

Food Fight - S1E10 - Is Our Food Safe.mp3

Matt Eastland [00:00:06] You're listening to the Food Fight podcast. I'm Matt Eastland.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:00:10] And I'm Lukxmi Balathasan. And both Matt and I are from EIT Food. Europe's leading food innovation initiative, working to make the food system more sustainable, healthy and trusted. So over the course of the series, a podcast for inviting guests from all areas of the food industry to talk to us about how we can tackle some of the world's biggest food challenges and most importantly, how we can fight for a better future of food.

Matt Eastland [00:00:32] Today, we're looking at the topic of food safety. Now, I know for some of you, that's not going to sound like the sexiest of subjects and call me Captain Sensible. But for the food industry and for us, the consumer, it is really important.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:00:46] Absolutely right, Matt. So if you're a person with a nut allergy, for example, this will be absolutely on your radar but for some of us who are fortunate enough not to have any allergies. It's likely you've barely even consider the food that you eat. Aside from watching out for use by dates.

Matt Eastland [00:01:01] Yeah, that's right. And how often do we actually question ourselves, you know, is the food a safe? So you wouldn't buy a car without checking it, working brakes and seatbelts. So is it really safe for us to trust everything we put in our mouths?

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:01:14] To help us explore that question, we're excited to welcome two guests. Joining us from Toronto in Canada, we would like to welcome, Jaed Khan. Jaed is the founder of FoodMaestro, a company that helps answer the question - can I eat this? By building consumer apps that help us navigate our dietary needs, as well as working directly with big retailers such as Sainsbury and Walmart. Welcome to The Food Fight.

Jaed Khan [00:01:37] Nice to be here. Thank you, guys.

Matt Eastland [00:01:38] Wonderful. And alongside Jaed, we also have Brij Sahi with us here in the studio. So Brij is the co-founder of a company called SwissDeCode that helps farmers and food manufacturers to grow and produce food that is safe to eat by providing rapid food safety solutions. SwissDeCode are pioneering things like portable DNA testing and helping companies identify contaminants that may harm their product quality, such as things like listeria, salmonella, vegetal material and pork meat. So. Hello, Brij.

Brij Sahi [00:02:07] Hello. Thank you for having me.

Matt Eastland [00:02:09] Great to have you. So we're going to get into all of this in a second. But first, both Brij and Jaed, I think for the listeners, it might be really great just to start at the beginning. So for everybody listening, what is your definition of food safety and why is it so important? So Brij maybe we can start with you?

Brij Sahi [00:02:29] My definition of food safety is essentially food has to be safe to eat. We have to be able to trust what's in front of us and we don't have to test it before we eat it.

Matt Eastland [00:02:39] Excellent. Love that. And Jaed?

Jaed Khan [00:02:40] Yes so building on that we... From a FoodMaestro perspective we've come out the other end of the value proposition. So absolutely, food has to be safe and you have to be able to trust it. But on the other end of that conversation is also we need to be able to understand what that means. And as consumers understanding what we're reading and having that translated to us is equally as important as knowing what's in the product itself. And so it's really about reading the label, the information on the label and what does that mean to me.

Lukxmi Balathanan [00:03:08] So this past year, the whole concept of food safety has really come to light through a number of high profile cases. So, for example, there was a teenage girl that died on a flight from a severe sesame allergy after it was reported she ate a sandwich where actually the allergen sesame allergen was not listed as an ingredient. And this has caused a lot of debate, sparked a lot of debate around specifically around food labelling. And, of course, who can forget the horsemeat scandal, which was a scandal which took place in all parts of Europe where foods were advertised containing beef were found to contain pieces of horsemeat. So this is, you know, essentially food fraud. So for you Jaed, are these examples of food scandals that's really motivated you to start your company?

Jaed Khan [00:03:53] Yeah, absolutely. So FoodMaestro was founded actually from a personal experience with my son who has a severe nut and egg allergy and we gave him something to eat or specifically I gave him something to eat one day, which did not have the word nut or eggs within it. What it did have was icing sugar and icing sugar was made from the egg whites in the product.

Matt Eastland [00:04:08] Right.

Jaed Khan [00:04:08] And that calls for him to have a very severe reaction. And this was a while ago, pre eleven sixty-nine regulations coming in. And so what it comes down to is it's not just about manufacturers declaring the information. It's also about us understanding what does that information mean to me? And as a parent, I did not know that icing sugar was made from egg whites and therefore he would have a reaction to that, to that product specifically because I'm looking for the word nut, I'm looking for the word egg. But as we think about the broader consumers, there's a problem that resonates even with eleven sixty-nine in place right? And it's how do you make it easy for customers to read that label, translate the information on that label and make a determination that, yes, this is something I can eat.

Matt Eastland [00:04:52] And so I guess based on that then would you say that it's like access to that information and awareness, that are the two key things that you're trying to communicate?

Jaed Khan [00:05:00] Well its access to that information absolutely. But it's also access to that information in this day and age.

Lukxmi Balathanan [00:05:06] Hmm.

Jaed Khan [00:05:06] So when we think about the average consumer, about seven to eight percent of the consumers that have an allergy actually have more than one allergy. If you think about the time it takes for that consumer to read a label and say, can I eat this?

Right? So if you've got two allergies on average is about a minute and a half. Now, take that journey through a superstore for a second. What will typically happen like with my son is, you know what, stick to the thing that you know. Right? Because you don't have time to constantly pick up everything. Now in a day and age where we're talking about digital. We're talking about data led strategies through every major retailer or brand. That's not a problem that we should have anymore. And so it's how do you make that information accessible? But it's also consistency. So when you take the may contain statements as an example, if we look at the UK marketplace, there are probably over three thousand different ways of saying may contain nut. Now I don't know how all the brands are unable to get to a consistent "this may contain nut" but the variations range from may contain gene traces of nut, may contain nut, produced in a factory with nuts so on and so forth. But we have over three thousand variations of may contain nut. And you have to wind that back and say, what does that really mean right? So for a consumer, for someone like my son can he eat it? Can he not eat it? Are we dealing with true issues? I'm sure Brij will talk about, you know, does it truly have nuts in it or is it just an alibi statement to get out of compliance issues and potentially legal obligations when it comes to risk.

Matt Eastland [00:06:32] I had no idea there were so many different ways of saying there are nuts in products. So that's really interesting.

Jaed Khan [00:06:38] Just imagine if you have a nut and egg allergy now right? So it just multiplies.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:06:43] What's left for you to eat? So sort of the same similar question to you Brij. So what's really, what's inspired you to become involved in the food safety industry?

Brij Sahi [00:06:52] So the W.H.O states that over six hundred million people every year suffer from food poisoning. That's one in ten.

Matt Eastland [00:07:00] Wow.

Brij Sahi [00:07:01] And as of the six hundred million people around, about forty five thousand die because of food poisoning. So this is a very, very significant issue. And this is one of the reasons why I moved into what we do at SwissDeCode. But I would actually like to share with you also my co-founder story, Gianpaolo. And he moved, we moved together into SwissDeCode with the horsemeat scandal. So when he saw a lot of his colleagues leaving the university and going to work for labs just to do DNA tests in labs for horsemeat, in beef or whatever lasagne, he decided that it wasn't for him. That's not what he wanted to do. And he knew that what we really needed was a revolutionary change in the way that we approach food safety. And if I can just pick up on the points that Jaed made about may contain nut. All right so the complexities of food manufacturing are increasing. The customers, they want choice. So what ends up happening is you get a factory with, say, two production lines, maybe producing up to fifty, sixty, seventy different products at different times, doing small batch runs. And so the chances of cross contamination, whether it's nuts or eggs or whatever, increases as a result of this complexity. And so now if I give you another real example, if you just take yoghurt, as you know, the trend today is for almonds, like everything, almond milk, almond.

Matt Eastland [00:08:43] I am partly part of that problem, I'm afraid.

Brij Sahi [00:08:46] Ok so we know of factories where they have dairy and almond on the same production lines. And we know that they have to try and make sure that the lines are thoroughly cleaned before they switch from one batch to another. But accidents happen. Mistakes happen.

Matt Eastland [00:09:02] And is this where your DNA testing technology comes in? And how does that make that situation better, shall we say?

Brij Sahi [00:09:10] OK. So in this particular case, what's required is a test that can basically detect any vegetable material. So it doesn't matter what type of nut it is, should be able to detect it. And then what's very important is the speed. So most tests, if you send something to a laboratory, is going to take about seven days to get the results. So what the manufacturing companies tend to do is they tend to switch from one line to another. They'll produce the first batch, and then that first batch goes to the laboratory and then they keep producing and hope that when the test results come back, it's negative, that it's ok the batches ok. But then when the batch is not okay, it has to be destroyed or they can take a risk and they can just ship the batch. And some companies do this. And this is where you get all these recalls taking place.

Matt Eastland [00:10:01] Right.

Brij Sahi [00:10:01] And what's really required is a more rapid test and this is where we come in because our test is able to differentiate and deliver results in thirty minutes.

Matt Eastland [00:10:11] Thirty minutes. And what was the usual time?

Brij Sahi [00:10:14] Days.

Matt Eastland [00:10:15] Wow.

Brij Sahi [00:10:15] Up to seven days.

Matt Eastland [00:10:17] Impressive. And I guess Brij. So, I mean, you're talking about across that food industry manufacturing piece. Jaed, when you get to the consumer, how are your apps then really helping people understand what kind of food they can eat or not? You know, can you give us some examples of how this actually works or what it looks like?

Jaed Khan [00:10:36] Yeah, absolutely, so if you think about it, I think the comment was made earlier around, you know, what can you, what's left to eat right? And this whole notion of freedom and food. Whether it's our app, I mean let's take a typical retailer's website. If you go in and I'll give an example, we did an analysis for a retailer a couple of weeks ago. They search for milk-free snacks right. And what should have been resulting in giving the customer a choice around three hundred products. They actually got back only thirty-five products. Out of the thirty-five, the first four actually contain milk.

Matt Eastland [00:11:09] Wow.

Jaed Khan [00:11:09] So what's actually happening is - and then that was on the ingredient label, nothing to do with the manufacturer. What's happening is the data is not accessible for the retailers and other digital parties to go and use that data. So what we're doing is we're taking that ingredient data and we're making it usable. We're understanding the information we're making. We live in an age where technology is evolved and we can

process this stuff in real-time and then present it back to customers. So what you'll now see is if you go into a typical website, you'll see three hundred products that you were supposed to see and you won't see the four that actually contain milk. You'll see the right three hundred products. What you're doing is you're giving the customer choice. Choice of products actually already exist, but they just didn't know they existed and is very difficult to find. Again, think about the shopping experience. If you look through an e-commerce experience, you're not gonna go product by product by product, looking at every single ingredient label.

Matt Eastland [00:11:57] Yeah.

Jaed Khan [00:11:57] Three clicks per product for you to decide if that works. If you're in a store, you're not going to pick up every single product on the shelf, on the aisle. And so you want to do that really, really quickly. But you also want to find all the right ones. And that's where we really come in. We enable that data and then we enable that personalised conversation based on the labelled information right? So whether you create impersonal profiles and then scanning barcodes or performing a search to find the product or you're doing it online through an e-commerce platform, the idea is you're gonna find more products and you're going to find them quicker. Now, with something simple like an allergy, it's quite binary. You know, if it's a nut allergy, it's a nut allergy and you're looking for nut. When you get into things like people following the low FODMAP diet for IBS, for example, it starts to get a lot more complicated, multiple ingredients involved. And it's absolutely personalised to the individual and the stage that they're on within that diet. And so it needs to become super personalised. If you think about the fourteen percent of the population that have IBS and the people, the subset of those following the low FODMAP diet, it's an extremely complicated, stressful process. And that's where we come in. You know we have the data, we've read the food labels, and we're working with the brands. We're working with the major data aggregators to centralise that information, structure that information and make that accessible either through one of our apps in partnership with people like the NHS or through retailers themselves who are serving the millions of customers everyday.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:13:24] So we're going from something that's really consumer-facing, consumer easy to use, and we have something complex like DNA testing. So just be really interesting to hear from you like why DNA testing? Do we need something this complicated to be able to really unpick food safety?

Brij Sahi [00:13:42] So DNA testing is the gold standard. There are other types of testing out there, but they're not acceptable to the food industry. So generally they're not acceptable, certainly, in the area of food safety, they're not acceptable. DNA testing is tried and proven that it works, that it can identify food safety issues as and when required. And I'd like to pick up one thing that Jaed mentioned as well, because I think one of the challenges that Jaed and his app will have is the speed of change. Because, and also looking at national boundaries as well, where food manufacturers actually change ingredients based on local taste. And so I can imagine the complexity coming in because of that. Also, just because I take a simple example, Kit Kat. Everyone knows Kit Kat here in the UK. In Canada, we know Kit Kat. But you know what? They have tens of hundreds of different flavours of Kit Kat in Japan.

Matt Eastland [00:14:42] Really? I thought Kit Kat was the same everywhere.

Brij Sahi [00:14:44] No. You can have a personalised Kit Kat where every bar is a different flavour.

Matt Eastland [00:14:50] Oh wow, ok.

Brij Sahi [00:14:50] So can you imagine trying to keep up with the pace of that sort of change and that sort of personalisation and customisation? So I can imagine from an allergy perspective, it's difficult. It can be very difficult for Jaed to keep up with something like that. But from a food safety perspective, because food safety is fairly standard type stuff and we know what we're doing. It's okay for us. But in this changing marketplace of customisation and personalisation, more and more challenges will come up. There's no doubt about that.

Matt Eastland [00:15:21] And so it's interesting you're talking about challenges. Mean, I guess a lot of people know about things like food prep hygiene, but where else along that supply chain are these challenges? You know, where else is food safety most compromised from your experience?

Brij Sahi [00:15:36] Food safety is compromised every step of the way. If I just give you some examples, take spices. Spices tend to have a high incidence of salmonella. It's a well-known fact within the industry and it has, spices have to be treated to make sure that the end product is okay and safe to eat.

Matt Eastland [00:15:56] Something else I didn't know.

Brij Sahi [00:15:57] And then you have essentially if you think of the listeria. So we've all heard about the recalls in North America where they let one particular brand of lettuce, a type of lettuce, was actually banned across the United States because of listeria. And it took them nine months to find the source. So where was, what was the source at the end of the day? There was one particular farm, the field that the lettuce was grown in, was below a reservoir and above the reservoir, there was an animal trail.

Matt Eastland [00:16:29] Right.

Brij Sahi [00:16:29] So the animals were doing what they do going into the reservoir and the water was being used to water the lettuce.

Matt Eastland [00:16:37] Wow.

Brij Sahi [00:16:38] So really, food safety can come in at any step. So that lettuce was then taken to a collection centre and it was mixed with lettuce from other farms. So everything became contaminated. And even though this lettuce is washed with, washed with cold water, so it has retained the freshness, when it ended up in the supermarkets and into the restaurants, it was contaminated. And then we have cases of, take chipotle in North America as well. And they had cases of E. coli. And this is a restaurant. And where did that come from? I cannot remember the exact source, but E. Coli can come from staff not washing their hands properly.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:17:22] Absolutely.

Brij Sahi [00:17:23] So it can be introduced every step of the supply chain all the way from the farm, right up to the customer.

Matt Eastland [00:17:29] Okay. So going from like, you know, what are the challenges facing the food industry on the whole to your both specific areas. So what are the key challenges that FoodMaestro and SwissDeCode have and how are you tackling them?

Jaed Khan [00:17:44] So anything Brij kind of touched on some of the complexity around the data and the challenges. So if you talk about human interaction, it's also there in labelling. And, you know, the biggest challenge we tend to find is into areas. One is someone who's just mislabelled something right? Forgot to put something in or just there's a contradiction and conflict. The other one is also understanding and we see this a lot. So sugar-free right? When we see things that have a claim on sugar-free, whether that's been added to the physical packet label to a digital label that's been on an e-commerce site some way. And then you pick up the pack and it says 16 grams of sugar right? And what people are actually getting confused with is no added sugar versus sugar-free.

Matt Eastland [00:18:26] Right.

Jaed Khan [00:18:26] Two very different things. And the education just isn't there and the distinction isn't there. So what you have is people who don't have the right education. It's gone through the supply chain, past the testing process into the hands of someone who is more commercial or store or customer orientated, putting in information about a product and misunderstanding what that means. Another great example is lactose-free being labelled as milk free.

Matt Eastland [00:18:53] Alright.

Jaed Khan [00:18:54] Two very different things.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:18:56] Yeah.

Jaed Khan [00:18:56] But there's that common misconception that a lot of people will hold is lactose-free means milk free. And of course, if you don't suffer from an allergy and you're not educated on these things, you're going to make those common mistakes and you're going to go with that common assumption. Now, as much as there are regulations downstream, some of that post, the physical pack label, the regulations are not necessarily as tight or let me rephrase that. The controls are not necessarily as tight. And so what you're seeing is a lot of errors and a lot of emissions. And so we spend a lot of time doing things like conflict cheques, looking at product, understanding what's what, and automatically programmatically going through hundreds of thousands of products each day saying, hey, are all those updates correct? Did something change? Did it change in the right way? Does it have a conflict? And if so, then pass it back to the right party to get that conflict resolved.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:19:47] So you mentioned a lot about, you know, mislabelling and misdirection of the consumer. So whose responsibility should it be? Is it that a retailer? Is it the consumer's responsibility? And I guess that's where you're addressing. But where do you think the responsibility lies?

Jaed Khan [00:20:03] Well, that's a great point. And I think that's where the biggest dilemma is. So after we go beyond physical pack label, when we're then promoting that product through various digital channels, there are many hands that touch that data from retailer to the national brand itself and then ultimately the consumer interpreting that.

Ultimately the brands need to hold responsibility because it is their data. And this is where we kind of come in with the brand-approved content, where we really try and push the brands to come in and approve that content. And it's about making that process simple and standardised. Are we there yet? Absolutely not. We've seen initiatives such as SmartLabel in the US, which is really pushing for some of that to get brand approved content into a common place to get that additional information. And hopefully we'll see some of that flow through into Europe and other parts of the world. But you've got to remember, there's physical pack label, there's only limited space. And so, you know, the traditional concepts and the mindset has been use that space for branding, marketing, but also providing consumer information. And we cannot have every single possible potential conversation on that physical pack label. Where we live in a world of digital, where data can be extended and infinite. And this is really where we come in to extend that data. Now, the brands have an opportunity to finally go and do more. And it's about bringing them to the table to say, look, you have the opportunity to do more. We've standardised it. We've brought it to a place where simply you need to review and approve it. How do we get the brands into that conversation? That's really where we're at at the moment.

Matt Eastland [00:21:37] That sounds really encouraging. And Brij, is this something you agree with?

Brij Sahi [00:21:40] Absolutely. I think the brands have to take the responsibility because they're delivering that final product to the customer. There are already standards in place which states that before a product can be released, it must be free of salmonella or listeria or whatever it may be. And they are responsible for that.

Matt Eastland [00:22:01] I just wanted to bring something up. So I had the good fortune of being sat in front of a whole lot of consumers fairly recently, we were actually asking them questions about trust and food safety, things like that. And we were asking about, you know, who do they trust in the food sector? And actually, somebody stood up and they said, you know what, I don't actually have a problem with the big three producers, because my assumption is that they are doing what they're meant to do when the food that they produce is safe. Then they said, actually, the thing that I'm most scared about is going down to my local shop. And I see that there's food there, which was there the day before and the day before that. And I'm wondering, can I eat that? So, you know, is there a variation? Do you think, in standards between like the big boy producers and the small shops down the road?

Brij Sahi [00:22:46] Yes, I think there is. If I can just say from a manufacturer's perspective, the rules are absolutely clear as to what they have to do before they release the food. But then what happens after it's been released. Ill give you a very good example. Frozen food and listeria. So there is a standard which says you're allowed to have X number of listeria molecules, I'll just call them for now, in frozen food. Because the assumption is that anybody who buys frozen food is going to cook it and they're going to heat it up. Its going to be really hot and it can be eaten. But then consumers decide that they want to make smoothies so that when I take some frozen carrots or some frozen peas or some of frozen whatever, not heated up, just put it into a blender and drink it. And so habits change as well. And now manufacturers are having to change as well. So to make sure that people who are making these smoothies have to make sure that there's actually zero listeria in the frozen food as well.

Matt Eastland [00:23:50] Right.

Brij Sahi [00:23:50] And these are the sort of changes that happen with manufacturers as consumers tastes change as well.

Matt Eastland [00:23:57] I'm glad you said that, because after I was then terrified of having my morning smoothie so that's good to know.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:24:04] So Jaed, going back to you, does the question that we had from some consumers through our social media. And one of the key questions that come out is, can consumers actually really trust the food labels are accurate for allergy information? Do you think the current system is good enough?

Jaed Khan [00:24:19] Look, I'm talking as a parent here now of a child who has a severe nut and egg allergy, and I'll say the same thing I say to my son. When you're picking it off the shelf, read the label before you buy it. When you're putting it in the cupboard, read the label before you put it in. When you're consuming it, read the label before you consume it, right? So, you know, forgiving everything that's happened in the supply chain where Brij is talking about, you know, the controls and processes, and then you are absolutely relying upon the information on the label as a consumer, you don't see anything before that. That's where the trust with the brand comes in right? And you're trusting that the information on the label is there, but also with someone with severe allergies like my son. You're trusting that that product you're about to consume and the information that brands put on there, you're trusting your life into that information, literally. And you just really got to be clear that you're understanding how that message is being communicated and what it means to you. I have a friend of mine as an example who does not need to consume nuts if she's barely in a room where there are nuts, she will have a severe reaction.

Matt Eastland [00:25:21] Wow.

Jaed Khan [00:25:23] And so you have to take all of those factors into consideration. Is it strictly down to trusting brands or being honest and doing the right thing? I don't think so. I think everybody has a responsibility. Everyone is trying their best, some could do better. Absolutely. And there are opportunities. But, you know, ultimately you're the one that's suffering. You've got to make sure that you've done everything you can because you're putting your life in the hands of that piece of information in that moment.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:25:52] And I guess, sort of going beyond the responsibility from brands. You know, there's food compliance and we have food standards agency. There's a big role for government to play. Do you both think that's enough? Do you think governments actually should be stepping in and doing more now? Because we're hearing, I feel like we're hearing more and more now about these scandals and allergens and unfortunate deaths.

Brij Sahi [00:26:14] I think that we hear more because more gets caught up in social media. I think there are a lot of things happening in the past, but it was just never communicated so well. I think that I take two different perspectives on this. Okay, so you've got the standard setting agencies, be the government, FSA, whoever. And I think they're doing a good job. They're trying to do the best they can with what they know and the technologies that are available. I think that the supply chain all the way from the farm, all the way to the consumer. They're trying to do the best that they can. But I think they can do better. I think if there was an opportunity to do more food safety tests, I think they would. This is a message I certainly get from them, but it's got to be cost effective and optimal. And this is an approach that we're taking at SwissDeCode. We're saying you don't

have to wait seven days and we can offer you something that will be cost effective and you get the result in a much shorter period of time. And I think as time goes on, this will develop more and more and more. And I certainly hope so for SwissDeCode's sake, but I think I'd like to take you to once one step further as well. And to Jaed's point, here we are - there's a plate of food in front of me. And it's not from one of the big manufacturers. It's not from a big brand. And I'm not sure if I can eat it or if I trust it enough to eat it. There has to be a test which is simple, which takes seconds, which is as simple as a pregnancy test. You know, there's the colour change of some sort to say this food contains X. All right. And there has to be that type of test. I think this will come about. I came from a technology perspective and I say that because I know what we're working on. And I think this will come about. And I think once this comes about and it's cheap enough because it has to be cheap. And if it's cheap enough and we can make it available to anyone and everyone and certainly all the allergy sufferers out there, then I think that'll start to make a difference as well. And that's important.

Matt Eastland [00:28:25] Okay. So taking all of that into account, so both of you said that I love the food industry in the food chain, massively complex. Consumer choice is driving more or more different flavours of various different things, like Kit Kats. Do you think that the technologies that you're both working on are going to ever be able to, like, eradicate these food safety problems across the food chain? Or are we always going to have them but we're just going to be constantly fighting it?

Brij Sahi [00:28:50] At the end of the day, it's a statistical matter. I guess so. If you have a twenty-tonne lorry as an example and you have to do sampling, ok you have to be statistically comfortable that you have, if it's there, you've caught it. Okay, if you're ish, if you're producing five hundred packets of sausages and you have to do a sampling process, then again, you have to be comfortable quarters statistically. So I think the issues will reduce because I think that they will be better processes in the future. I think that even with the complexity that the manufacturers can handle it and they're certainly trying to do their best to handle it, there will be new technologies that will allow them to do things quicker, faster, onsite, rapidly. And so I think it's very positive what's happening that space. Over to you Jaed.

Jaed Khan [00:29:46] Yeah, look, I think there's a number of different things there right? Thanks, Brij. But let's take it back to the consumer. Ultimately, the consumer holds the power when the consumer choice and we've talked about changing habits and changing preferences when the consumer says, I want to do something different. I want to eat something different. You know, Matt mentioned earlier the smoothies and, you know, he's one of the guys on the almond train.

Matt Eastland [00:30:07] Sorry.

Jaed Khan [00:30:08] And what have you... No, it's all good! You know you create a new market. And I think that's the point. Right. So you're seeing new brands come up and some of them may be ankle biters. Some of them may be brands that are being driven by the big corporations. But you're seeing a distinct shift where brands are recognising the size of the market. And when you recognise the size of the market, immediately things start to change. And so as we're having this growth and these kind of changing preferences. Whether it be lower calories, cleaner food, safer food, free from, you know, these are the largest drivers in terms of growth when it comes to certainly packaged goods. So if you talk to any major retailer globally, health and wellness will be part of their strategic objectives over the next few years. And that's not driven by the retailers or the

manufacturers. That's driven by consumers saying this is what we want. Will we eradicate the problem? No, I think what will happen is there'll be a shift. We're making it easier to have a conversation. We're making it easier to connect with the customer. Testing is making it easier to understand what you're serving. As we getting to unpack some of these challenges, you know, be clear. We don't eat ingredients. We eat food. Right. We take these things. We turn them into a meal. So there's added complexities that come up. You know, 40 percent of what we consume is not in our house is actually in restaurants in other places. Brij talks about the kind of the pregnancy version of the allergy test. You know, forty percent of the food we in restaurants, I can see how that becomes really applicable to a large number of people very, very quickly. But, yeah, absolutely. I think it's going to change. I think consumer demand will probably change it before technology does.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:31:51] I find it really interesting that you, both of you, have taken something complex like mass consumer data and something like DNA testing and simplified it and made it really accessible to the industry and consumers. And you've progressed quite a lot with your Start-Up. So we really interesting to hear from each of you what you're most proud of that you've achieved to date with your two companies.

Jaed Khan [00:32:12] Yeah, I mean, as a Start-Up is, there's so many things to be proud right? The fact that we're still here is a great one, but working with the likes of Sainsbury's and Asda and Walmart and all these other really, really big brands with the National Health Service for a start up is huge to be powering their e-commerce, their digital capabilities, their clinical labs. That's a really, really big place to be, because what it says is, you know, what we are talking about and the millions of people that we are trying to affect is absolutely real. And we can do that. And they're realising the benefit and the value of that. And as we grow on that journey and we see those real customers being impacted, I mean, that's fantastic. But nothing takes away from those individual messages you get from app users who just send you this kind of really, really simple one liner to say thank you because you've sold something so stressful, which for the rest of us, you know, the, myself included, you know, the only thing I think about when ordering food in a restaurant is taste right?

Matt Eastland [00:33:10] Yeah.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:33:10] Yeah.

Jaed Khan [00:33:10] But for some, it's a really, really big problem right? And so those messages are probably the best messages to receive.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:33:20] And what about your Brij? What are you most proud of?

Brij Sahi [00:33:23] There is a, an image you can find on the Internet if you Google it, it's called the illusion of choice, which basically depicts that the majority of the world's brands are, in fact, controlled by ten companies. And we are really proud that we're, in fact, engaged with eight of them.

Matt Eastland [00:33:42] Wow.

Brij Sahi [00:33:43] They have noticed us. They have noticed what we have to offer. And I am looking forward to the impact that we can make to those WHL statistics I shared with you earlier on as well, to reduce the number of people who suffer from food poisoning and those who may or for those whose fatal as well. So that's the impact we're looking for.

Matt Eastland [00:34:05] That is some amazing impact. Thanks, guys. That's great to hear. We're almost at the end of the show, actually. So I'm just going to pose a really kind of outback question for you both. So if you could click your fingers and solve your most hated food safety problem, what would that be? Number one. And then if you had free reign, how would you redesign the food industry to solve that problem? So I dunno who wants to go first. Jaed, what's your biggest food safety problem?

Jaed Khan [00:34:34] May contain. Ok if you talk to customers, consumers, the biggest frustration is may contain. Two things. One, why can a manufacturer and not tell us if it contains or does not contain? Two, why does it take three thousand different ways to say it?

Matt Eastland [00:34:53] Yeah.

Jaed Khan [00:34:54] And so, you know, how many different ways can you spell the word nut right? And so if we could, first of all, just standardise that statement just so that there is one simple way of saying it. And second of all, if we could just explain to people what may contain actually means. And I think what you'll find is that will A, give people a lot more choice, but it also gives them a lot more freedom when understanding what to do when they see the phrase may contain all the variations of that phrase.

Brij Sahi [00:35:26] Ok simple and effective. Brij?

Brij Sahi [00:35:29] For me, it would be to eradicate counterfeit food because I do believe that manufacturers generally are trying their best to produce food that is safe to eat. But when you have financial opportunities in counterfeit, then those companies who are counterfeiting are not working to the same standards. So for me to eradicate the counterfeit food that's out there, it would be a big plus. And if I could click my fingers, it would be to accelerate the technology I referred to, whereby you have a plate of food in front of you in a restaurant, let's say Jaed, and you can within a few seconds, max one minute, know whether you can eat it or not. And that's the technology we need.

Matt Eastland [00:36:15] I really hope we get there. Sounds great.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:36:17] And add to both of you, what would be your top tips to food producers or retailers who want to be more conscious of food safety?

Jaed Khan [00:36:25] I guess I'm going first. So brand approved, I think is very, very important. I think brands manufacturers need to get into the space of understanding the importance of their data. And so when they're thinking of their data, not just in terms of what is it they're writing, but translated into, what does the consumer infer from the information that put in on that packet? And this is where, you know, people like us come in with FoodMaestro Platform actually takes that data and says here are all the different things that the customer will infer from the information that you've put on the packet. Do you agree or not? This is not dairy-free just because it's got lacti in it right? Do you agree or not? And giving that clear message to the brand and recognising that customers, consumers live in a data driven age is very, very important today.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:37:18] What about you, Brij? What are your top tips to small food producers?

Brij Sahi [00:37:20] Training

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:37:23] Hmm.

Brij Sahi [00:37:23] I came across a very large customer, a restaurant chain, and we proposed a solution whereby the facilities could be cleaned and then overnight a test to be performed to confirm that the facility had been cleaned properly. And what I was told, was that, look, we are concerned that if your test is positive for something that's not meant to be there, what will they do? And my answer was, you have to give them training. You have to teach them that if they have discovered something in the facility, whatever it might be, that they know how to handle it. And so I think it's for the small retailers. I think it's really understanding that, yes, there may be some problems there. And if they find them, what they have to do with it.

Matt Eastland [00:38:10] Brilliant.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:38:10] Brilliant. Thanks both.

Matt Eastland [00:38:12] Okay, guys, so we're almost at the end now. So you've given us a lot of insight into both your businesses. So where can people find out more about your work and what you do? Jaed?

Jaed Khan [00:38:22] www.foodmaestro.me or go onto Sainsbury's and create a profile and you'll start seeing how those preferences materialise as you're doing to shop. Go on to Asda, use any of the search and wellness filters and you'll start to see products that you can actually consume. And of course, there's a range of apps available across the app stores, Android and Google.

Matt Eastland [00:38:44] Amazing. Thanks Jaed. And Brij?

Brij Sahi [00:38:46] Well, since we're primarily B2B, I would just recommend Googling SwissDeCode and we'll be there at the top of the page.

Matt Eastland [00:38:54] Great.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:38:55] Excellent. Thank you. So I want to thank you both. Thank you very much. This has been a really insightful session and also thanks to our audience for listening. So that's it from us. From Matt and I. Thanks and goodbye.

Matt Eastland [00:39:07] Thank you both guys.

Brij Sahi [00:39:08] Thank you.