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## Mr. Goudas' recipe for success is in the ethnic food market

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Who is the mysterious Mr. Goudas, the guy who fills the ethnic-food section of just about every local supermarket?

"The Trinidadians think I'm not from Trinidad; the Chinese think I'm Chinese; the Indians think I'm Indian," the small dapper man says.

"But I'm none of those. I'm Greek."

There really is a Mr. Goudas (Σπίυρος Πήτερ Γούδας) to be exact - but a Greek background is just one small part of his make-up.

### **Goudas offers food from around world**

The once-impooverished immigrant who built his fortune in Canada is the embodiment of just about every culture in the world.

He sells [Jamaican ginger beer](#), [Middle Eastern lentil soup](#), [Brazilian black beans](#) and [Chinese lichees](#), all under the Mr. Goudas brand. He also offers Italian tomato sauce, English [rice pudding](#) and Greek peaches-a total of [592 different products](#) in cans and bags and bottles with down-home labels that carry an endearing message from the 58-year-old company founder and president.

"Dear customer: this recipe was developed with great thought. We hope you enjoy it."

He distributes another 600 products through his retail network in Ontario and overseas: Nestle baby food, Montini coffee, Horlicks drinks, olive oil and Billy Bee honey.

His products are big sellers especially in Toronto's ethnic communities, according to spokespersons for Toronto - based Great Atlantic & Pacific Co. of Canada Ltd. and Sobeys Inc. of Stellarton, N.S.

Mr. Goudas is certainly enthusiastic about his products. I've got 20 different kinds of basmati rice. I make rice for the Pakistanis, and rice for the Indians. I make Chinese rice and Vietnamese rice and Filipino rice. How does he keep all those products and those

cultures straight without offending anybody? My business is to know that," he said, simply.

In Latin America, the Portuguese - and the Spanish - speakers cook the same food differently, he said. The countries of the former Ottoman Empire all eat chick peas. He adds one spice for Syrians, another for Bulgarians and Turks, and a third for Palestinians and Egyptians and Israelis. He even has a rabbi on call to certify kosher foods and a Moslem expert to keep an eye on halal rules.

Some cultures are fussier than others when they sit down for dinner. "The Greeks, the Italians and the Japanese don't try anything else," he said, looking exasperated. "Food is such a fickle thing. But in Canada, everybody eats everybody else's food. This is the most multicultural country in the world."

It is impossible to measure the size of Canada's ethnic food market, but Statistics Canada takes a stab at it.

In 1971, when Mr. Goudas was starting up, Statistics Canada said there were 21.6 million Canadians and 18.9 million whose mother tongue was English or French. That left 2.7 million who were "other Europeans", with a smattering of people from Asia or the Middle East.

Canada had become a different country by 1996, the date of the latest federal census. By then, there were 28.8 million Canadians of which 11 per cent were defined as visible minorities, mainly Chinese, South Asians and blacks.

More remarkable, during those 25 years Statistics Canada added nearly 40 new language groups to its list of mother tongues. By 1996, there were 716,000 Chinese speakers, 202,000 Punjabi, 149,000 Arabs, 133,000 Filipinos and 107 Vietnamese living in the country.

Most of the immigrants live in the Toronto area. In 1996, there were 1.3 million people - 32 percent of the total population - deemed to be visible minorities in the city.

Market researcher A.C. Nielsen has collected its own statistics on the size of the Asian food market in Canada. Spokeswoman Marlene Jenett said sales of packaged rice grew 14 per cent in 1999 and 2000, to \$133-million in 2000, while oriental sauces grew 7.5 per cent to \$60.6-million, and specialty rice dishes 18 per cent to \$50.8-million.

When [Mr. Goudas arrived in Toronto in 1967](#), he - like many immigrants - had just a few dollars in his pocket and no more than a few words of English. He washed cars by day and slept in the streets by night, slowly saving enough money to buy a small packaging company and go into business selling rice to South Asians.

Over the next 34 years, he built a food empire, Goudas Food Products and Investments Ltd. His head office is a corner of a warehouse in the industrial suburb of Concord, Ont.

That nondescript office is the hub of a world-wide empire that has as many tentacles as a can of Mr. Goudas-brand octopuses.

Mr. Goudas said he has food-processing plants in 13 countries, contract farms to grow the food and a fleet of trucks to move it. He grows beans in Peru and Australia, peaches in Greece, bamboo shoots in Thailand and rice in India, and then looks for nearby factories to process them while they are still fresh.

The only way to guarantee the all-important quality, consistency and supply of his products is to buy a stake in the factory, he said. So he does just that.

With production in place, he starts to shuffle all the intricate makings of his complex business. He buys [ackee](#) and [rambutan](#) and cassava and 30 kinds of beans and ships them to his plants all over the world. He prints labels in Thailand and Canada. He hires local people to prepare the recipes and taste the food.

For a while, he even owned a multicultural night club to burn off some energy after work. He has slowed down since then, but his mind still bubbles with ideas, some more practical than others.

He is launching a line of [microwaveable rice dishes](#) next month, the first in the world, he said. He is working on ways to emboss his cans so the blind can tell them apart, and he wants to put aroma on the labels so shoppers can smell the ingredients. "This is such an exciting business," he said. "I make people happy."