



December 14, 2022

Prairie Food Link: a recipe for a thriving food ingredient and processing sector in Saskatchewan

Saskatoon, SK: A fresh new name and logo was recently revealed for Saskatoon's food and ingredient processing cluster: Prairie Food Link.

Joanne Baczuk, Director of Ecosystem Development with Ag-West Bio, has been managing advancement of the cluster over the past year, continuing the industry-led journey that started in 2018 to reach new heights.

Saskatoon is the logical place in Western Canada for a food and ingredient processing cluster. The region has plentiful raw commodities; large and small processors located here are willing to partner on projects with cluster members; technical and commercialization support is available through our University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre (Food Centre); and there is buy-in from all levels of government, including initial support from Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan) to get things started.

Prairie Food Link is a vehicle for food processors both new and existing, of all sizes and scales, to foster connection and build their businesses. Members include business leaders who are passionate about developing the sector, helping other companies and bolstering their own growth through sharing information and ideas, and this is where real value comes in – meaningful collisions between firms triggering innovative approaches and a shared opportunity for growth.

Industry leadership has been key to developing and executing the cluster approach. Co-Chairs Blair Knippel (OMD Global Foods) and Karen Churchill (Ag-West Bio), supported by steering committee representatives Shannon Sears (Bioriginal), Devin Dubois (Blue Sky Hemp Ventures), Mehmet Tulbek (Food Centre), Dan Prefontaine (Food Centre), Sav Bellissimo (Federated Cooperatives Limited), and Abdul Jalil (PrairiesCan), remain focused on what is needed to take the region's food processing cluster to the next level.

"Starting a food business is exciting, but there are challenges at practically every stage, unique to this industry," said Knippel. "While membership opens the door to networking events and the overall expertise of the Prairie Food Link community and its leaders, the real value comes from actively engaging with others who have each 'been there, done that' both locally and globally. Our members engage with world-class, experienced food and ingredient CEOs, facility operators, innovators, and investment experts, to troubleshoot solutions with others who have dealt with similar issues."

Prairie Food Link currently spans Saskatoon and a wide region outside of the city into northern Saskatchewan. Membership is nearing 140 and includes food and ingredient processors and retailers of all sizes, as well as their supporters, including educational institutions, R&D facilities, government, investors, financial institutions and Indigenous economic development organizations.

To learn more about Prairie Food Link and food ingredients and processing in Saskatchewan, contact Joanne Baczuk at (306) 250-4969 or joanne.baczuk@agwest.sk.ca.

Contact:

Jackie Robin
Communications Director
Ag-West Bio
Jackie.robin@agwest.sk.ca
306 299-0391