



## Meatless on the Menu

Consumer appetite for vegetarian diets has grown significantly in the past five years. Whether for ethical, health or cultural and religious reasons, or simply as an occasional meal, more Canadians are showing interest in vegetarian alternatives, attracting the awareness of large manufacturers in the process.

While no current Canadian statistics exist (a 1997 study by the National Institute of Nutrition revealed that four per cent of Canadians called themselves vegetarians), Kathleen Farley, executive director of the Toronto Vegetarian Association, says “demand for vegetarian products is increasing.” Membership, event attendance and calls to the association’s resource centre are all on the rise, says Farley, noting that many of these inquiries are from people who are simply interested in healthy eating rather than becoming strict vegetarians. The group, which is the country’s largest vegetarian association, also hosts the annual three-day Vegetarian Food Fair, which is now the largest in North America, and attracts hundreds of visitors and exhibitors.

Vegetarian meals and products are now appearing on retail shelves with increasing regularity. And not just from smaller niche players. “It is most definitely easier to eat vegetarian today, because of the variety of products available now from producers and in local grocery stores,” says Farley. “It’s becoming more mainstream, more accepted by the public and by the health community.” Food manufacturers have also realized that the vegetarian public isn’t just a marginal consumer group anymore – just consider the uproar when Mars UK announced it would use the animal enzyme rennet in the whey used in several of its chocolate bar brands. The company’s quick reversal left no doubt that it viewed this group’s concerns as significant.

According to Farley, the next step for product developers is to “focus on the increased demand for less processing and less additives” in vegetarian options. “Convenience is also going to be a big factor too. But the two aren’t mutually exclusive,” she says. “I truly think it’s possible to have healthful, convenient products.”

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## NEWS FILE

The Voice of the Canadian Food & Beverage Industry

### Canadian Meet and Greet

Last month more than 100 food industry professionals gathered for the first Research Chefs Association (RCA) Canadian Region summer event.

Themed “From Aloo Gobi to Vindaloo: Indian Cuisine 201,” the event represented a positive start to the group’s networking plans. “We’ve had great response and turnout for our first meeting,” says Randy Josephs, vice-

president of Operations for Markham, Ont.-based Kisko Freezies, and regional chair for RCA Canada. The RCA currently has more than 2,000 members across North America, including 80 registered Canadian members.

Held at Brampton, Ont.’s Bombay Palace restaurant, the evening featured a delicious Indian buffet, and special guest speakers Arvinda Chauhan, chef, cookbook author and owner of Arvinda’s Healthy Gourmet Indian Cooking School in Oakville, Ont. and Toronto, and her daughter Preena Chauhan. The pair took guests on a culinary tour of India, highlighting the many different culinary styles, flavours and dishes found throughout the country’s various regions.

“We’re hoping to have two to three meetings per year, and we want to



Arvinda (left) and Preena Chauhan were the guest speakers at the RCA Canadian Region’s first meeting.

make them really interesting” says Josephs, noting that each event will combine great food, education and networking opportunities.