

From left: Siblings Nima, Sahba and Salma Fotovat

# Snack attack

Siblings find success by getting snack time right

by ERIN SILVER



BASAK KARAMEHMET

**T**he three siblings behind Riverside Natural Foods' MadeGood snacks are making a world of difference by caring for people and the planet, all while feeding children healthy, allergen-free foods packed with vitamins from vegetables.

Nima, Sahba and Salma Fotovat know what it's like to be hungry. The siblings grew up in war-torn Iran during a time of rationing and empty store shelves. When their family immigrated to Canada in 1988, their dad started a confectionary business with a friend, selling nougat candy in stores.

"When his small business didn't take off, he pivoted into organics, becoming one of the first companies to be organic certified," says Nima Fotovat, president of Riverside Natural Foods.

After university, Nima and his sisters joined the family business until 2012, when their parents sold it. The siblings arrived at a crossroads. "We were in our parents' basement, and we had two options," says Fotovat. "Go our own separate ways or start something new."

With the relationships they'd built with organic food suppliers, Nima saw an unmet need for healthy, allergen-free snacks for the whole family. The siblings joined forces and rented a 20,000-square-foot facility in Toronto and created Riverside Natural Foods. The MadeGood

line of organic granola snacks, including Fotovat's favourite, the mixed-berry granola bar, was introduced in 2014. Nima's wife, Ladan, sold the snacks at events and farmers markets in an effort to introduce the product to consumers; the MadeGood line was soon picked up in stores.

Instead of only emphasizing profit, the Fotovats have created a company that minimizes its carbon footprint while maximizing its positive impact on the people who make their products and the children who eat them. One of the first Canadian companies to give their employees two weeks of paid sick leave during the pandemic, Riverside also donates money and products to many causes, including the Hospital for Sick Children, I Grow Chicago and Canadian food banks.

"Because of our upbringing, we empathize with the fact that others go to school hungry," says Fotovat. "We're always thinking about how we can do our part."

Working together is easy, since the siblings share the same values, mission and vision. Family dinners are filled with discussions about new products and flavours. As for their parents, Nima says, "They are happy and proud. It's a great immigrant story, and we're glad it's worked out." ■

Erin Silver (erinsilver.ca) is a freelance writer and children's author in Toronto.

## COMPANY INFO

**Name**  
Riverside Natural Foods

**Founders**  
Nima, Sahba and Salma Fotovat

**Employees** 500

**Location**  
North York, Ontario

**Website**  
riversidenaturalfoods.com

**Items at Costco**  
Chocolate Chip Granola Bars, Granola Minis Variety Pack, Soft Baked Red Velvet Mini Cookies (various item numbers; Warehouses/Costco.ca)

**Quote about Costco**  
"They make us a better company because they challenge [us] to do better. They're all about bringing the best to their members, and we enjoy being part of that journey and mission."

—Nima Fotovat, president, Riverside Natural Foods