**HOMEGROWN STARTUPS SHOW THE WAY IN ADAPTING TO NEW F&B NORMAL AT GULFOOD 2021**

***Regional entrepreneurs leverage unique Gulfood Startup Progamme platform to share insights on sustaining success in evolving industry ecosystem***

***‘Gulfood Start-Up Programme’ kicks off five days of rich content delivered by 110 of the biggest names in business and food***

***Dubai, UAE – 22 FEBRUARY 2021:*** Homegrown regional startups optimised the unique platform of Gulfood 2021, the world’s safest and most competitive sourcing hub and the global F&B industry’s first in-person event for a year, to share valuable insights on how they adapted to the pandemic and are sustaining success amid a new normal for the rapidly evolving F&B sector.

With the global industry reconnecting across 20 exhibition halls at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) for five days of knowledge and mega business deal making to begin the year with confidence and conviction, the Gulfood Startup Programme kicked of five-days of rich content across multiple platforms, featuring 110 of the biggest names in regional and global F&B.

Tomaso Rodriguez, Chief Executive Officer of online food ordering company Talabat, delivered the keynote address at the Startup Programme and revealed that during 2020 Talabat devoted much of its usual marketing budget to support SME restaurant partners through the challenging times, which has ultimately allowed them and the online ordering segment to flourish.

“We deferred commissions and renewal fees for over 4,500 small and medium sized restaurant partners to support their cash flow. We also provided free delivery for our partners based on delivery radius. Our investment was approximately AED2 million per month, for Dubai only. Our goal is always to support the ecosystem, and we took a big risk in those six months by investing a lot of money to make sure the ecosystem could thrive,” Rodriguez told attendees at the Startup Programme.

“Looking back, the customer funnel that we were able to keep full, has resulted in a very, very promising recovery. On average, during the most critical period of March to September our SME partners grew on average 25% with some growing more than 100%,” said Rodriguez.

Meanwhile, UAE media personality Kris Fade, founder of Fade Fit – which produces a range of healthy and affordable snacks and vitamins, said that challenges faced in 2020 have underlined the importance of working together and networking at events such as Gulfood.

“We are all in it together. We had a lot of things that were planned to be launched in 2020 which we have had to hold off on till 2021, things for 2021 which are now headed for 2022 but, everyone is on the same level I feel, we just have to work harder and find new ways to do it the safe way,” said Fade. “First and foremost, it is about everyone being safe and sound within our company and organistation which they are.

“The event is really cool, it is not an easy thing to put on something like this in a pandemic and the DWTC has done a really great job. You can see people double masked and the social distancing marshals everywhere and that’s really important,” he added.

“For a business I think it is great to be here, it is fantastic to see India right next to France and France right next to The Netherlands and just seeing everyone talking to each other. I think especially for this year, during a pandemic, that we are coming together and talking about how each other is handling it, that’s really important.”

**Business and Safety**

Gulfood 2021 is being held under strict health and safety protocols, which have been intensified funder strict guidance and coordination with Dubai Health Authority (DHA) and Dubai Municipality to ensure the safest possible business conditions.

Wearing of masks is mandatory, with social distancing in place to ensure the wellbeing of all delegates. On-site registration will not be available; registration must be completed in advance via [www.gulfood.com](http://www.gulfood.com)

Furthermore, the show is co-located with GulfHost, the ultimate trading platform for the hospitality equipment & foodservice Industry. For more information, please visit <https://www.gulfhost.ae/>

More information on the event safety guidelines can be found here <https://www.gulfood.com/useful-info/safety-guidelines>

**ENDS**

**About Gulfood:** [www.gulfood.com](http://www.gulfood.com)

Gulfood has established a position as the world's largest annual food & beverages trade show. Split into eight specific food industry sectors, the trade-only show is professionally managed and hosted by the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC).

**About Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC):**  [www.dwtc.com](http://www.dwtc.com)

DWTC brings more than 40 years’ experience delivering world-class events in the Middle East and provides local, regional, and international exhibitors with unmatched expertise and in-depth market knowledge. Our team organises more than 20 of the largest and most successful international and regional shows in Middle East, providing an ideal platform for business development in the region. Our commitment to on-going innovation within the exhibition industry has supported the rapid growth and development of a wide range of business-to-business and business-to-consumer shows and delivered consistent satisfaction to exhibitors and visitors. DWTC works with the leading trade bodies and industry associations to ensure that all exhibitions deliver full value and are built upon the real needs of their specific sector.

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