

# TOP 10 Innovators

By Deanna Rosolen

Each year new companies land on the food scene in Canada — creating whole new categories or shaking up existing ones. And each year *Food In Canada* looks at 10 of these companies to showcase what new innovations in products, packaging or technology they have to offer. Unfortunately, we have room for just 10, making our decision on which to profile a difficult one. Here are our picks for 2014, in no particular order.

## 1 Square Snacks Inc.

Toronto, Ont. [www.squareasnacks.com](http://www.squareasnacks.com)  
The energy bar company is co-owned by Mary-Ann Scandiffio, a registered nutritionist, and her business partner Susan Wilkes. It launched in 2012.



**Q: What challenges did you face getting started?**  
Mary-Ann Scandiffio: "Budgeting and accessing funds. Figuring out the best manufacturing process for our snacks, meeting packaging requirements and having limited marketing dollars."

**Q: How is your snack different from other energy/nutrition bars?**  
Scandiffio: "All of our ingredients have a nutritional benefit."

The snack-size bars are raw and have a balance of carbohydrates, protein and good fats (from nuts and seeds). There's no soy, corn, wheat, dairy and whey, and they're made with carefully sourced non-GMO ingredients."



**Q: Where are your products sold?**

Scandiffio: "Our products are mostly found in Ontario in health food stores, including Whole Foods, cafes, catering companies and naturopathic and wellness clinics. We also deliver to offices."

**Q: Future plans?**

Scandiffio: "We are launching a nut-free line this year that is seed-based and can go into schools and camps. We are planning to have our products available nationally before the end of 2014."



## 2 Golden Beef Producers Co-operative Ltd.

Belle Vallée, Ont. [www.goldenbeef.ca](http://www.goldenbeef.ca)  
The co-op was incorporated in 2008 and consists of 10 members, who are all farmers from North Bay to Iroquois Falls. The company's main abattoir is located in Belle Vallée near New Liskeard, Ont. Jason Desrochers is president of the co-op.

**Q: What challenges did you face getting started?**  
Jason Desrochers: "Marketing, cash flow, supply, storage, inventory challenges and logistics. Most of these challenges have been resolved."

**Q: What makes your beef unique?**

Desrochers: "Our beef cuts are much smaller in size than most beef at the store because we harvest our animals at a younger age. There's a lack of marbling since our animals are not fed grain to be fattened. It's lean. It also has high levels of vitamin B-12, omega 3, and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA). It's raised without growth promoting hormones or antibiotics."

**Q: Where are your products found?**

Desrochers: "Our product is now available online, as well as through retailers such as Eat Local Sudbury, Railside Country Store in Val Gagné, Dabrowski's Smoked Meats Ltd. in Timmins and Yves' Prime Cut Meats in New Liskeard."

**Q: Future plans?**

Desrochers: "We plan to reach out to more populated areas in Southern Ontario. We also might consider partnering with other grass-fed groups in Ontario."

## 3 Latin Foods Inc.

Calgary, Alta. [www.fresk-o.com](http://www.fresk-o.com)  
The company is owned by Rafael Chavez and family, who launched it in 2010. It produces the brand Fresk-O cheese, white fresh cheese made from 100-per-cent Canadian milk. The cheese is available in three varieties: Paisa that is suitable for frying and grilling; White Fresh cheese that doesn't melt, and which is good for soups, stir-frys or pasta; and White Duro Cheese which is salty with a hard cheese texture and which is used ground.



**Q: What challenges did you face getting started?**  
Rafael Chavez: "Obtaining a federal license. Raising awareness of our product to consumers and non-Latino consumers."

**Q: How did you determine there was a need for these cheeses?**

Chavez: "The Latino community is continually growing and there just aren't enough products. For the non-Latino community, it's something new and interesting — a cheese that is grilled."

**Q: How are consumers responding to your products?**

Chavez: "It's a product widely known in the Latino community. And we were surprised to find how well received it was by non-Latino Canadian consumers."

**Q: Where are your products sold?**

Chavez: "It's sold in grocery stores in Western Canada, such as Real Canadian Superstores, Loblaws, Sobeys, Save on Foods Market, Sunterra Market, Calgary Co-op Markets and Latin American grocery stores, and La fromagerie Hamel in Montreal. We're distributed by Antoronto Fine Foods in Ontario."

**Q: Future plans?**

Chavez: "We're going to be building a new federally licensed plant in Alberta. We're also developing new cheeses like Oaxaca, Cotija, Asadero, Trenzadas, which are highly sought after by consumers."



## 4 Pluck Tea Inc.

Toronto, Ont. [www.pluckteas.com](http://www.pluckteas.com)

The tea company was launched in 2013 by tea sommelier Jennifer Commins.

**Q: What challenges did you face getting started?**

Jennifer Commins: "In the tea business, differentiation is critical. We blend unique, 100-per-cent natural teas using local ingredients. Getting the message out about our approach and our values



has been challenging; we're competing with larger companies."

**Q: How are your teas unique?**

Commins: "Pluck sources tea from Ethical Tea Partnership sources. We use local 100-per-cent natural ingredients wherever possible. We work alongside chefs and retail customers to create custom teas."

**Q: Can you talk about the Bespoke Tea?**

Commins: "Our bespoke program allows us to be flexible in the teas we make for restaurants, corporate customers and retailers. From Orange Pekoe of York for the York Club, and Director's Cut

for TIFF, to the Right to Play blend for a charity event, it's creative and explores the boundaries of what tea can do."

**Q: Where are your products sold?**

Commins: "On top menus around Toronto and select retailers including Toronto International Film Festival (concessions and the shop), the Art Gallery of Ontario Shop, Rowe Farms stores and McEwan Gourmet Grocery. In the fall, Pluck will be available at one of Canada's largest retailers across Canada. You can also purchase online."

**Q: Future plans?**

Commins: "We plan to grow our foodservice and wholesale business, so we will be investing in packing equipment to help us scale up production. Currently, all blending and packing is done by hand. And we'll be revamping our online store."

