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## **Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt doubles production in just one year as it expands to supply 26 Thrifty's locations and stores in the Okanagan**

**The B.C. Government's Buy Local Program is providing Tree Island with \$46,331.25 so the company can continue their work promoting the use of local agricultural products**

**Courtenay, B.C.** – In less than three years, Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt has grown to supply its wholesome, luscious yogurt to Farmers' Markets, top restaurants, and to 125 grocers, with the recent additions of 26 Thrifty Foods locations and – as of September – 12 more retailers in the Okanagan, including Nature's Fare Markets. With business more than doubling in the last year alone, that's also twice as much fresh local milk used to make yogurt each week, and 120 lbs of BC honey each week for the cream top yogurts.

The good news continues this month with Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt rolling out new, highly innovative sustainable packaging. It is the first company in Canada to use these lightweight plastic containers, which contain 50% less plastic than most, and are reinforced with cardboard sleeves. These containers were first introduced earlier this year for Tree Island's Greek yogurt, and are now being used for the cream top yogurt, as well. In the first year, Tree Island will save 26,000 lbs of plastic – the average weight of 22 Ayrshire cows – by using these containers for its entire product line.

"We are excited about our new package because it is moving our commitment to environmental sustainability forward and reducing our footprint," said Scott DiGuistini, microbiologist and owner of Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt, along with his wife, Merissa Myles. "While it's a new package for the cream top yogurt, the artisan recipes have stayed the same, as has our commitment to using fresh whole milk from grass-fed cows, BC honey and live cultures."

"Ingredients matter, which is why we choose carefully," added Myles. "We are proud to work with local dairies, like Birkdale Farm in Comox, and use only 100% fresh, local grass-fed milk in our recipes. We are therefore 100% Canadian Milk Certified and our yogurt doesn't contain any skim milk powder, thickeners or fillers. Now more than ever it is important for consumers to look for this marker. Dairy products with the 100% Canadian Milk symbol guarantees that they are free of antibiotics and bovine growth hormones."

Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt owners DiGuistini and Myles are both committed to the local food movement. They settled in the Comox Valley, where they could combine DiGuistini's scientific experience and Myles' passion for food and the Island's source of grass-fed milk to create a high-quality, grass-fed yogurt not otherwise available in Canada. Research shows that grass-fed milk contains more Omega 3s, Beta Carotene and Conjugated Linoleic Acid (CLA).

"We developed recipes for grass-fed yogurt because we are passionate about the benefits for humans, cows and the land," said Myles. "Management of pasture land with grass and forage crops is also good for soil ecology, plant biodiversity and for maintaining wildlife habitat."

Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt gained quick popularity in BC as its delicious recipes use 100% fresh local dairy. Grocers, like Thrifty Foods, were soon approaching them to supply their stores.

"Thrifty Foods is proud to carry Comox Valley-based Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt at all of our locations. This product is memorable, delicious and embodies the type of local success that our We Pick BC First program was designed to support," said Thrifty Foods Director of Grocery Categories Jim Steel.

Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt's commitment to local agriculture was recognized recently when it received \$46,331.25 from the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia and the Buy Local Program in a 50/50 cost matching program. The Buy Local program has received \$6 million in B.C. government funding since 2012 to increase sales of locally grown and processed agrifood and seafood products within the province.

"With the assistance of the Buy Local Program, it is great to see Vancouver Island's Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt and their tasty products being made available to consumers throughout the province," said Comox Valley MLA Don McRae on behalf of Minister of Agriculture Norm Letnick. "When we buy local, we support B.C. agriculture and ensure our dollars stay in our communities."

#### **Harvest Recipe Contest – On Now!**

Tree Island is using the funds to reach new customers at new stores and restaurants throughout B.C. As part of these initiatives, the company is hosting a Harvest Recipe Contest, which runs from Sept. 25 – Nov. 9, with judging to be done by Tree Island Yogurt staff and members of the CCFCC-North Vancouver Island Chefs Association (CCFCC-NVICA).

"I am proud to say that Tree Island Yogurt has been involved with the CCFCC-North Vancouver Island Chefs Association since Scott and Merissa first started making yogurt," said Chef Lesley Stav, President, CCFCC-NVICA. "Their vision dovetails perfectly with our mission of using and supporting local producers that promote a healthy culinary lifestyle. It has been a pleasure to watch them grow."

Enter your favourite original breakfast, salad/salad dressing, main course or dessert recipe using Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt and at least one other B.C. agricultural product to win the grand prize: a tour for two people of Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt and two other local food producers or farms, plus lunch with Island Gourmet Trails in the Comox Valley (value \$300). There are also opportunities to win \$75 gift certificates to Tree Island partner restaurants. Visit Tree Island Gourmet Yogurt's website [www.treeislandyogurt.com](http://www.treeislandyogurt.com) to view the contest rules and submission process.

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**Note: photos available upon request.**

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