

Final Day of InFlavour Celebrates Regional F&B Ecosystem as Winners of Food Start-Up Competition Confirmed

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA, November 2, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- InFlavour ended its three-day run at Riyadh Exhibition and Conference Centre, Malham, with the region's growing start-up industry at the top of the menu. Prominent figures from across the Middle East took to the inaugural event's various stages to share personal growth stories, while the first Five-Star Pitch Fest – a three-day knock-out competition for F&B start-ups – confirmed its winners.

Speaking on the Main Course stage early in the afternoon, Jordanian chef Manal Al Alem discussed the importance of keeping tradition and culture alive. With more than four million followers on Instagram and in excess of 2.6 million subscribed to her YouTube channel, the “Queen of the Arabian Kitchen” believes social media can help rather than hinder when it comes to ensuring younger generations remain connected with their food heritage.

“It is an ongoing challenge with the new generation as they are so used to quick food – the press of a button nowadays means you can have any cuisine you wish,” she said. “Also, traditional food can sometimes be one-dimensional in terms of flavours and the new generation prefers multiple flavours when they eat a meal.



Alia AlKhasimi, the co-founder of Oh Delices Creative



Chef Manal Al Alem discussed the importance of keeping tradition and culture alive

"I like to use my influence on social media to try and encourage my followers to try different things. I work with them to find ways of merging tradition with current trends and have seen some incredible recipes come out of social media. I always like to engage with my followers and leave comments on how they can improve their creations – I believe this is very important when trying to inject traditional culture into modern cuisine trends."

Later on the same stage, the grand finale of InFlavour's inaugural Five-Star Pitch Fest saw the industry's brightest and best start-ups compete to win one of three coveted prizes: The 'Plant The Idea Award' for best early-stage start-up included a US\$10,000 prize; 'Flourishing Founder Award' celebrated the best well-established start-up and also provided a prize of US\$10,000; while the 'InFlavour Award' was given to the most impressive startup overall, rewarding the winners with a cheque for US\$30,000.

Starting on InFlavour's opening day, 33 semi-finalists battled it out on stage to impress the 24 investors-turned-judges and secure one of six finalist spots. The grand finale welcomed His Royal Highness Prince Khaled bin Alwaleed bin Talal Al Saud, the founder and CEO of KBW Ventures, alongside industry veterans Andrew D Ive, founder and managing general partner of Big Idea Ventures, and Dana Al Salem, founder of Merit Capital, as part of the judging panel, who scored the start-ups based on how each tackled creativity, innovation, potential, functionality, impact, and people and society.

Taking home the 'Plant The Idea Award' for best early-stage start-up was Saudi-based Terraxy, a spin-off from King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST). Commercialising its SandX and CarboSoil technologies, Terraxy aims to address the ongoing challenges posed by harsh and arid environments by ultimately providing low-cost and environmentally friendly solutions for growing plants in deserts. The 'Flourishing Founder Award' for best well-established



Dr. Suliman Alkhateeb, Assistant Deputy Minister for Agricultural Affairs at MEWA presents the winner's cheque to Ibraheem Basir, Founder and CEO, A Dozen Cousins



Winners of the inaugural Five-Star Pitch Fest at InFlavour 2023

start-up, meanwhile, was Saudi-based Barakah, an online marketplace that enables food retailers to sell their surplus products and meals to consumers at heavily discounted prices.

Taking home the 'InFlavour Award' and its US\$30,000 prize was US-based A Dozen Cousins, a natural food brand that makes convenient and nutrient-rich meals, side dishes, and sauces inspired by traditional Creole, Caribbean and Latin American recipes.

"I was thrilled to showcase our brand and what we've built over the years," said Ibraheem Basir, company founder and CEO. "It was so refreshing to hear all the pitches and it's always a privilege to emerge as the winner. Looking ahead, our future involves continued growth, expanding distribution, and entering new markets. The prize money will help us expand our team and allocate resources efficiently."

Speaking on the experience of judging some of the most innovative start-ups in the F&B ecosystem, HRH Prince Khaled added: "It has been an incredible three days of pitches. We've seen some truly groundbreaking innovations and products from around the world. It is really exciting to see how these start-ups plan to transform not only the wider world's F&B landscape, but also specifically Saudi Arabia's. Congratulations once again to all participants and especially the three winners."

Earlier in the day, Alia AlKasimi, the co-founder of Oh Delices Creative, had delivered a masterclass focused on current trends, spotlighting a cookbook her company created using only generative artificial intelligence (AI), and what potential repercussions the technology could have on the food marketing industry.

"After seeing so much talk about the possibilities of AI, my team and I got together in February of this year to explore how we could use these tools in our work, and in particular, the culinary space," she said. "We set out to make a cookbook solely using both text and image-based generative AI. As we are a Morocco-based company, we asked the programme to come up with dishes that have never been done before, but still encompass the tradition of Moroccan food. What came out was nothing short of amazing."

Some of the dishes that made the final cut of Spice & Machine: 10 Moroccan Recipes Born From Artificial Intelligence include a strawberry harissa gazpacho, orange honey quinoa, and a Moroccan mint tea cake. Yet before they could be included, first Al Kasimi and her team needed to generate supporting images – and then, of course, the best part: Testing the recipes for real.

"I'll be honest, we were all expecting the dishes to taste horrible, but we ended up changing next to nothing as every dish worked perfectly," she said. "It was a real eye-opener for us all just how powerful AI can be if you learn to harness it properly. A project like this would usually take seven people up to four weeks to create – we did this with two people in less than a week. Is AI going to replace humans? It's a broad question, but what I do know is humans who have learnt to properly utilise AI will replace humans who haven't. That much is certain."

Organised by Tahaluf, the Informa LLC joint venture with the Events Investment Fund and SAFCSP, and with the support of the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water & Agriculture, the inaugural InFlavour proved a hive of activity with tens of thousands of visitors being joined by 400 brands, 200 investors, and 200 speakers representing 143 countries across the three days. To know more about InFlavour, visit www.inflavourexpo.com

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