

ALL FATS ARE NOT THE SAME

BY DALE SPROULE

Imagine an inch thick T-bone steak the size of a dinner plate. Now try to imagine eating the whole thing in a single sitting. Sounds incomprehensible to me now, but as a teenager growing up in Alberta in the 70s, that was a typical Saturday dinner. How was that even possible?

Aaron Skelton, a slender young man with a ready smile, explains. "With most beef these days, you wouldn't do it because you'd feel so full and boated. But that's the corn in the beef. The feed for almost all cattle these days is concentrated dried corn – a huge energy source – but nutritionally void. But if the beef is grass fed, the fats are in balance, there are more nutrients and your body can absorb them quickly. It's much easier to digest."

As VP, Brands and Business Development at Greenspace Brands, Skelton is clearly not as young as he looks (a natural perk – one supposes – of eating well). With over 10 years experience coming up through the ranks in the health food category at Loblaws, he has a keen awareness of consumer preferences as well as changing health and dietary trends. That insight is apparent as he explains, how "truths" once held by science are now being challenged – like fats causing cholesterol, which ultimately leads to heart attacks.

"The science that's coming out now is saying completely the opposite. You need fats – the trick is – the quality of the fats. When you look at omega and the benefits that omega has on brain function inflammation – those all need to be discussed when you talk about fats – so it's not a single entity that you can just say you need a certain per cent of, you have to talk about the quality of it and that's when we get to talk about how animals are fed and what the effect of that feed is on the products.

Their modest office in the basement of a heritage house in downtown Toronto feels more like a farmhouse than an urban space. There's natural brick and rustic signage, plus a small kitchen, whose refrigerator is undoubtedly chock full of things like grass fed milk, butter and beef – after all, these are Canada's two new gurus of grass-fed food. They may seem new, but they've been around for awhile, says Matthew von Teichman, the founder and CEO of Greenspace Brands. "Our original brand was Life Choices Natural Foods. It's been around for 13 years now."

With a kind of Matthew-Perry-guy-next-door affability that makes him feel like an old friend that you just met, von Teichman is genuinely excited to explain the evolution of his company. "The Life Choices brand started off as a frozen food company, but it's morphed into a clean meat company – so it's now kind of the Applegate of Canada. Better sourced meat and just fewer ingredients basically. Familiar family favourites – but healthier versions with simple ingredients. We have a breaded line that includes chicken nuggets and fish sticks and stuff like that. We have frozen burgers. We have Life Choices Fresh Hot Dogs."

"Ideally, we should be drinking milk and eating meat and vegetables right off the farm. The gold standard is to cook, but that's not realistic for everybody – at least not all the time. When the parents are both working and don't have time to cook – we provide the next best option, it's an excellent product – great sourced meat that's as minimally processed as possible. When you're pushed and you can't make the best choice because of time, commitment whatever it happens to be ... that's what Life Choices is there for – so you can make the best choice possible."

"Every product we have, adds Skelton, "is antibiotic and hormone free."

