



## Pita Pioneer Aims for Expansion

*Calgary's Byblos Bakery has found the sweet spot: consumer-pleasing quality, a diverse product line, efficient production and rigorous food safety. Here's how.*

Back in 1975, when George Daklala was first introducing Albertans to pita bread, would anyone have predicted that his company would grow and thrive for the next 40 years?

"At that time, when we first did demonstrations with pita, people had never seen it before and had no idea what to do with it," says Daklala. "It was a long haul at first, because it was completely foreign to most people."

Countless demonstrations later, people began to acquire a taste for this staple of Middle Eastern cuisine. Some favoured decidedly non-traditional fillings (peanut butter, anyone?) and found that pita's versatility and health qualities were a great fit for the fast-paced life of Alberta.

Byblos Bakery – the company originally founded by the Daklala brothers – gained a foothold in the competitive market for baked goods. Today, Albertans still can't get enough.

"The pita market is huge for us and it grows every year," says Daklala. "Our equipment produces 18,000 loaves of pita bread per hour and our lines operate 20 hours per day, five days per week, just to meet the demand."

### Life after pita

Over the years, Byblos has expanded its production capacity significantly, carefully ensuring that the Byblos brand is strengthened along the way.

"We put the utmost importance on quality," says George's wife Cristina Daklala, Byblos Bakery's Human Resources and Administration Manager. "We like to make a healthy product, with no added preservatives. We have a strong Quality Assurance program and we do our best to fulfill customers' orders to the Byblos standard."

Despite strong demand for its pita, the company has diversified its product line in recent years to include bagels, baklava, balady pita (larger and thinner than the original), pita chips (baked or fried), flatbreads such as Indian-inspired naan, Mexican-style tortilla and Italian-style panini. Need something to accompany your flatbread? That's easy: Byblos also makes hummus dip.

The company's priority has been to diversify, and increase production, while maintaining quality and meeting retailer demands for food safety assurance.





Byblos achieved these goals through strong investment, committed ownership and periodic cost-sharing with the Growing Forward initiative, now known as *Growing Forward 2*. The *Growing Forward 2* Agri-Processing Automation and Efficiency Program shared the cost of equipment such as dough mixers, a pita divider and an automatic syrup spray for its baklava, as well as associated process improvements.

The *Growing Forward 2* Food Safety Processor Program shared the cost of consultation and staff training to develop a comprehensive food safety program. In 2013, Byblos received accreditation under the rigorous BRC (British Retail Consortium) Global Food Safety Initiative. This status has been confirmed through two subsequent audits.

### **Ready to grow**

Here in 2015, no one's asking how to eat a pita. Thanks to the dedication and perseverance of Byblos Bakery, Calgary-made pita is now about as Albertan as you can get.

As demand for pita and other products has blown past every projection, this 40 year-old company is looking to the future. With a globally significant food safety designation in place, and highly efficient production, Byblos Bakery appears set to keep expanding.

"We still do a lot of product demonstrations, such as in schools with our *For Pita's Sake* program, and we continually try to come up with new products," says Cristina Daklala. "We believe that, based on health concerns and demographics, our business is going to continue to be strong. It's great that *Growing Forward 2* helped us along the way, to position us to grow in the future."