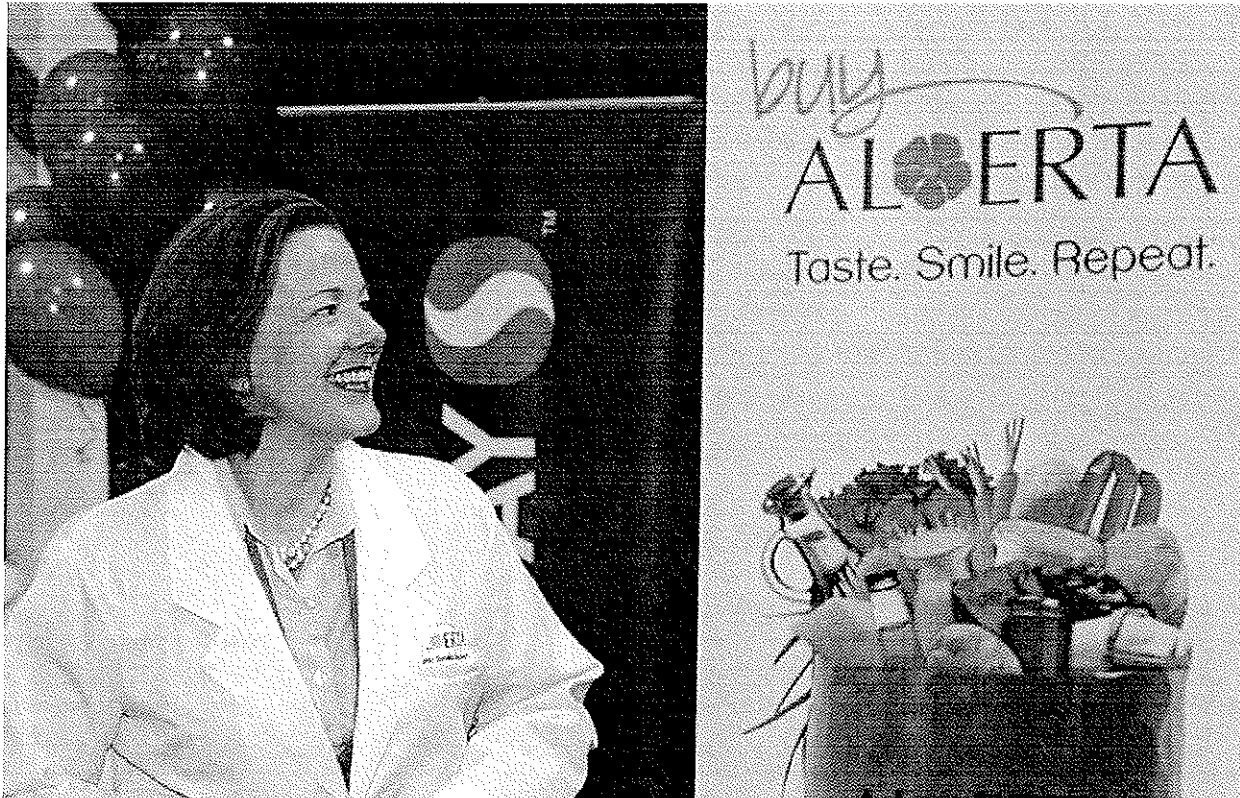


# Safeway backs Buy Alberta campaign for local food producers and processors with \$2 million

BY BILL MAH, EDMONTON JOURNAL    DECEMBER 5, 2012 2:05 PM



Alberta Premier Alison Redford helped launch the Buy Alberta campaign in Edmonton on December 5, 2012. The campaign aims to help Albertans identify and purchase food products produced and processed in the province of Alberta.

**Photograph by:** Larry Wong, Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - One of North America's biggest suppliers of gluten-free foods is based in Edmonton, but the president and CEO of Kinnikinnick Foods says even local customers are often surprised by the products' homegrown origins.

"They really don't realize where it comes from," said Jerry Bigam.

A new public awareness campaign launched Wednesday, using Kinnikinnick's northside bakery as a backdrop, aims to improve consumers' awareness of Alberta food manufacturers like Bigam's. The Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA) and Canada Safeway want to help Albertans identify and purchase foods produced and processed by the province's \$11-billion food processing industry.

Shoppers in Safeway's 86 Alberta stores will now see "Buy Alberta" signs marking more than 1,800 qualified products on the shelves. Bigam says the shelf tags will boost sales.

"There's no question about it. Albertans look for locally produced products and the more visibility you have, the more it's going to influence the consumer. Even though we do have a much broader business, the Alberta market is important to us."

To qualify, products must contain at least 85 per cent of provincially grown or raised ingredients or be processed and packaged entirely in Alberta even if they contain imported ingredients.

"Albertans want to know that whenever possible the food they purchase comes from Alberta sources," said Lori Ell, chairwoman of the AFPA, which represents more than 300 member companies.

Local products are fresher and require less shipping so they leave a smaller carbon footprint and their purchase supports local farmers and businesses, she said.

"However, the difficulty for consumers up to now has been how to identify which of the thousands upon thousands of products available on retail shelves are products from our beautiful province."

Canada Safeway is partnering with the industry group and contributing \$2 million for point-of-sale signage at its retail outlets.

"Both of us feel that by identifying the products, it will increase the awareness in the customers' eyes and then, obviously the sales of their products," said Dave Rodych, vice-president of retail operations for Canada Safeway.

The retailer launched a similar program in Manitoba last April.

Future phases of Buy Alberta will expand to smaller retailers and restaurants.

Members of Alberta's food processing industry said the campaign will shine a spotlight on a business usually overshadowed by the oilpatch but is the second-largest manufacturing sector in the province and employs 26,000 Albertans.

Joe Makowecki, president and CEO of Edmonton-based Cheemo Perogies, said food processing is a renewable industry that boasts tremendous potential for growth as the world's population increases.

"We buy potatoes from local potato farmers here in the Edmonton area, we buy flour from Lethbridge and we employ people," said Makowecki. "It's really the original value-added concept that went back all the ways to the days of Premier Lougheed that Alberta was trying to get past just being a commodity producer."

"The neat part about this is we're also reminding people how important it is to support the local food manufacturers. If you don't have that stable base from people who live right in your neighbourhood, then it's difficult to export long-term."

Alberta Premier Alison Redford, who attended the launch, said agricultural production was the second-largest employer in the province.

"We know that over the next 10 years that Alberta, not Canada, but Alberta will be one of the top five or six suppliers of food around the world," Redford said.

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