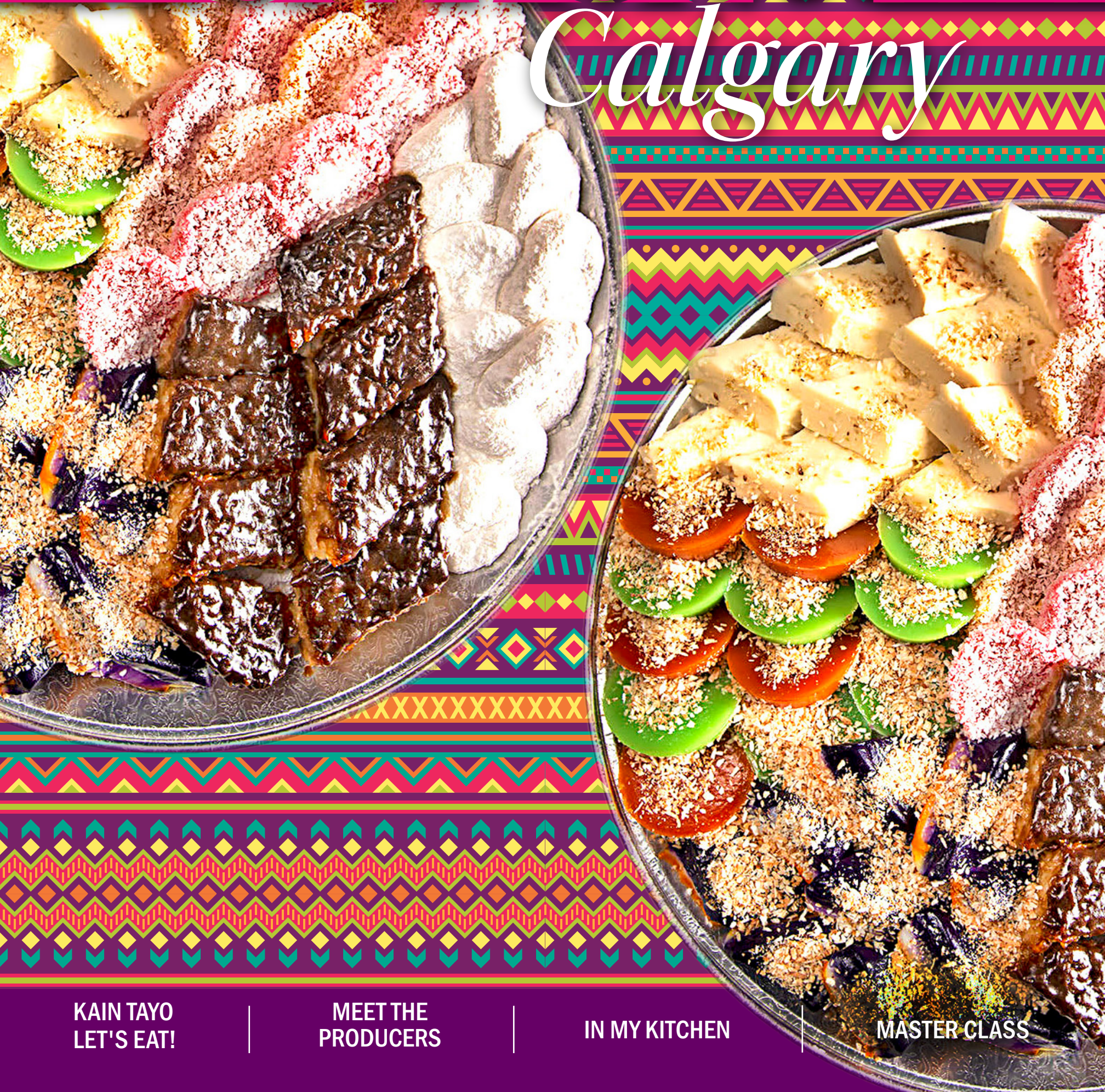


LATE SPRING 2022

FRESH. LOCAL. STORIES FOR FOOD LOVERS.

Savour *Calgary*



KAIN TAYO
LET'S EAT!

MEET THE
PRODUCERS

IN MY KITCHEN

MASTER CLASS



Photo provided

Luco Farms

As has become a spring/summer tradition at *Savour Calgary*, we're proud to introduce you to the great local growers and producers that put the food on our tables year-round.

Rosemary Wotske and Cam Beard



Robert and Ben Luco

Here's a handful on our radar:



MEET THE PRODUCERS

POPLAR BLUFF ORGANICS

If you've eaten at fine restaurants in our region, you've already tasted her products. **Rosemary Wotske's Poplar Bluff** farm has supplied organic produce to the community since 1985, and her *Agria* potatoes are highly sought-after by chefs for their unparalleled flavour and consistency.

As a food-industry icon, she makes success look easy. But while it took only one childhood farm visit for this Calgary girl to discover farming was in her blood, it took decades more to figure out how she was going to do it. There was a degree in physiology and biochemistry, a Master's degree in genetics and the search for just the right piece of land. Then the sharp learning curve to overcome a lack of practical skill and an occasional leap of faith. She experimented with crops and livestock, tried to replicate the grassroots approach to food-growing she'd observed as a global traveler and collected feedback from customers at farmers' markets.

Potatoes emerged as her crown jewel (she grows up to 18 varieties!) Eventually, she teamed up with neighbour grower, **Cam Beard**, to supply a full range of root vegetables to organic grocers and restaurateurs, carefully rotating and cover-cropping the pair's combined 250+ acres to promote the soil fertility that produces flavourful, nutrient-dense food.

Rosemary is as big a "foodie" as she is a farmer, talking starch types and mouth feel and heat responses with the best of them. "I love doing chef calls," she says. "This is home; this is where I need to be."

She also loves to get people out on the farm, running field tours with Cam and hosting long-table dinners. A concern for food waste means she supplies two foodbanks with vegetables that "don't meet runway standards in the beauty contest" and offers "Ugly Veggie Wednesday" discounts at the farm. Both motives are behind a new venture she hopes to launch by 2024: a distillery that uses field 'seconds,' alongside a steakhouse featuring products from Poplar Bluff and other county ranchers, growers and brewers.

"It's about integrity, about what you're giving people to eat," she says. "Because eating well does more towards happiness and longevity and *joie-de-vivre* in people's lives than anything else does."

Check **poplarblufforganics.com** for upcoming events and for a full list of restaurants and retailers where Poplar Bluff products are sold.

LUCO FARMS

Love those fields of bright yellow blooms in an Alberta summer? Guess what! They're not always canola. In a country that's the world's largest producer of mustard seed, the harvest from those fields might just appear in your next jar of Dijon.

Mustard is not native to Alberta, but this sun-loving, drought-tolerant crop thrives on our southern prairies. **Robert Luco** knows that better than most. His family has farmed 1,000 acres near Lethbridge since 1937 and his father was among the first in the area to grow pedigreed oriental mustard seed almost 60 years ago. Now Robert and his son, **Ben**, are carrying on the family tradition with their line of **Luco Farms** artisanal mustards.

At first, "we were [adding] thyme and cranberries and beer and all sorts of stuff," says Robert. But chefs told them to keep it simple and leave the flavour-play to them. "So we backed off that and started making pure ground mustard [using] brown, yellow and oriental mustard seeds." The Lucos blend them like your favourite GSM wine, creating six varieties to date: from the mild, yellow *Prairie Flower* to the aptly-named *Prairie Fire*, blazing with oriental seeds and their horseradish/wasabi tang.

The duo has sold Luco products online and at the **Lethbridge Farmers' Market** since 2013 where they've been a hit with people like the nonna who keeps her family coming back with her *Prairie Spirit*-laced mac 'n cheese, and the beef lover who finesses his flat-iron steak with a Luco Farms mustard-spiked jus.

The Lucos are quick to credit the many organizations and partners who've championed their product, including a swath of **Lethbridge** stores and restaurants, as well as the Calgary and Airdrie Sobeys/Safeway managers who added the mustards to their shelves this past year.

"I like the feedback that we get from the marketplace," says Ben. "People saying 'this is the best.'" And Robert loves working with his son: "[It's] been a really wonderful experience to build something together. And to be producing product that people...use as an expression of THEIR caring and love for THEIR family."

Calgary shoppers can buy Luco Farms mustards online (lucofarms.com) or at Safeway Aspen, Garrison Woods, or Sobeys Strathcona Square.

SHIRLEY'S GREENHOUSE

She's the definition of hustle. And – surprise – her name's not Shirley.

She's **Dawn Buschert** of **Shirley's Greenhouse** –and Shirley is actually her mom, who started the family operation back in the '90s with Dawn's dad, **Ted Van Tienhoven**. Dawn grew up in the greenhouse, so when her parents decided to sell, she took the business name and built a greenhouse of her own just east of **Didsbury** in 2007. There she grows cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers in a 36,000 square foot facility, in addition to 20 acres of hand-picked field crops like greens and squash.

In truth, she loves the people side of the business, so she leaves operations to her tiny, trusted team while she hits the road six days a week, tending to her many farmers' market booths as well as her **Old's Uptown Market** and **Symon's Valley Ranch Market** stores. Her truck is her office; her phone never stops. "But I thrive on that," she says. "I love people and relationships."

What she doesn't love are the pests that are the bane of greenhouses everywhere. "Aphids are my enemy," she says. Like all Alberta greenhouse growers, she turns to predator insects – such as ladybugs – as a first line of defense. When flare-ups do occur, she uses only certified organic pesticides – her own personal commitment to customers and family. Her greenhouse collects rainwater; she re-uses water from the greenhouse's hydroponic systems to irrigate her field crops; and she uses no grow lights – which not only saves energy but shuts down operations for a month in deep winter, allowing any residual pests to die. In 2019, she was Alberta Greenhouse Grower of the Year.

"It's about [selling] good food to good people," she says. "I love what I do." Check shirleysgreenhouse.com for all her online and market locations.

Photo provided



Dawn Buschert

