Gary's family of products, including Organics, are carefully curated for our members offering high-quality and unique attributes that are often not replicated in mainstream brands. Our Founders & Farmers family of products give members everyday quality and value. Eating local has been a trend for a while but for more than 60 years, it has been our mission. Cal & Gary's and Founders & Farmers are unique to Calgary Co-op and showcase our local flavour and commitment to our community.



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Eric Haak
AFPA Chair
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These circumstances have stopped, restarted, renewed, and rejuvenated our programs and direction for the future. We continue to work for you, our members, amidst the current turmoil and operational changes.

DEAR AFPA MEMBERS,

I want to thank all of you who continue to support our vital association, and welcome to all of the new companies that have joined over this last year. Our industry is truly made up of fantastic and supportive individuals who work together to create an enduring force to supplement our food and beverage segment. AFPA continues to be a strong link for sharing industry information, supporting food and workplace safety, and being a conduit to the industry and government in this time of COVID-19.

To say that there have been challenges since the pandemic began is an enormous understatement. These circumstances have stopped, restarted, renewed, and rejuvenated our programs and direction for the future. We continue to work for you, our members, amidst the current turmoil and operational changes. We have streamlined to create an unending climate of provision. We have been there for the food and beverage sector since 1967, and we continue to support our members, who make up this vital piece of the food chain.

Government, of course, has been inundated under the strain of this pandemic. I am proud that AFPA has been actively engaged in conversations for industry support and updates on how we are faring. We continue to welcome your comments, concerns, and suggestions, as we have avenues to interact with government channels on these items.

In light of the events of 2020, we are evolving to address our mission of program delivery and support of our established curricula. Our Food Safety and Workplace Safety focus is taking on a new face in regards to the circumstances we are in, as we look for the best ways forward. We are seeking out best procedures and direction. We have been grounded in providing these services for many years and we are working with a wide array of contacts in these fields.

Until next time, I wish you safety, health, and happiness. Please be sure to connect with AFPA if you have any questions.



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The Impact of COVID-19 on Alberta's Food Processing Industry

FOR CALGARY'S COCOCO CHOCOLATIERS, the disruption caused by COVID-19 has been tremendous, causing closures and forcing significant modifications and restrictions to the way the company does business.

"When the first wave of Public Health orders came in, we had to close the majority of our stores, and they stayed closed until the middle of September," says company President, Brian Beck. "And now that we have emerged from the closures, we've done so at about 50 per cent the size we went in; half the stores, half the volume, half the employees."

Although there was some scale-back at the factory level, Cococo did not have to entirely cease production during the crisis. During this time, the company was proactive in making arrangements related to COVID-19; encouraging social distancing (made easier because of a skeleton crew), providing masks to its employees well before masks were mandated, and looking ahead to what may be the "new normal" going forward.

"The pressures of 2020 have created a real need to focus on the core of one's business, and to cut away any extra activities," says Beck. "That has meant narrowing product lines, refining distribution, and looking at those things that ultimately make the most sense and contribute the most. Focus on what you do best, and do it as well as you can do it."

When COVID-19 arrived in Alberta in the spring of 2020, it created a steep increase in demand and lead time for Camfil Canada's products and services; so much so that the CFO

at the Camfil Americas corporate office in New Jersey has had to step in and help out on the production line.

"Many people have turned to Camfil during the pandemic due to the expertise we have in air filtration and the impact airborne contaminants have on human health," says Camfil Territory Sales Manager Alberta, Jon Holmes. "There is considerable confusion in the general public as it relates to air filtration and Camfil is committed to ensuring that our customers are equipped with the information they need to make the right decision for their given application."

If there is one positive to have come out of this pandemic experience, it has been an increased public awareness across North America about how air quality can directly impact wellness; a fact that – until now – the Canadian public has largely taken for granted.

"COVID-19 has raised the awareness that it's not just outdoors where quality air is needed," says Holmes. "We spend 90 per cent of our time indoors, and this virus has shown us how critical it is that we have the best air quality possible, without breaking the bank. It's a benefit to everyone's health."

Considered an essential service, BioNeutra North America Inc. was able to continue manufacturing its lead product, VitaFiber® IMO throughout the pandemic at its Edmonton plant, as well as at its two co-manufacturing facilities offshore. Social distancing was easily maintained thanks to the company maintaining just five employees per shift working along the block-long production floor, and by asking other non-production staff to work from home.

"We adjusted as best we could," says Warren Michaels, Vice President/Communications at BioNeutra. "We provided company-issued cell phones and computers, and our regular departmental meetings and senior management meetings continued through the use of Zoom and other equivalents. And, as a publicly-traded company, we held our AGM virtually."

BioNeutra is a North American supplier of high-quality fibre ingredients and products, which are used as ingredients in products across the continent. While its employees were working from home, BioNeutra removed doors and installed motion-activated lights in washrooms to reduce potential touch-points, thoroughly wiped down various surfaces, and cleaned out its air-circulation system. The company also developed a return-to-work plan with strict policies to protect employees from contracting the virus. This began with expanding the barriers to employee cubicles and creating sign-in stations equipped with wipes, masks, gloves, and hand-sanitizers that would offer more effective contact tracing in the case of an outbreak at the plant.

"We also, sadly, cancelled our Company Christmas Turkey Dinner for our staff and spouses," says Michaels. "In its place we plan to bring in personalized pizzas that each employee will be able to eat at their work space."

At the onset of COVID-19, Ontario-based private equity firm, CIEL Capital, closely examined the impact of the pandemic on its various business entities, as well as its ability to carry on business as usual should an outbreak occur. Seeing a need for better screening, the company dispatched service teams to a number of its



Safety is the priority on Cococo Chocolatiers' production line. Both photos courtesy of Cococo Chocolatiers.



Cococo Chocolatiers was proactive in encouraging social distancing and providing masks to employees.



A BioNeutra worker with mask and gloves at a control station. Both photos courtesy of BioNeutra.



A BioNeutra reception desk is equipped with plexiglass to keep everyone safe.

front line customers and set up Health Canada-certified thermographic (thermal imaging) cameras within their facilities to help in temperature screenings.

“Certified by Health Canada, these thermal imaging devices proved an accurate way to provide autonomous 24/7 monitoring of anyone entering our or a customer’s facilities, checking to see if their temperature is at an abnormal level,” says CIEL Strategic Advisor, Chris Weatherhead. “It is an effective preventative measure that can help identify and restrict someone who may be sick from entering your facility, and acts as an additional line of defence against the spread of COVID-19.”

Recently Category 5 (managed by CIEL) partnered with Quebec food processor Nutrigroupe to test the efficacy of autonomous thermal screening solutions vs. manual screening solutions already in place. The case study definitively showed that by switching from a manual to an automated process, using thermal cameras for screening, Nutrigroupe would be able to save itself (based on an employee

population of 100 and screening twice daily) more than 70-hours of labour per month with an improved screening accuracy of between 0.6 and 1.4 degrees Celsius, in addition to the cameras being able to detect improper personal protective equipment (PPE) use among employees.

As cruise lines, restaurants, and entertainment centres were shuttered because of the pandemic, Kinnikinnick Foods’ food service business ground to a virtual halt. At the same time, the Edmonton company’s direct home delivery program rose by as much as 600 per cent in the span of just a few weeks, and its regular business experienced significant growth over the last six months, both in Canada and the United States.

On the other hand, Kinnikinnick also experienced a significant increase in costs after installing new sanitation stations across its plant, as well as in ensuring there was an adequate supply of PPE for staff. This was particularly true at the beginning of the crisis, when serious questions arose about meeting the growing need

for masks. Fortunately, Kinnikinnick did not have to look far to find an answer.

“It turned out that Eden Textiles – which is right next door to our plant – had some super-fine, high mesh Egyptian cotton and they agreed to make our first masks,” says Kinnikinnick CEO, Jerry Bigam. “We passed Eden’s name on as a supplier and many other food plants in Edmonton got their PPE from Eden.”

Kinnikinnick saw the great value the Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA) brought to its members during the pandemic, particularly for Alberta’s smaller food processors that may not have the resources to support in-house health and safety departments.

“For the first few months, it was a zoo in terms of new regulations, new concerns, and new policies to implement,” says Bigam. “The association would post important information and current health and safety requirements on its website related to COVID-19. The level of uncertainty and concern that was out there at the beginning gave many smaller companies a real challenge to sort out, and AFPA was there for them.”



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Five Keys to a Rigorous Food Safety System

An HACCP-based food safety system is key to the growth of your company.



FOOD SAFETY HAS LONG been an essential ingredient for food processors, manufacturers, and wholesalers committed to providing high-quality products and growing their business. Now, the federal government has introduced regulations that require most food companies to meet high safety standards to obtain a license from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

The *Safe Foods for Canadians Regulations* apply to food businesses that import food, and/or prepare food for export or interprovincial trade. The regulations, which cover companies with over \$100,000 in annual revenue, came into force in January 2019 for dairy, eggs, processed fruits and vegetable products, fish, meat, honey, and maple products. On July 15, 2020, they came into effect for additives, alcoholic beverages, and all other foods.

“To be licensed, companies must have a rigorous food safety program in place based on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) methodology,” says Rowda Mohamud, a BDC Business Advisor who guides companies on obtaining food safety certifications.

A key focus for food retailers

Mohamud says it's not just the government that is demanding high standards; many food manufacturers and retailers will not partner with your company if it doesn't have an HACCP-based program.

“No retailer wants to put a product on their shelves that isn't backed up by a rigorous approach to food safety,” says Mohamud.

Depending on your business, there can be dozens of criteria to be analyzed for conformity with food safety standards, ranging from worker attire to food handling procedures to the condition of your facility, and much more. Here are five critical points in introducing a food safety program to your food business.

1 Your facility

The condition of your building and equipment will be an important focus in bringing your company up to standard. “The facility needs to be easy to clean and easy to maintain, so you can't have, for example, damaged floors and walls because they can harbour contaminants,” Mohamud says.

Updating your facility is generally the most expensive part of the process and will require a complete assessment of your workplace. The following are a few examples of things to consider:

- Is your equipment and your work surfaces well-maintained, made of food-grade materials, and easy to clean to prevent contamination?
- Do you have the right number of drains and hand-wash stations, and are they properly located?
- Do you have the right kind of lighting for your facility?

2 The flow of people, materials and waste

An important goal of a food safety program is to prevent cross contamination – the unintentional transfer of biological, chemical, or physical hazards. To help prevent

this, the movement of people, material, and waste in a facility must be carefully controlled. Among other things, the plant must be laid out to allow for the segregation of activities and materials, and ensure a safe workflow.

3 Employee training

Employees are on the frontlines of maintaining good food safety practices in your plant. They must understand the principles on which your food safety program is based and their duties and responsibilities within it. These range from proper hygiene and wearing proper attire to following food handling procedures, performing sanitation duties, and respecting the segregation of work zones.

“Do they understand the different risks that are possible within the facility?” Mohamud asks. “Do they understand the possible risks with the product itself? For example, why food needs to be cooled down to a particular temperature at a particular rate?”

4 Monitoring and record-keeping

It's essential to monitor your production to ensure you are controlling hazards and taking corrective actions when necessary. Monitoring also provides data for keeping detailed record-keeping. Daily documentation of procedures, deviations from limits, and corrective actions provides the information you need to improve performance and demonstrate to outside parties that you are operating a safe facility. It is also important to have someone in the facility verify that the procedures were

followed thoroughly, and that the documentation is, in fact, accurate.

5 Management commitment

Change is hard at any workplace, which is why it requires the steadfast commitment of management to achieve success. That commitment is particularly important in implementing a food safety program because the stakes are so high, Mohamud says.

"Your production people are not going to go through the trouble of following all these procedures and protocols if management is not supporting it," she says. "You have to provide the leadership and guidance that says: 'Hey, this matters. We care about our customers. We must have a safe, high-quality product.'"

It's time to ensure your business is food safe

Mohamud says entrepreneurs shouldn't underestimate the amount of time, effort, and investment required to make a business ready for certification. It will depend on the current state of your plant but can typically take six months and sometimes a year or more.

However, a food safety program is not only important for meeting regulatory requirements, it's vital for positioning your company for future growth.

"In this day and age, you simply cannot just ignore this and hope for the best," stresses Mohamud. "You have to have a standardized approach to safety."

For more information on this topic and other food-safety related topics, please visit www.BDC.ca. The Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA) also offers several food-safety related training courses as well as many other services. Learn more at www.AFPA.com.

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COVID-19 and the Rising Need for Food Safety Software



MANY ARE SHOCKED TO learn that 97 per cent of the food industry still conducts food safety processes with paper and spreadsheet. The cracks in this antiquated approach are starting to show. Despite the food industry now spending \$10B on food safety annually, there was a record 10 per cent increase in food recalls from 2013 to 2018.

The growing number of recalls demonstrates the high risk in food safety. By operating with paper and spreadsheet, the food industry is failing to meet the increasing consumer demand for safety, sustainability, and transparency in food. Government regulations are tightening in response, spurring the industry to catch up to consumer demand. Recently, U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) Deputy Commissioner for Food Policy and Response, Frank Yiannas, announced new *Food Safety Modernization Act* (FSMA) rules that lay the groundwork for advanced traceability in food safety. Any company still operating with paper and spreadsheet will need to transition into specialized food safety software that enhances speed and accuracy. COVID-19 has further reinforced the need for such digital food safety.

By conducting analog, in-person safety screening, companies can see mass COVID-19 outbreaks from employee transit and screening lines. Without digital symptom tracking, companies respond woefully late to the outbreaks,

triggering employee issues and negative media that can shake a company's reputation. Walmart failed to record their screening processes, and subsequently encountered lawsuits for negligence in managing employee health and safety.

The Public Health Agency of Canada released new projections on September 22, 2020, that warn of exponential increases in transmission. As wave two intensifies, COVID-19 appears to be here to stay, and new responses are necessary for the food industry to stay open and safe.

To properly manage COVID-19 safety procedures, the food industry needs off-site screening with alerts and tracking, combined with encrypted storage of medical records. None of those safety functions are available with paper and spreadsheet, yet all are accessible with software.

Provision, an Alberta-based company, that is also a member of the Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA), is at the forefront of this transition in food safety.

Danni Kneeland, Director of Food Safety Solutions Inc., says, "Provision is Canada's fastest-growing food safety software for a reason. Working with their team has been excellent."

Provision has grown by over 20 times in 2020, as food companies rapidly adopt its food safety software. Provision software is now used for 51 per cent of fresh and frozen food in Canada, with major clientele such as VersaCold.

Provision's Primary software ensures food safety completion with form-specific scheduling, reminders, and tracking. It improves the accuracy of records by translating forms to user preferences and auto-filling information between forms. Its clients operate faster by automatically running inventory from data already collected in production forms, and by automatically generating notifications and corrective action reports based on critical limits

inside forms. Provision's Premium software takes the granular data from these food safety records and correlates every process variable with every production outcome. This creates administrator dashboards that replace gut-feel operating decisions for food companies, enabling data-driven control over safety and quality.

At the core of all this functionality, Provision software enables its users to create custom forms that automatically trigger custom alerts, tracking, and reporting. Back in March, the company noticed its users were creating employee symptom forms, and saw so much potential in this, they created a side product for COVID-19 so their users could stay open and safe.

Called Basecase, this COVID-19 software enables a workforce to submit digital screening forms before every shift, using any internet connected device. After submission, each user receives an email or text notification. Based on the answers in their form, the notification will either share the user's one-time facility entry code if they're safe, or a call button to organize a COVID-19 test if they're at risk. This off-site screening limits on-site transmission risk, enabling employees to feel safe at their facility. Administrators receive instant alerts of off-site employee symptoms, so they can respond to risks, not outbreaks. As forms are submitted, the dashboard on Basecase shows the number of employees who are safe, caution, and isolated within a workforce, all filtered by date and location. This data allows companies to plan their production pace according to their operating risk. Every employee form is individually encrypted and stored, creating a trail of due diligence that protects corporate liability.

Recently, Basecase has garnered national attention in *The Globe & Mail* and has been adopted by significant food industry players such as Centennial Foodservice.

Erik Westblom, Co-Founder & CEO of Provision, believes this shows the future of food

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safety. Westblom says, “As a sommelier, I saw that wine was the first commoditized food product, because every variable was tracked, then controlled, enabling value-based pricing. When food processors transition into software like ours, it not only improves the accuracy and speed of food safety – it gives them real insight and control over their production variables. We’ve seen our software dramatically increase quality for our clients, enabling them to improve sales and operating margins.”

Basecase stands out as one targeted example of Provision’s software, where a digitized safety procedure significantly reduces operating risk.

Provision supports the increasingly stringent regulatory requirements, which will allow the food industry to fulfill consumer demand. Deep traceability is inherent in its software, as is labelling, and any other regulatory requirement designed to reduce recalls, fraud, and other concerns in food safety.

AFPA has organized a 10 per cent member discount on Basecase starting November 1, 2020, and a 10 per cent member discount on Provision software starting January 1, 2021. For more information, visit www.provision.io or contact info@afpa.com.



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The Food and Beverage Industry MUST Embrace Health and Safety!

THE ALBERTA FOOD Processors Association (AFPA) is the food and beverage processing industry's advocate and leading resource for ensuring the continuous improvement of workplace health and safety. Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety* (OHS) legislation sets the *minimum standards* for workplace health and safety. Sadly, many companies are not compliant in meeting the required minimum standards for their employees.

OHS officers have been visiting businesses operating in our industry – are you compliant? It is AFPA's mission to assist companies in their efforts to achieve their workplace safety program goals. This includes the implementation of a formal health and safety program, meeting minimum OHS compliance, and/or maintaining or formally attaining a Certificate of Recognition (C.O.R.). **Contact AFPA for your training and resources.**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

It is expected that all Alberta workplaces take diversity, equity, inclusion, violence, and bullying seriously. This also ties into updated company harassment and violence protocols. There should now be specific content/wording in your company's operational procedures that address this.

Our workplaces are evolving to ensure civility, diversity, respect, psychological safety, and productivity. It will take awareness, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement of the necessary changes to meet the new compliance requirements here in Alberta. There are two acts that

protect all employees: One, the *Alberta Human Rights Act*; and two, the *Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which has been expanded to include "protected grounds" harassment, psychological harassment, bullying, intimidation, violence, and domestic violence.

Providing education and training to all staff, specifically supervisors, is a critical aspect of these changes. Creating a respectful workplace may mean your company has to address many tough issues, such as harassment, bullying, intimidation, violence, and/or sexual harassment. All of these actions are illegal in Alberta, and **it's the law for you to provide a safe working environment!**

Mental health problems and/or mental disorders can also impact people of all ages, cultures, education levels, and/or socio-economic statuses. Make sure to add discussions about psychological safety to your scheduled meetings; have a psychological safety moment, plan to discuss your current or newly updated company policies regarding psychological safety, and keep records of the conversations so you can show your due diligence.

Workplace safety competence...are you there yet?

The new supervisor competency requirements now tied into minimum OHS legislation state that, "both the employers and all supervisors are expected to ensure competency," and this includes formal training in hazard assessment, incident investigation, and roles and

Partnerships
IN INJURY REDUCTION



Congratulations to Inovata Foods, located in Edmonton, which recently achieved its Partnerships in Injury Reduction (PIR) Certificate of Recognition (COR).

responsibilities. Supervisors include those who direct the work of others, going by any title, including foreman, or shift/team leader.

Why? Well, they are expected to lead the hazard assessment process, including reviews, worker engagement, and changes and/or updates. In addition, they need to know how to conduct an investigation when required, such as if there is a work refusal, so they must be well trained. This includes knowing their roles and responsibilities, as well as ethical, moral, and legal obligations.

Safety training is also required for select managers and health and safety committee members, who are entitled to up to 16 hours of **annual** training related to their role, duties, and functions in serving on the committee. Contact AFPA to learn more about these new OHS compliance requirements and related training.

A worker's three basic OHS rights, as per OH&S legislation

OHS legislation includes a worker's basic rights, as follows:

The right to know (be informed) of worksite hazards, the means to control such hazards, emergency response plans, and results of inspections and investigations.



UNB Scholarship Winner Announced

Congratulations to Greg Evancio, who was the lucky recipient of free tuition to enroll in UNB's online Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety Program at the University of New Brunswick (a retail value of \$6,545). Greg submitted his entry through Kinnikinnick Foods AFPA Membership.

"I'd like to thank Melody Pashko at AFPA, and Jerry Bigam and Carolina Macorin at Kinnikinnick Foods, for all the support they've given me," says Evancio.

Take time to reflect on 2020...COVID-19 was a harsh reality for everyone worldwide and now we must look ahead to 2021. Have your efforts made any real impact on your workplace? Or on your employee's health and safety? What key lessons were learned?

- **The right to participate** in health and safety activities pertaining to their worksite, such as the ability to express concerns, attend meetings, and serve on health and safety committees, and be involved in inspections or investigations, or ERP drills, exercises and development.
- **The right to refuse** dangerous work.

Internal responsibility system

Current OHS legislation is founded on an internal responsibility system (IRS). An IRS establishes a relationship between employers and workers in the implementation and the application of workplace processes which help to ensure a healthy and safe work environment that can be enjoyed by all involved. The IRS should be reflective of all levels of management, supervisors, workers, and any affected parties.

Workplace safety...what are your plans for 2021 and how can AFPA help?

Take time to reflect on 2020...COVID-19 was a harsh reality for everyone worldwide and now we must look ahead to 2021. Have your efforts made any real impact on your workplace? Or on your employee's health and safety? What key lessons were learned? Shared? Do specific areas of your program need improvement? What would directly or indirectly make your workplace safer? What, if any, are your OHS priorities for 2021? Is there key AFPA safety training you can provide to your staff? How will you generate enthusiasm and commitment to your health and safety priorities in 2021, based on all the new minimum requirements? *Do you understand that safety is a company value, and is not a competing priority?*

In addressing workplace safety – PLEASE – you MUST understand that your employees are on loan to your organization from their families. You have legal, ethical, and moral obligations, regardless of any production

protocols or customer needs, to provide a safe and healthy working environment for them. You must return them home safely...each and every day. Training, knowledge, education, evaluating competency, and management support is required...**daily**.



**WORK SAFE
ALBERTA**

AFPA's Health and Safety Training Schedule

Check www.apfa.com for specific dates and locations.




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COVID-19 related plans, protocols, and key resources are available on the AFPA website.



VALBELLA

EST. GOURMET FOODS 1978

VALBELLA GOURMET FOODS WAS first established in 1978 by Walter and Leonie von Rotz within a small 1,000 square foot facility located in beautiful downtown Canmore, Alberta. Before long, the company's European-style sausages, hams, and air dried meats found their way into Banff's famous hotels and restaurants, and quickly became part of the local experience.

Now more than four decades later, Valbella's current 40,000 square foot facilities overlook the Three Sister Mountains, and continue to build on its reputation for producing only the highest quality sausages, hams, and charcuterie products (and much more) for gourmet dining establishments, fine hotels, and first rate food markets throughout Alberta.

"Valbella's commitment to excellence, paired with our European traditions and simple love for fine food, has allowed us to stand out as one of Western Canada's most recognized meat processors," says Valbella owner, Chantal von Rotz. "Walter's constant product innovation and keen market sense keeps customers and top chefs awaiting new and tantalizing products, whether they be for a gourmet menu or simply for a backyard BBQ party."

Valbella today is a wholesale business and a retail business; supplying its customers with a tremendous line of over 300 meat products that are all made in Canmore. The company's delicatessen has also become



Chantal von Rotz (left) with her father Walter, mother Leonie, and brother Jeff.

a favourite among locals, featuring Valbella products, as well as a large variety of domestic and import cheeses, pan-ready items, and freshly-made sandwiches and lunch items in the Valbella Café.

"What sets us apart is our exceptional quality and European influence," says von Rotz. "We source all of our meat from Alberta, we buy and sell local, and we are exclusive to Alberta; so it has a large impact on the Alberta meat industry. We also sell a great deal of Alberta grown produce, B.C. grown fruit, and Alberta dairy. Our customers expect superior quality, and that supports our local economy."

Because of the significant challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, Valbella has recently launched its new online store at www.shopvalbella.ca, which has since become a resounding success for the company. In addition, Valbella is just about to break ground on its new deli renovation that will result in a larger and more up-to-date space by next spring. The space will include a first for Canada – a 24-7 meat vending machine.

"These machines are big in Europe where a lot of farmers will use them as a means of direct farm sales, and we'll have the only one in Canada," says von Rotz. "Customers will be able to walk up and get anything – sausages, burgers, steaks, milk, or eggs – whatever we decide to put in there. This could end up being an amazing way for us to get our product out around Alberta."

Valbella greatly values its membership with the Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA), not only as a venue to network with industry peers but also as a source of information about the industry it serves.

"We have been members of the AFPA for decades and have always appreciated the support they give us as well as the knowledge they have about the Alberta food industry," says von Rotz. "The AFPA helps keep us up to date on current food processing news and new regulations that allows us to remain ahead of the game."



Wabi Sabi

Brands LTD.

NAMED AFTER THE JAPANESE

Zen world-view that finds beauty in things that are modest, humble, and unconventional, Wabi Sabi Brands Ltd. is an Alberta-based company specializing in the creation of artisan chocolate delights infused with cannabis.

The company's President and CEO, Todd Pringle, is a five-time Ironman finisher and certified Ironman Coach who, in 2014, had to retire from the sport due to extreme pain in his knee. The discomfort was brought on by bursitis (bur-SY-tis), which made it difficult to make it up stairs without crutches, much less compete in Ironman events.

"This led to a personal investigation into cannabis and the use of Cannabidiol (CBD) in Colorado," says Pringle. "With a newfound understanding of the potential cannabis offered, I began to experiment with edibles as an alternative to alcohol and, after numerous years of culinary practice, I was able to perfect my skills combining chocolate with cannabis."

Last May, armed with laptops and cell phones, Wabi Sabi – along with technicians of Italian machinery manufacturer Selmi's North American vendor out of Buffalo, NY – virtually installed and commissioned its chocolate-processing equipment. Since then, the company has been able to persevere through the challenge of COVID-19; thanks in large part to Pringle's passion and the know-how and enthusiasm of his staff, who bring many years of valuable experience in food safety and manufacturing execution to the business.

"It is critical that you have a very extensive understanding of cannabis and extracts, as well as of chocolate and manufacturing," says Pringle. "As such, we designed and built our facility with Brand Reputation Compliance Global Standards (BRCGS) as the goal once we're live. However, while we are well on the path to gain this certification, Covid-19 has pushed any BRC inspections into 2021."

When Cannabis 2.0 rolled out in 2019 for alternative cannabis products (like edibles), the large licensed producers quickly flooded the market with products that were found to lack



Rather than rush an unsatisfactory product, Wabi Sabi took its time to develop a line of products that look great and taste amazing with an extremely mild cannabis flavour.

in excitement or taste, particularly in regard to chocolate edibles. Rather than rush an unsatisfactory product, Wabi Sabi took its time to develop a line of products that look great and taste amazing with an extremely mild cannabis flavour.

"Unlike most of our competition, we do not use distillate, since the effects of distillate are very unpredictable and tend to be bland," says Pringle. "Distillate is cannabis extract that has been stripped of all flavours (flavonoids) and most importantly, terpenes. Terpenes guide your effects and ensure it is balanced with no possible chemical hangover. We are huge proponents of using the whole plant, not a subset."

Looking ahead, Wabi Sabi is near to receiving its final licence, which will allow the company to start stocking its product on shelves across Alberta and, shortly thereafter, Ontario. Wabi Sabi is proud of its association with the Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA) and sees membership as being a valuable resource that has helped the company find success.

"Since food safety is paramount for us, AFPA has been our go to for training staff as they have courses on everything from Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) to labelling details," says Pringle. "We have enjoyed working with AFPA and will sure to be a member for many years to come."



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