

Day Two of InFlavour Serves Up Future Vision with Mobile Greenhouses on Mars and Fish Farming in Saudi Desert

RIYADH, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA, October 31, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Food technology and innovation investment dominated the menu on day two of InFlavour, Saudi Arabia's newest F&B mega-event, as key figures from around the world gathered to discuss everything from farming salmon in the Saudi desert to mobile greenhouses on Mars.

Kicking off the second day of an inaugural three-day run at the Riyadh Exhibition and Conference Centre, Malham, His Royal Highness (HRH) Prince Khaled bin Alwaleed bin Talal Al Saud, the founder and CEO of KBW Ventures, spoke with Agronomics' co-founder Anthony Chow about price parity in the plant-based meat sector, the dangers of a nation being reliant on imported fruit and vegetables, and the long-term vision of the Saudi leadership.

With sovereign investment increasing in pioneering growth companies and next-generation industries recently, Prince Khaled was asked about Saudi's growing involvement in the future of food security and targeted investments. He spoke candidly.

"We have seen Saudi change dramatically throughout the past few years," he said. "Cellular agriculture is the future when it comes to food security. It is estimated the planet's population will be 10 billion by 2050; you need to feed them in some way, so something is going to need to



change, and you need to lean on innovation.

“It is testament to the vision of Saudi Arabia’s leadership, who are looking to the future of innovation. Bluefin tuna in the desert, salmon in the desert, there are so many production lines that you would never expect to see Saudi leading on.

“As soon as solar, wind, and nuclear start developing and being accepted by the public, I think that will drive faster innovation when it comes to impacting the environment positively... Now is the time to invest in companies that are shaping the future.”

The second day of InFlavour also saw two teams battle it out for a US\$10,000 prize at the ‘Table of Flavours’ competition, which took place in the Chefs’ Table Arena. The two teams, comprising five chefs each, were tasked with creating a specific four-course menu. Team Sweet, captained by Chef Yusif Fattahov of Urth Caffé, and Team Sour, led by Sunil Paul, Head Chef at Coya Riyadh, competed simultaneously for 90 minutes to prepare their menu. With access to a wide range of products, each team had to choose 30 ingredients in a turn-based battle to secure the necessities for their dishes. If a team missed out on an important ingredient, quick-thinking came into play to ensure their dishes were still viable.

With five points deducted for every unused ingredient, teamwork and communication were paramount to create the best dish and claim the cash prize. Team Sour secured the win after creating an eclectic yet harmonious menu that included a succulent tenderloin paired with an avocado and orange salad and a caramelised crumble with strawberries.

“It’s an incredible feeling to win this competition,” said Chef Sunil. “As a team, we’ve worked together for almost a decade and met each other during our time in the kitchen at Coya Dubai. This is the first competition we’ve participated in and chose to create a fusion of flavours from Latin America and the Middle East. The support of my amazing team was key to our success. We’re excited to bring our culinary vision to Riyadh and celebrate with our hardworking staff.”



Judging the competition, iconic British chef Marco Pierre White said: "I've witnessed the true essence of culinary artistry in this competition. It's a journey where precision, timing, and teamwork unite to create culinary masterpieces that transcend the ordinary, and the contestants have demonstrated the ability to harness their passion and talent to deliver dishes that not only please the palate, but also tell a story."

Another highlight of InFlavour's Main Course stage came from Barbara Belvesi, founder and CEO of Interstellar Labs, who highlighted how her company is using a variation of space engineering to design a system that can efficiently grow plants of all types, but, specifically, variations that are high in bioactive's – a key ingredient for industries such as F&B and cosmetics.

Interstellar Labs' primary innovation is the BioPod, a fully autonomous, enclosed mobile greenhouse that does not require a pre-laid foundation, has a fully self-contained water system that does not require a connecting water line, and only needs a power supply to operate, according to Belvesi. The company has high hopes for the BioPod not only here on Earth, but further afield too, with ongoing plans for a moon mission and a Mars expedition in the not-too-distant future.

"NASA launched a competition two years ago to find companies that could develop a system to autonomously recreate our optimal growing climate using a combination of hardware, AI, data and science, and so we came up with a prototype that is right now at Kennedy Space Centre," said Belvesi, who shared images of a BioPod set to leave the Earth's atmosphere. "This prototype is nearly identical to the BioPod we designed for Earth, but a bit smaller in scale. It is important to minimise human intervention by creating systems that are smart enough to understand what's going on inside and then adapt to the climate by itself.

"The product I'm showing you today is planned to go to low Earth orbit with NASA in 2025. We also have a moon mission that we will announce next month and a plan further in the future for Mars, but we're not quite ready for that yet – we still have a lot of people to feed on this planet before then."

On the Invest & Indulge Stage, Manuel Gonzalez, co-founder and partner at AgFunder, a venture capital firm that invests in impactful technologies rapidly transforming the food and agriculture system, discussed how agtech investment strategies are changing – for the better. He said that while investment in the global agtech sector has dropped by more than 50 per cent from the highs of US\$50 billion in 2021 – due to conflict and the US banking crisis – there is still a large volume of investment to drive the industry.

"There's two ways to look at investment. One is the value of individual deals; the other is the number of deals being done," said Gonzalez. "Prior to last year, the sector was skewed by some very large deals. Now those values might have dropped, but there is still a healthy amount of deals being done. Investment levels are now back at 2016 levels, but the difference is that from 2016-2022 it was what we call 'momentum investing' – making calculations knowing markets are

going up and counting on more and new money coming - whereas today many groups are going back to core: What is the company's ability to grow revenue, profitability, and cost efficiency?"

The veteran industry professional also had sage advice both for investors and companies in the agtech space: "When a founder tells you a story, your job as an investor is to look at overpricing and ask 'Can the company grow revenue and make money?' and 'How efficient is it with capital?'. For a company looking for investment, you need to show somebody that your company can grow revenue, show you are profitable, and are capital efficient."

The inaugural InFlavour is proving a hive of activity with more than 40,000 attendees, 400 brands, 200 investors, and 200 speakers representing 143 countries expected to turn out across the three days – unprecedented numbers for an F&B event in Saudi Arabia. To know more about InFlavour, visit www.inflavourexpo.com

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