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Ethnic tastes drive success

Rob McKenzie

“The West Indians think I am a West Indian, the Chinese think I’m Chinese, the Indians think I’m Indian,” says Peter Goudas, who is none of the above.

He is Greek by birth and has lived in Canada since 1967.

The reason why many people think of him as one of their own is that their kitchen shelves are home to his Mr. Goudas line of ethnic foods.

Goudas is in the vanguard of a trend in Canada’s food business.

Immigration and travel are broadening the national diet, with the immediate beneficiaries being companies that produce or distribute ethnic foods.

In its annual survey of the eating habits of 2,600 Canadians, Montreal polling firm Crop Inc. detected a shift toward ethnic foods.

Crop asks respondents how often they eat food from other countries. In 1990, 48% answered sometimes?and 11% answered “regularly”, up from 42% and 6% respectively in 1986.

Small-scale evidence is also indicative.

For example, the restaurant guide in the Calgary Yellow Pages lists

four Thai, six East Indian and seven Japanese restaurants; in 1987, it listed no Thai, two East Indian and three Japanese.

So the time is ripe for entrepreneurs like Peter Goudas in suburban Toronto, David Lee in east end Montreal and a group of Middle East immigrants in Windsor, Ont.

A small meticulous man who favors espresso and Rothmans cigarettes, Peter Goudas (Σπύρος Πήτερ Γούδας) came to Canada in 1967 at age 25 with no English, No friends and a few dollars.

He spent his first nights sleeping outside Toronto’s old city hall.

After finding a job and saving for two years, he got a loan and made a down payment on a small packaging and canning plant.

He entered the ethnic foods business because of the lack of competition. “I was all alone at time in this type of market,” he says.

His first products were rice, beans and spices.

Food city stores began to carry his wares in their international section in 1971. Loblaws followed in 1974.

Now Goudas Food Ltd. distributes some 350 products, from coconut cream to basmati rice to chow mein.

Highlights from the article.