



In this inaugural episode, we talk about the basics of being a GS1 Canada small business subscriber. Learn how global standards relate to barcodes and supply chains and why it's important to work with a Trusted Strategic Partner. The discussion covers how a small business can plan for future success with a strong starting position. Gain insights and information from people with lived experience from industry knowledge to post-pandemic growth and resilience.

Host:

- Isabelle Huot, Dietitian, Columnist and Small Business Owner

Guests:

- Jean Morin, Fromager (Cheesemaker), Fromagerie du Presbytère
- Natacha Roy, Director Central Procurement, Grocery, Metro
- Francois Bouchard, Senior Vice President, Industry Relations and Community Engagement, GS1 Canada

Isabelle Huot:

Small businesses are the pillars of the economy and the heart of communities across Canada. They represent our innovative spirit, our diverse cultures, and our common needs. In support of the small businesses that continue to drive our economic growth and the businesses that proudly sell their products, here is Beyond Barcodes, an original podcast presented by GS1 Canada for people interested in small business and all things entrepreneurial.

Hello and welcome. I'm your host, Isabelle Huot, Ph.D. in nutrition. Behind most small businesses is a dream. A deep desire to share a passion, a great product, or a unique service with the community, but achieving that big dream can seem daunting to many. That's where GS1 Canada comes in to help small businesses like yours and mine get off on the right foot. Everyone knows about barcodes, but only GS1 Canada barcodes are recognized worldwide.

They ensure that your products are uniquely identified and can be traced back to your company, both locally and around the world. In this episode, beyond barcodes, we discover how to get off on the right foot with our guest, fourth-generation dairy farmer turned cheesemaker and co-owner of Fromagerie du Presbytère, Mr. Jean Morin. Hello Jean.

Jean Morin:

Hello to you.

Isabelle:

I discovered your cheeses, which are wonderful. Since then, you haven't stopped evolving by constantly marketing new products, cow's milk cheeses, but also sheep's and goat's milk cheeses. Do you really have innovative

strategies? Yes, you follow in the footsteps of your great-grandfather, but you took an innovative turn in the early 2000s.

Jean: We first made a shift about 30 years ago when we went organic. It really brought me closer to the whole proximity that you have with a consumer. It also brought me back to my professional ethic, which is to feed people. When you tie all of that together, you end up with proximity of consumers and: "Why not go further with organic milk, to bring it to processing?" Then it became for me like a kind of attraction. It attracted me. It was a passion that was growing in me.

The Presbytery Cheese Factory is first and foremost the transformation and marketing of the milk from the Louis d'Or farm. It's a valorization, a rise in the value of milk, in the quality of milk. Listen, it happens in a presbytery, it's wonderful. It's the rise of cheese. It's in a way an improved option of a simple milk, of a basic milk.

Isabelle: There, this magnificent building, the magnificent presbytery of Sainte-Élisabeth de Warwick, you saw a possible place to do food processing. Just, already made organic production 30 years ago, it is really a pioneer or almost?

Jean: Yes, we were going off the path that we had just established with the chemical world. We isolated ourselves a little bit, but we worked as a small team, and then we had challenges doing better without the chemical input. This is a great challenge. I like these challenges: technical challenges, philosophical challenges, but above all a challenge of passion. When the presbytery shelter was a great opportunity for me to go further because I had been attracted to it for a long time and I was going to do training everywhere.

Isabelle: You went to France, among other places, yes.

Jean: Among other things, to learn how to make cheese and then learn how to do better with our milk.

Isabelle: Can we say today that your cheeses are better than French cheeses?

Jean: The best French cheeses are from Quebec. That says it all.

Isabelle: Yes. If we come to Sainte-Élisabeth de Warwick during the summer, what happens on Friday night?

Jean: It's the big Friday mass where we share the cheese instead of the host. It's wine and cheese.

Isabelle: Wine and cheese. There are 400 inhabitants in the village, there are people from everywhere. How many people meet on Friday night?

- Jean: We have peaks of 5,500 - 8,000 people at the peak of the summer.
- Isabelle: That's incredible.
- Jean: Especially since it's every week
- Isabelle: Word of mouth.
- Jean: Word of mouth, I think that people still have a taste for picnics.
- Isabelle: So unifying.
- Jean: Yeah, it's unifying. A little bit of music, a little bit of wine, and then a little bit of cheese and that's all it takes.
- Isabelle: Wine, cheese, it's a classic. There, we can buy, in the production, there is the cheese curd of the day.
- Jean: Yes, it's fresh.
- Isabelle: And there's a whole range of cheeses that you produce that are accessible to these picnickers.
- Jean: Yes, on a platter.
- Jean: The start-up like that was the baguette of bread that arrived under the arm. The first consumers arrived at our place, the first tourists. We would make them a little cheese platter, then a bag of cheese curds. We added the music and then we add a table, add music, add a table, then we block the street for them every Friday.
- Isabelle: We need to have fun. After the pandemic, it feels good. That's for sure.
- Jean: It feels good. Yes, it's necessary.
- Isabelle: Buying the presbytery comes with its share of challenges, a major financial investment. What were the main challenges you faced when you bought the building?
- Jean: A small challenge was to restore the building to its former glory, it was a little bit neglected. The real challenge in the production, the transformation of our products: who is going to eat it and how do we manage to make something very good. Yes, my mother will tell me it's good, but it's not good enough. Along with that, you have to build a budget, you have to set up, you have to make sure you have the financial means to set up.

All of that is one side of the coin. The challenge of distribution, the challenge of production, the economic challenge of all that, and it may be a dream, but we must now cling to realities and probably the most difficult in my opinion, today, is distribution. It's still a challenge, even if it's a small one, even if it's a big one, to get the products that come out of our house to the right point, to the right port.

Isabelle: I can say that I am experiencing exactly the same challenges with my company. You had said, "The product has to be good, you have to be critical of your own products." Before I marketed, I read that in an interview you did in a store about how important it is to be critical, and then not release a product until you're satisfied yourself.

Jean: There you go. Just a little example that I tasted this morning before I left. We're working on this new cheese that we've named Les Pieds de Dieu. We know very well that the product is going to have a nose, but we have to come up with a way to make it... We've been making it for two years now, and then we're working on it again, and it's not quite to my taste, so we're reworking it. We've been doing little tests for two years now, and it's not quite right.

Isabelle: It's expensive to do tests like that, to be constantly in research and development. The consumer has to understand that when we launch a product, sometimes there are months and months of research and development to come up with a product that is perfect from a taste point of view, and also to have a price that is accessible, so that we can enter our distribution chains with a price that is accessible to the consumer.

Jean: Absolutely. It's a great challenge, however, to create, but that's part of the pleasure we have, unlike Europe, which is confined to making only one type of cheese. We, the small cheese makers in Quebec, make two-three-four-five, and we have a dozen types of cheese, but they all have to be up to par.

Isabelle: They are all excellent, but I want to go back to the beginning. You met Yann Picard at Fromagerie Hamel. What did you say to really get your product into the Fromageries Hamel?

Jean: There, we end up in a fridge full of food. Behind the counter, there is Mr., the father, to whom I ask: "Is there still room in this fridge for a new cheese? Dad simply replied, "Yes, if it's good, I always have room for big cheeses." That's the way it used to go, the marketing of the distribution. The counters are full of beers, they're full of cheeses, they're full of everything, but if you come up with something exceptional, you stand out, there's always room.

Isabelle: I don't know if you agree, Jean, but it takes perseverance, because sometimes you get told no. You have to keep going. You don't have to give up at that point when you get told no. You just have to come back a few weeks, a few months

later or sometimes with a new product, because if you stop every time you get told no, you won't get very far in distribution.

Jean: Absolutely. When we first started, buying the rectory, I went to see the agricultural financier. It didn't take long, they told me: "Mr. Morin, do your homework, we can't lend you money. Do your homework, we [unintelligible 00:09:45] a cheese factory. There's already enough." Already, there was enough for [unintelligible 00:09:48] I was forced to continue. I continued the presbytery, I put my milk cans in a little cheese factory on the left, on the right, and then we made cheese with them. We called it the Bleu d'Élizabeth, in collaboration with a small cheese factory in Saint-Rémi-de-Tingwick. A year and a half later, we presented our Bleu d'Élizabeth at the Caseus, and we won the Caseus d'Or. I can tell you that Mr. Desrosiers came to see me after the awards ceremony and said: "Jean if you need money, you have what you want."

Isabelle: That's crazy. What is your vision as an entrepreneur for the cheese factory? How do you see the next 5 years, for example?

Jean: Technically, Europe is in our way. I have the privilege of having access to milk. It's the milk from our farm, and my children are now in charge of the farm.

Isabelle: Yes, all four children are involved in the business. It's wonderful.

Jean: Yes, all four of my children are with me, it's wonderful. I have one who makes cheese with me too. There, we have access to what the cows will eat, what they will give as milk. We have access there. After that, we have to work technically, we must always improve, make sure that there is a follow-up, and that there is consistency.

The second major challenge is the price. It happens, we are fighting over prices. The Europeans are subsidized, they arrive at half-price on our shelves. This is really going to be a challenge for small cheese makers in Quebec. How will we position ourselves? Where will we position ourselves? How are we going to find the consumer at competitive prices? We experienced the COVID wave, when the minister said at one point: "Let's eat Quebec, Blue Basket", it was extraordinary for the small cheese makers.

Isabelle: You really felt the impact.

Jean: Extraordinary. It was phenomenal for us.

Isabelle: Already, just in the province of Quebec, there is a market to be won, there is a distribution to be won in Quebec itself.

Jean: You're right, Isabelle. There are still so many places here.

- Isabelle: Yes. Now, how many points of sale do you have so far?
- Jean: Across the whole network, it's maybe 700-800 points of sale.
- Isabelle: That's still excellent, but we agree that we can reach 1,300 points of sale.
- Jean: Yes, we can still go there.
- Isabelle: Now tell me about GS1 Canada. At what point, at the distribution level, did you say to yourself: "It would be important to join GS1 Canada"?
- Jean: It was Loblaw that was the first to want to pass on our cheeses because in 2011, we won the best cheese in Canada with the Louis d'Or. At the Canadian competition, there are of course people from Loblaw, who are in Toronto. They called us right away, approached us, and in order to go to Loblaw, we needed labels, we needed consistency, we needed a way to be recognized at the checkout.
- That was the immediate approach we took. We were lucky enough to meet people who were able to place the right codes, in the right ways, and then position us better on the Internet.
- Isabelle: It's really helped you reach new markets as well.
- Jean: It was very valuable for us, absolutely, to be able to standardize our barcodes, standardize our presence in the chains. That, through the stores, the chains, at one point, we were told: "Your code does not pass. It does, it doesn't. It's not standard. It's not uniform." We'd get a little printer to print it from nothing, and then it wouldn't go anywhere.
- A word of advice: I would say it's a must. It's a necessity for business development, for product development. It's a necessity, so you don't miss it. It's a membership. I strongly recommend it, since you are going to dry in your village. If you want to get out of the village, you have to go that way.
- Isabelle: What would you say to someone who is a succession from a farming family, for example, and then wants to innovate, but is challenged, scared? What would you advise someone who wants to start a business?
- Jean: There are a lot of things, but the first one is to be stubborn. Really stick to what you want. To go out and get help. To define yourself in a project, you have to define what you want.
- Isabelle: Help from mentors? Help from grants?

Jean: Mentoring, that's clear. I've always said since we started, we've done it without grants, at the very least the project has to be done without an aid program. It's fine if there is, but if there isn't, the project has to stand on its own. That's really about surrounding yourself with the right budgets, the right plans, and, above all, the right product. You can be stubborn about making certain types of products, but if there's no room on the market, it won't work.

It's also important to look elsewhere. I've been lucky enough to travel from California to just about everywhere in Europe. I go every year, to Switzerland, France or Italy. For example, the Salon de Bra, I don't know if you went, Isabelle?

Isabelle: No.

Jean: The Slow Cheese show, the Food, it's phenomenal what's there. It's extraordinary to see everything that goes on there, how it's done, how you can dress cheeses, and how you can present them.

Isabelle: That's where we get our inspiration.

Jean: The inspiration is there, that's it. It happens everywhere. There are exhibitions, then there are great opportunities to go and see elsewhere, and that helps to position oneself through what one dream. I did it, about thirty years ago, to go and see the Jura, to go and see the Gruyère, to go and see Normandy.

Isabelle: It inspired the famous Louis d'Or. I used to live in Switzerland, but the Louis d'Or is exceptional. The Louis d'Or already has several types of maturation, so the longer it is matured, the more expensive it is. It's a lot of work.

Jean: Yes. You should also know that we were installed in the church. The cheeses are aged in the church and we make them in a copper vat, we make them on wooden boards. Fortunately, they are aged in a church. It's made with raw milk, but we bring a second vocation to our church, to our local heritage. Then mainly, it takes cheese from a church. All that combines well.

Isabelle: It's the ideal conditions.

Jean: Yeah, the church is perfect for that. In terms of temperature, my mom coming out of the church every week would say, "I'm cold, what are they putting in the church."

Isabelle: It's perfect for cheese.

Jean: So it's perfect for cheese.

Isabelle: What can we wish you for the future?

- Jean: Health. No, but that's the best thing right now.
- Isabelle: As a business, yes.
- Jean: As a company, yes. What can we wish for? That would be sustainability and to keep in mind, I tell the whole gang, to keep in mind the question all the time, all the time, all the time, to ask ourselves: "What can I do today to be better than yesterday?" That, that exists everywhere, that's necessary. Keep this question.
- Isabelle: What can I do today to be better than yesterday? I love this. Thank you so much for sharing, Jean. You are so passionate, so inspiring. Thank you for sharing your journey with us.
- Jean: You're welcome. It was a great pleasure to talk with you, Ms. Isabelle.
- Isabelle: My pleasure.
- Jean: See you soon.
- François Bouchard: Hello, this is François Bouchard, Senior Vice President of Community Relations and Engagement at GS1 Canada. I hope you enjoy listening to our podcast, Beyond Bar Codes. For more information on how GS1 Canada can help you start your business, stay tuned. We're here as a trusted strategic partner to companies like yours.
- Isabelle: There are so many things to consider when starting a business, but it should never discourage you. With the right partnerships in place, success is possible.
- This brings me to my next guest, Natacha Roy, Director of National Purchasing at Metro's Central Grocery. Natacha, welcome to Beyond Bar Codes.
- Natacha Roy: Hello, Isabelle, thank you for having me.
- Isabelle: It's a great pleasure, Natacha. We just heard the story of Jean Morin, an extraordinary cheesemaker who has experienced a lot of success thanks to his passion, his innovations, and his know-how. This is a truly inspiring interview for new entrepreneurs and for farmers as well. In light of what was shared by Jean, Natacha, tell us what are the most common mistakes when starting a small business.
- Natacha: Absolutely. Indeed, Jean's journey was super inspiring. Something that we often see with entrepreneurs who are starting out is that they don't necessarily think big from the start, so they kind of limit themselves to saying that they want to sell in a certain smaller market. It's so important in the early stages of developing a business to surround yourself with the right people, and then go

get the right information. There are a lot of things to think about, whether it's the product development, but also the packaging, the branding, the name you want to give to your company and the name you want to give to your product.

Isabelle: The trademark.

Natacha: The trademark and having to prepare to enter the mass market after the launch of our products.

Isabelle: Are there any partnerships that are important, precisely, to have a solid foundation?

Natacha: There are so many resources available for entrepreneurs who are starting out in the food industry, whether it's the agri-food tables, whether it's GS1 Canada, for example, or even there are a lot of companies that network with other Quebec entrepreneurs who are a little further along in their development, and who can provide mentoring, and coaching on the steps and mistakes, perhaps, that should not be repeated when starting a business in the food industry.

Isabelle: The main mistakes, you're bringing me there, would be maybe not having a solid foundation. Should we start slow but steady or should we grow fast?

Natacha: Both options are possible, but it's wrong to believe that when you start in food distribution, you have to enter the entire metro network or other food retailers.

You can limit yourself to a certain number of stores to start with, to get a feel for them, and then to better understand how things work. Yes, indeed, it could be a mistake to have to start or maybe have to start in the whole network. It allows you to learn how it works in a store, how you can sell your products in a store, and also to make sure you have all the information and the product in accordance with what is required for retailers.

Isabelle: If you have a vision, then you establish and say, "I would like that, to be everywhere in Canada". Because you are in charge of the local program as well? Is it possible to say one day that I will be able to win Ontario, for example, for a Quebec producer? I know that Jean Morin was talking about it. He said: "I would like that. To see bigger and then go elsewhere, go outside the borders of Quebec.

Natacha: That's where the importance of a solid foundation comes in. Right from the start, when we design our product, when we design all the communication that comes with our product, we have to make sure we meet the requirements of all the markets. For example, if we are targeting the entire Canadian market or the Ontario market, we can start with the name of a product. If the name has too much of a French connotation, it could be a block to the Ontario market.

It is also important to have a standard that meets the requirements of retailers across Canada. In terms of labeling, nutritional information, and bilingualism on our packaging, all the standards must be respected in order to have access to all markets.

Isabelle: Jean Morin talked a lot about the challenges related to distribution, and being part of a group of entrepreneurs, and small businesses that have between 1 and 5 million in sales, many of them tell me: "My God, distribution is difficult". I'm just talking about Quebec. Natacha, do you have any advice to give to small businesses to have reliable distribution, but in all regions of Quebec?

Natacha: You have to do your homework, then look at all the options that are available. There are so many distribution options. Often, when you start out, you say to yourself that you're going to do business with perhaps the smallest distributor in Quebec. That's a good approach to start with, but it sometimes limits us in opening up the Ontario or Canadian market. I think you have to look at all the possible options.

There are many types of distributors, there are broker distributors, there are more local distributors, there are national distributors, and there are other types of distribution as well, such as online. We have to look at all the options and think about the best and most effective approach for our products to reach our consumers.

Isabelle: You mentioned the importance of GS1 Canada. How important is it for a small business to adhere to the bar code system to enter Metro for example?

Natacha: It's definitely part of the winning recipe to lay a solid foundation to open doors for future growth. At Metro GS1 Canada, it's a partner that is very important in the whole creation of products, in the standardization of information. It's a partner that helps us to be much more efficient and much more precise in our operations. Honestly, it's very important for suppliers to be part of the GS1 partners in order to be listed or referenced.

Isabelle: It may seem like a big deal for a small company because they say, "How does this work?" There are resources at GS1 Canada precisely to accompany small businesses to make the first codes. Because there is really coaching that is done at that level.

Natacha: Yes, absolutely. Both at GS1 Canada and even in our teams at the purchasing center, we are there to support suppliers in the steps that must be taken before they can have a first product code. The GS1 teams are there and the metro teams as well to make it happen.

Isabelle: My advice would really be to have your own codes linked to your company. Because when I started, I didn't know anything about it. I had a supplier for

snacks. I took his company code and after that, if we change suppliers, the code does not belong to us. Now we have packaging for 2-3 years, so it's very complicated. So the advice is that even if you are on day 1, your turnover is very small, it is very important to have your own codes. What would Natacha suggest to a young entrepreneur, a young entrepreneur who has a really exceptional product but doesn't necessarily meet the listing requirements for a large banner like Metro?

Natacha: I think you have to take a step back to see what doesn't fit or what doesn't meet the needs or requirements of food retailers, you have to know the category you want to play in. You have to bring value to the category. I really like what Jean mentioned in his interview as well where he said, "There is always room for a good cheese even if the cheese section is full.

There is always room for a good product, but it has to be the right product at the right time, at the right price, and with the right distribution. We were talking about distribution earlier, so there are many factors that need to be taken into consideration and often it's just going back to do your homework, making sure you meet the requirements, and then coming back to it.

Isabelle: You are in charge of the local purchasing program, how much room is there at Metro for local products?

Natacha: All Metro stores have a dedicated space for local products. There is really a specific program for local products at Metro where we refer new products from local producers who either approach us directly or are referred to us by regional agri-food tables. We also provide this information to our merchants to tell them: "Here are the products in your region that are available and that you can sell in your spaces that are dedicated to this program.

We also have posters, we make regional flyers where we put forward local products from Quebec. This allows small entrepreneurs to say: "I can have a nice distribution thanks to a partnership with Metro that encourages local products, local purchasing. We need that.

Isabelle: Absolutely. On behalf of all the small entrepreneurs, thank you very much, Natacha. Thank you, Metro for being there to help us, to support us. To help us grow. We all have a vision, we all think big. It seems like it's in the realm of possibility with a partner like Metro. Thank you so much.

Natacha: Thank you Isabelle.

François: Hello again, it's François. Thank you for listening to "Beyond Bar Codes". GS1 Canada is a neutral, not-for-profit association. Our priority is to provide reliable tools to support small businesses like yours. In this episode, John talks about the growth of his cheese factory. We've been listening to small businesses across

the country, and we've launched new initiatives to support this important group.

From flexible and affordable subscription options for your barcodes to training resources, to this podcast that allows us to share experiences from small business owners and insights from industry leaders.

We've also worked closely with the government to offer a commercial certification program to help small businesses learn how to meet trading partner requirements. We want to share what we have learned with our small business subscribers, listening to their needs, so that other small businesses can succeed as well.

One thing auditors may not realize is that GS1 standards are the most widely used supply chain standards systems in the world. Our barcodes, tools, and services are used to sell products by over 2,000,000 companies worldwide. This means that products can be recognized by various retailers, distributors, online marketplaces, and more. Many of them are located here in Canada. When a single standards system is used throughout the supply chain, communication is easier because we all speak the same common business language.

GS1 Standards ensure that manufacturers provide the product data that retailers, food service operators, and markets need to simplify the listing process. This is how GS1 Canada can help small businesses succeed. Thank you for listening to "Beyond Bar Codes". Stay tuned for our next episode where Isabelle and her guests will continue their discussion on product marketing.

Isabelle:

My name is Isabelle Huot, Ph.D. in nutrition and entrepreneur. Thank you for tuning in to "Beyond Bar Codes", a series of podcasts created for small businesses presented by GS1 Canada. A non-profit organization committed to providing reliable support and tools for small businesses to successfully market their products. To find out how GS1 Canada can help you start and grow your business, visit www.gs1ca.org.