

# Danielle Franz and Sherry Essnaashari

DIRECTORS AND CO-OWNERS, TROINOA FUNCTIONAL FOODS INC.

The story, for friends Danielle Franz and Sherry Essnaashari, began about five years ago. Franz was completing a masters degree and encountered some digestive issues. Essnaashari, a homeopath, recommended Franz try kefir, a fermented milk product that has 22 billion active cultures per a 125-mL serving. Franz loved it. Long nights spent studying but also researching healthy snacks led Franz to dabble with her ice cream maker. “And voilà,” she explains, “I had myself a low-fat, digestive friendly, sugar-free dessert.” The discovery led the two friends, who spent four years researching and developing the product, to launch Yogalicious, a frozen dessert featuring kefir. Under the company name Troinoa Functional Foods Inc., the pair launched officially in Toronto in August. ■



Danielle Franz (left) and Sherry Essnaashari

## Q&A

### WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE GETTING STARTED?

**Danielle:** “We really needed Business 101. We had the help of a large food processing organization, but it was difficult for a small business to speak the culture of large business. The minimum volumes required certainly didn’t speak to our needs. And accessing organic and local ingredients became a mini nightmare.”

**Sherry:** “Developing a product that is socially responsible, tasty and natural. Most people still believe ice cream is not good for you, so our challenge is helping people change that way of thinking, while supporting good food practices.”

### WHAT WERE YOUR FAVOURITE HIGHLIGHTS OF STARTING THE COMPANY?

**Danielle:** “The thrill of knowing we were creating something different, that can make a difference and address a real need. Ice cream and desserts are fun, a great way to endorse health and bridge the divide between nutritious and delicious.”

**Sherry:** “Understanding the potential that exists in our product line. As we did our research, our network grew and we received more confirmation that we were on to a great thing.”

### WHAT ISSUES IS YOUR SECTOR FACING?

**Danielle:** “The food industry is undergoing a major shift. Consumers are more educated on how to read labels and are seeking foods that offer value-added benefits. Small businesses are actually propelling the market forward in this area and women are taking the lead. But the industry doesn’t necessarily support small businesses, yet most innovation comes from them. Canada should take the lead and invest in enterprises that support small business production and processing.”

**Sherry:** “While regulations are necessary, some, such as Bill C51, affect consumer purchasing power. There also needs to be consistency among natural health product developers. What is ‘natural,’ and are there risks to using products with genetically modified ingredients? It is vital consumers understand so they can make informed choices.”

### WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO YOU SEE IN YOUR SECTOR?

**Danielle:** “We’re in a great position to address nutritional and dietary needs of consumers and we hope to do this through the creation of foods that are nostalgic, fun and bring enjoyment.”

**Sherry:** “Only 20 years ago, society dismissed the role of nutrition to overall health. Today people are seeking alternative healing, going back to basics and paying closer attention to what they consume. The shift in awareness means we have a role to play as educators. There is a great opportunity to better understand the correlation between nutrition and chronic diseases. As a functional food developer and homeopath, I have a responsibility to help educate the public so they can better manage the quality of their life.” ■

## inthespotlight

**First food industry job: (Danielle)** “Teaching youth to cook at a community kitchen.” **(Sherry)** “The Old Western Chicken and Chips in Baltimore, Md. and at my parents’ fast food chicken spot.”

**Favourite food: (Danielle)** “Homemade soup.”

**Industry mentor: (Danielle)** “First and foremost, my grandmother. And Michael Wolfson, Food and Beverage Cluster Specialist for the City of Toronto. He gently guided and encouraged us onward.” **(Sherry)** “Michael has been instrumental to our progress.”