

Healthy, Adventurous Cuisines on the Menu The Ethnic & Specialty Food Expo 2007 and All Things Organic return to Toronto.

By Alan MacKenzie, Canadian Meat Business

The Ethnic & Specialty Food Expo 2007, a trade event open to the foodservice and retail industries, will be held at the International Centre in Toronto Sept. 30 and Oct. 1.

Event director Donna Wood says the expo – in its second year – is dedicated to satisfying the burgeoning trend for flavourful, delicious and healthy foods, which is driven in part by southern Ontario's strong immigrant population, and the push by urbane mainstream consumers for healthier, more adventurous cuisines.

She says the expo is a chance for attendees to gather industry and product information, identify food trends, compete and succeed with market knowledge. Buyers can discuss their needs with suppliers in an informal, low-pressure setting, start new vendor relationships or complement current ones.

The 2006 event attracted 1,124 attendees – including restaurants, grocery, box and convenience stores – and featured 70 exhibitors. This year Wood expects to have about 100 exhibitors and hopes to see the number of attendees increase as well.

“Buyers told us the number one reason they came to the show was to find new products or suppliers,” she says, noting that over 70 per cent were successful in meeting this goal.

Events will include cooking demonstrations, educational seminars and a yet-to-be-determined industry panel.

Wood notes that the specialty food market is particularly strong in Toronto, as the city is home to 41 per cent of Canada's three million immigrants. There are more than 170 different ethnic groups in Toronto and almost 100,000 immigrants move to Toronto each year.

As with last year's expo, an additional part of the event is the All Things Organic pavilion presented by the Organic Trade Association. Wood says the pavilion has more than double the number of exhibitors than it had last year. This part of the expo is dedicated to exhibitors that offer organic-only products, but Wood notes that buyers interested in organics will find additional products throughout the expo by exhibitors that offer both organic and non-organic items.

The organic food market has shown a 20 per cent annual growth rate, Wood notes, adding that 71 per cent of Canadians have tried organic food and almost 6 million are regular purchasers.

Registration for attendees is open until two days before the event, but Wood recommends exhibitors sign up early so they can be properly promoted as part of the event. She notes this is particularly important for export-ready exhibitors, for whom she sets up one-on-one meetings with U.S. buyers.

For more details on the event, or to register, visit ethnicspecialtyfood.com.