



# Grace Mandarano

Chief Executive Officer & Founder

100km Foods

Toronto, ON

Founded 2014

100kmfoods.com

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*An local food distributor servicing Toronto & the GTA*

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## Background Information

100km Foods was founded in 2014 by Grace Mandarano and Paul Sawtell to support the local food industry in Ontario.<sup>1</sup> The North York-based company partners with local Ontario producers to bring farm-fresh goods directly to local restaurants and consumers. It specializes in the sale and distribution of local, sustainable foods, with a comprehensive offering of fresh produce.

As a result of the impacts of Covid-19, 100km Foods expanded from selling only to 500+ of Ontario's hotels, restaurants and retailers, to also including consumers. They have 1000+ local food products available to order, all-year round. Since its inception, 100km Foods has generated an incremental \$91 million in additional revenue in the Ontario economy by selling \$35 million in local Ontario produce and goods to local consumers.

## Entrepreneurial Story

Grace Mandarano is the owner, co-founder and CEO of 100km Foods. As she shares on her website, "Grace aspires to reestablish the cherished connection her farming relatives in Southern Italy had with their food and their communities. She believes being connected to people through clean, fair food creates a strong, authentic community and is thrilled that 100km Foods can contribute to connecting people to where their food comes from and how it is grown."<sup>2</sup>

Mandarano has a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Toronto. Prior to starting 100km Foods she worked in sales at various companies, positions that afforded her the freedom to be an active part of the full operations cycle - from pricing and procurement to sales, right through to warehousing and distribution. When asked about her decision to start 100km Foods with her partner, she shared that "this isn't a typical path, but I think we both

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<sup>1</sup> BlogTO. (2012, November 26). Where top Toronto restaurants get their produce. Retrieved March 23, 2023, from [https://www.blogto.com/eat\\_drink/2012/11/where\\_top\\_toronto\\_restaurants\\_get\\_their\\_produce/](https://www.blogto.com/eat_drink/2012/11/where_top_toronto_restaurants_get_their_produce/)

<sup>2</sup> 100km Foods Inc. (n.d.). 100km Foods. Retrieved March 23, 2023, from <https://www.100kmfoods.com/>

started the business wanting to have congruence between what our personal beliefs were and how we earned our money.”

In 2012, 100km Foods achieved B Corp certification, which acknowledges the company's dedication to social and environmental sustainability, and has maintained it every year since. 100km Foods also achieved Feast On certification, recognizing its commitment to sourcing locally grown and produced foods in Ontario.

100km Foods also received numerous awards celebrating its innovation and community-focused mission. It is the five-time award-winner of the "Best for the World" recognition for the top 10%\* of B Corps globally for Community Impact (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019).

### Challenges facing Green SMEs

In her interview, Mandarano named a general lack of understanding of the environmentally and socially sustainable business model in entrepreneurship. She noted that there are great examples of other companies who have been successful but these are still viewed as the exceptions, rather than a path forward.

### Contribution to Net-Zero Goals

100km Foods shortens food supply chains with its farm-sourced, direct-to-consumer model while delivering fresher food with more nutrients, picked at peak ripeness. The external impacts of 100km Foods include bringing local farm-fresh foods to Ontario chefs and consumers, avoiding 92% of the distance food has to travel to the consumer and reducing GHG emissions in the process.<sup>3</sup> The company also selects restaurant, grocery and farming partners employing best practices for the planet and ecosystem with an increasing focus on regenerative agriculture.

Grace Mandarano identified sustainability as the fundamental principle that underpins the existence of 100km Foods, guiding every business decision without the use of set targets or metrics. She shared that the company prioritizes reducing its environmental impact across all aspects of its operations, including energy consumption, emissions, carbon footprint, and waste generation.

### Key Organizations at the Macro-Level

#### **Green Belt Foundation**

- The Green Belt Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing Ontario's green spaces.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 100km Foods Inc. (n.d.). 100km Foods. Retrieved March 23, 2023, from <https://www.100kmfoods.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Greenbelt Foundation. (n.d.). Greenbelt Foundation. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://www.greenbelt.ca/>

- Mandarano identified the Green Belt Foundation as instrumental in the success of her business. She described it as the “most helpful and most mission-aligned”, due to their commitment to granting funds and supporting infrastructure projects for local foods.

### **The New Farm**

- The New Farm in Creemore, Ontario, educates farmers about regenerative ways of growing crops and therefore contributes to the environmental sustainability goals of 100km Foods.<sup>5</sup>

### **Feast-On**

- The Ontario Culinary Tourism Association program that recognizes businesses committed to sourcing and celebrating Ontario-grown food & drink.<sup>6</sup>

### **Local Foods Plus (LFP)**

- Mandarano described the now-defunct LFP as an “industry partner” and “certifying body that was in between conventional farming and organic farming.”
- The LFP farm network helped 100km Foods to find the first farms that they partnered with.

### **Government of Canada**

- Mandarano identified the government’s COVID rent and wage subsidies as supporting 100km Foods through the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Canada Summer Jobs**

- Canada Summer Jobs is a government-funded program that helps employers create summer job opportunities for youth aged 15 to 30 by providing funding to cover up to 75% of the minimum hourly wage for each position.<sup>7</sup>
- Canada Summer Jobs facilitates the hiring of seasonal workers for 100km Foods.

## **Recommendations for Implementing Sustainability**

Mandarano recommended that environmental and social sustainability should be built into the fabric of your business mission and values. In her interview, she shared her belief that “if you’re going to run a mission-based company, you can’t think of profits as a dirty word. You can’t change a game if you’re not playing.” She also pointed to networking and mentoring programs as key components of successfully running your business.

Mandarano also shared the need to reframe the costs associated with properly addressing the needs of the planet, people and profits as necessary investments, instead of afterthoughts.

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<sup>5</sup> The New Farm. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://thenewfarm.ca/>

<sup>6</sup> Culinary Tourism Alliance. (n.d.). Feast On. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://www.culinarytourismalliance.com/feast-on>

<sup>7</sup> Government of Canada. (n.d.). Canada Summer Jobs. Employment and Social Development Canada. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/canada-summer-jobs.html>

Neglecting any one of these factors can cause the entire effort to fail. 100km Foods also focuses on developing strong relationships with their stakeholders that are mutually beneficial for both parties and for the environment.

Mandarano suggested disregarding advice that doesn't align with your values or mission. 100km Foods regularly brings its suppliers and customers together, modeling its core values of mutual respect and benefit. They felt that it cultivated a much deeper appreciation of the story behind each business, the why of it; while reinforcing the need for each other, and solidifying the value that each party brings to the table.

### Attributes to Succeed as a Green Business

100km Foods holds several values as key to their success as a business.

- **Congruency**
  - Alignment between values and actions, in every area of the business.
- **Willingness to learn**
  - The desire to cultivate a deeper understanding about issues, particularly on topics that are new to the business, whether arising from social movements or regulatory changes.
- **Partner to fill strengths gaps**
  - The ability to partner with, or hire, people with different skills and perspectives.
- **Empathy**
  - The ability to care about and understand the experience of another being.
- **Honesty**
  - The ability to be transparent and truthful, particularly about things the business is still learning or working on.

### Skills to Succeed As a Green Entrepreneur

Mandarano relies upon several learned and innate skills to help her succeed at 100km Foods.

- **Strong sense of values**
  - Mandarano explained how mutual benefit and respect are the core of everything 100km Foods does, which creates a workplace with diversity and pay equality without having any policies, targets or metrics around these factors.
- **Understanding human behaviour**
  - Mandarano uses her background in psychology and pairs it with a keen interest in how people process information. She also applies empathy in her interactions.
- **Sales and fulfillment**

- Mandarano credits her business success to her experience in selling and negotiating; along with an understanding of cost of sales, margins, markups, shipping and logistics, profit and loss.
- **Collaboration**
  - Mandarano identified how important it is to work with partners and staff to learn the true costs of doing business, then manage pricing and marketing accordingly so that the transaction is profitable for everyone.
- **Systems thinking**
  - Mandarano spoke to the importance of the ability to understand how things are related and where dependencies exist.

### Key Quotes

- “We have opportunities everywhere in every way to be conscious capitalists, as sort of a stepping stone away from the detrimental system that we've had economically on this planet.”
- “Often when I'm asked... ‘As an entrepreneur, what do you think some of your superpowers are?’, I [say that] it's just partnership with people who have the skills that you don't.”
- “You are either having the impact you want to have or you are not. The values of 100km Foods were born from the type of impact we want the organization to have.”
- “I think you have to figure out what the hard costs are of running a sustainable business, and that needs to be part of your cost accounting.”