



## Bringing Asian flavors to Alberta, Then all of Canada

*This Edmonton food processor has invested heavily in new food safety processes, infrastructure and equipment, with the help of cost-sharing from Growing Forward 2.*

These days, consumers are looking for new tastes and new experiences when they visit their local food retailer. Asian styles of food are seeing particularly strong demand and the people at All Asia Fresh Foods are aiming to meet it.

Based in Edmonton, the company – formerly known as Tokyo Express – makes soup, noodle and rice bowls rooted in the cuisines of China, India, Japan, Korea and Thailand. Japanese-inspired sushi is another popular item. Over the past few years, in order to enhance its food safety performance, the company developed and implemented a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system.

All Asia's HACCP system, along with related improvements in equipment and infrastructure, were developed with cost-sharing assistance from the *Growing Forward 2* Food Safety (Processor) Program.

"We started the HACCP plan going back to 2012," says Christy Young, All Asia's Quality Assurance and HACCP Manager. "Food safety and quality assurance are about the facility we have, the processes we use and the training that's required for our people."

### Critical Control Points Scrutinized

When you enjoy an All Asia Fresh product, you may not think about all the steps that had to be executed precisely to make your meal tasty and safe. In a food operation like All Asia, there's a lot going on and many variables of time and temperature to master. The sushi rolls that are so popular in supermarkets provide one example.

"The rice has to be warm when it's wrapped," says Young. "You have the filling at 4 degrees C, but slowly the filling warms up because the rice is warmer, so you need to chill it down. Another factor is that sushi rice is acidified and should be a certain pH."

Many of All Asia's products have several steps involved in their preparation. Meat, vegetables and noodles or rice are cooked, then blast-chilled, assembled in bowls and prepared for distribution. To prevent cross-contamination, the company established and equipped separate rooms for each function. Each room is maintained at an ideal temperature for quality and food safety.

"We have a raw meat room that's kept at 10 degrees C," says Young. "We process all our meat there. We put a wall between the raw meat room and our kitchen for cooking. Vegetables are handled separately. We also upgraded our blast freezer so that it can chill product faster."



### **A Process of Continuous Improvement**

Once All Asia's HACCP and quality assurance systems were in place, the story didn't end there. Annual third-party audits validate the processes being used, and identify ways to perform at an even higher level. Ongoing training keeps staff attuned to the company's food safety protocols.

Currently, you can buy All Asia Fresh Foods products at Costco, Safeway, and Save-On-Foods in Alberta. As Young explains, that market footprint is only the beginning. During 2016, All Asia expects to open a production facility in British Columbia. New products, such as Japanese udon noodle soup, are on the way.

"People are willing to try new cuisines from different cultures, and we will continue to focus on Asian cuisines," says Young. "Our goal is to open up a plant in every single province and shop local and fresh. Our food safety and quality assurance program underpins our growth and expansion plans."

*Growing Forward 2* is a federal – provincial – territorial initiative.