

NEWS

Supply chain holds true in pandemic



Some stores have struggled to stay fully stocked with certain items.

Photo: Telegraph-Journal



🕒 Published a day ago

Sean Mott | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • The grocery store supply chain has weathered some heavy blows this year.

Earlier in 2020, a series of protests across Canada blocked trains from completing their routes, slowing down transportation and delivery. Next, the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic left some Saint John grocers scrambling to stay supplied. Many grocers are saying that while most supplies are easier to get now that New Brunswick is loosening restrictions, certain items are in high demand and short supply.

Yuke Xie, daughter of the owners of First Stop Market, said the store has "definitely" been impacted by COVID-19. She said the early weeks of the pandemic led to a lot of empty shelves in the store. There was a shortage due to the difficulty of shipping in products across borders amidst the coronavirus, she said, and due to a spike in bulk item purchases from customers.

"We had a lot in stock and we were prepared for it, but we didn't think it would go this fast," she said. "We couldn't get regularly weekly shipments in and trucks couldn't get across the border."

David Duplisea, CEO for the Saint John Chamber of Commerce, said they were concerned the pandemic and the restrictions that ensued could disrupt the supply chain.

They've seen interruptions in bigger stores as there have been supply chain shortages in the international market, Duplisea said, noting the shortage doesn't seem as pronounced in smaller businesses.

"It underscores the need to support local," he said.

Duplisea theorized that big grocery stores have hundreds of shelves to stock, meaning if they're short on select items, empty sections will stick. Smaller stores can perhaps more

easily manage to bring in their more-focused selection of items on a regular basis with fewer interruptions, particularly if they're locally sourced.

The Telegraph-Journal reached out to Sobeys and Loblaw for comments on their supply chains, but did not receive responses at press time.

Kelly McCarthy, owner of Corn Crib Natural Foods – which has three New Brunswick locations, including Saint John – said specialty items like immune support and baking goods have become harder to keep fully stocked, because as soon as they reach shelves customers snatch them up.

"When they come in, they sell out," she said.

Darren Lavigne, owner of Pete's Frootique in Saint John, said his store's supplies haven't been overly affected by COVID-19. He said prices took a jump in the early stages of the pandemic when people were "panic buying" items, but overall things have been good.

"We're one of the lucky ones," he said.

Xie noted the supply chain seems to be rebounding as COVID-19 restrictions loosen up, which is fortunate for First Stop as the demand for grocery supplies has only grown in the last three months.

"We're doing better during the pandemic," she said.

🕒 Published a day ago

