



Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information Janil Puthuchery (right) and NUS deputy president (Innovation and Enterprise) Chen Tshuan (behind him) with Meatless Kingdom CEO Widya Putra (second from left) and his plant-based products at the exhibition. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Start-ups get chance to show off products, network at InnovFest

Mahima Srinidhi Hari

The latest food fad might just be vegan rendang.

Meatless Kingdom, an Indonesia-based food and technology start-up, is producing mushroom and plant-based food products that are high in protein and, most importantly, suited for the Indonesian palette.

It has developed plant-based dendeng, rendang and dendeng manis asap, a product similar to bak kwa. It also intends to introduce “meat” floss to its line-up, allowing foodies to enjoy traditional delicacies ethically.

Its rendang “meat” is flavourful, with hints of coconut milk. It has a soft texture and tastes similar to the real thing. The ready-to-eat products only need to be heated up before serving.

The company has partnered hotels in Indonesia. Its products are sold in some malls in Singapore,

such as Kinex and Burlington Square, and online on Shopee.

Meatless Kingdom’s chief executive Widya Putra, 33, said his background in microbiology led him to see mushrooms as superfoods, inspiring him to take plant-based products to the Indonesian market.

He said his products have reduced the carbon footprint of such foods by using up to 80 per cent less water.

The firm is based in Block71 Jakarta, an initiative by the National University of Singapore’s (NUS) entrepreneurial arm, NUS Enterprise. Block71 is a technology-focused ecosystem builder and global connector.

Meatless Kingdom was one of the start-ups featured at the InnovFest x Elevating Founders event at Singapore Expo, as part of Asia Tech x Singapore.

Organised by NUS Enterprise, in partnership with Informa Tech, InnovFest is the flagship technology innovation conference in Asia.

Over 100 start-ups had the opportunity to feature their products and network with venture capitalists, academia and stakeholders.

Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information Janil Puthuchery said in his opening speech at the event on Wednesday that Singapore’s tech start-ups contribute to 2.4 per cent of Singapore’s gross domestic product, despite accounting for about 1 per cent of all companies here.

The Government has four key pieces in place for building an even more vibrant start-up ecosystem. The first two are big ideas and talents, with institutes of higher learning playing an important role in providing real-world opportunities to turn big ideas into reality, he said.

The other two are the availability of capital and infrastructure. Dr Janil said Singapore ranks high in the world for ease of fund sourcing, and has numerous programmes in place to assist start-ups in areas including lead de-

mand generation, talent acquisition, mentoring and more.

NUS Enterprise has nurtured close to 3,000 start-ups and created 11 unicorns, a term for a privately held start-up company with a value of over \$1 billion.

One such start-up is Curated Cultures, which aims to provide dairy- and sugar-free probiotic drinks. It was also featured at the InnovFest event.

Chief operating officer and co-founder Shermaine Heng, 26, said: “Probiotic drinks in the industry are all dairy-based and contain a lot of sugar, which makes them counter-intuitive – probiotics are said to be healthy, but they are loaded with sugar.”

So, the team set out to create healthy drinks that contain the *Lactobacillus acidophilus* NCFM probiotic commonly found in products such as yogurt. To make the beverage sugar-free, xylitol is used as a substitute.

Curated Cultures’ products include probiotic cold brew green tea and caffeine-free probiotic rooibos tea. They are sold on the firm’s website and on Shopee.

InnovFest x Elevating Founders will be on at the Singapore Expo until Friday.

mahima@sph.com.sg