

Meet Born Maverick, driving innovation in the food industry

As part of a series with Innovate UK KTN, Maddyness spoke to Azhar Murtuza, founder of Born Maverick. We will introduce several of the 13 'startups of the future' chosen by Innovate UK KTN to take part in its three-month sustainability accelerator programme. Working with Innovate UK KTN, Growth Studio and their ecosystems, these startups will prepare to raise external capital. The program aims to back the bright ideas that put biodiversity, the climate, and sustainability first.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for starting your company?

Born Maverick is a group of ventures made of individuals who have set out to change the dynamics of the food ecosystem and the way it functions. We realise the gaps within the existing system and the way it's hurting the exponential growth of the sustainable food industry. Hence the reason we not only wanted to develop our own diversified product portfolio but also work closely with companies who are constantly looking to adapt using their existing infrastructure by allowing them access to facilities and research experts in our network. To make this happen we wanted to develop an innovative business model which brings all entities from farm to fork together and helps us deliver an impactful solution to our partners.

Tell me about your business – what it does, what it aims to achieve, who you are aiming to reach etc.

We are a backend bio-engineering company which has developed products ranging from seafood alternatives to plant-based milk/eggs/adaptogen lollies and currently working on interesting projects such as seaweed proteins ingrained with hydrocolloids as well as exploring unique methods of developing cultivated meat and mycelium meat.

We aim to get our unique formulations and ingredients licensed out to our manufacturing and branding partners. They will then use their expertise to deliver these projects to consumers.

At Born Maverick we take it as our responsibility to constantly contribute towards making the world sustainable. This is done with our Airbnb model of accessing research experts and facilities to cut down overhead costs and help fast-tracking innovation within the food industry. We are always striving to prevent finding another set of problems in 3-5 years. We fully understand that there is a climate emergency and no time to relax.

We are looking to reach out to strategic partners who really understand the crux of what we're doing. There are no limitations on who this could be - it could be an investor, corporate or company of any size. The important part is that they are looking to build a strong food eco-system and understand our expertise in assessing sustainable growth which addresses the global climate emergency. We want passion, vision and community rather than entities only looking to capitalise on the trend. This is especially crucial now as we are seeing a major decline in products that were designed and invested in a 'sustainable' way only to turn out to be greenwashing or monetizing.

Overall we aim for our work to be constant and for it to continue to help the environment and the world we live in forever.

Explain your engagement with the InnovateUK KTN SIIP accelerator and why you applied for it.

Firstly, we wanted to put ourselves out there to showcase our abilities and expertise.

Then came everything else. Being considered as one of the few impactful UK start-ups across all sectors by Innovate UK has been a true privilege - however, the real highlight the mentors from GrowthStudio. Paul, Rayan and Jordan from Innovate UK have tried to get to the crux of our business offering. They constantly strive to propel our journey, on a personal level.

It is often difficult to understand your own strengths and weaknesses and value proposition as well as have a sense of clarity whilst you are so immersed within the business. The fresh perspective we gained from the mentors allowed us to perfect the bigger picture whilst making sure all the finer details were ready first. We really couldn't have asked for any better people or platform to help us.



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In particular we noticed how complimentary and generally interested the mentors were. We aren't a money motivated business - we have a bigger vision than just being profitable - and the mentors have truly understood that and have ensured this programme has helped us deliver our message rather than just raise funds.

Describe the working culture at your company

The company culture at Born Maverick is ingrained with a shared set of principles and ethics and we all strive to save the planet. We all have the drive to go out and get it done rather than wait for others to initiate the process. We are a strong team of individual mavericks who also strongly

believe in collaboration. We understand that if we want to change the world then we have to work together in an efficient way. Our strength doesn't just lie in our expertise but our strong intent and desire to create a sustainable food eco-system.

What has been your biggest challenge so far with your company, and how did you overcome it?

Often, we are mistaken for a product company which has a cool repertoire of products. In reality, we are a bio-engineering company which has developed products and is continuing to do so. We want to be seen as the brains behind the innovation rather than the product brand.

We are closely working with our advisors at Innovate UK KTN to address these issues. So far we are changing our value proposition and designing the offering elements in a way that ensures we are seen beyond our existing portfolio of products. We've come to understand that our messaging needs to focus on what potential Born Maverick has for the future, especially if we get the right platform and strategic partners who understand our journey and share our vision.

How does your company answer an unmet need?

We are all witnessing the consequences for companies who tried to capitalise on the trend of plant-based products without really addressing the actual issues of sustainability, costs and nutrition along with taste and texture. The demand for many brands is dipping because they are not contributing towards sustainability due to over-exploitation of crops and they are not reaching taste/texture or nutrition through eco-innovative methods either. The result of this is an ingredient list heavily bombarded

with stabilisers/gelling agents etc. This would take away 60-70% of products from the shelves in the next two to three years.

Hence, we at Born Maverick work on products which are from diversified sources without heavy reliance on mono crops yet address the nutritional aspects through simplified ways so that we don't have to mask flavours or add many ingredients to achieve acceptable taste/texture. This helps us bring down the costs and also gives consumers a choice to select from a range of products without burdening the consumer's pocket or affecting the planet.

What is in store for the future?

We want Born Maverick to be recognised as a well reputable backend bio-engineering team on a global stage. We aim to achieve this by collaborating with strategic partners and working closely with food companies across the globe. We have a goal to be the Airbnb of the food research industry with an aim to help companies quickly adapt and address their product needs based on their existing infrastructure.

We are confident of achieving all this in time and we are already well on our way to do so. We're always keen to welcome new mavericks to the team and know this would help us address the climate emergency and transform the food industry in a more efficient way!

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Make sure you sweat the small things and get the basics right. Nail the research! This is particularly important when it comes to food innovation as we are in a sector where our solutions can either positively transform or be a detriment to the livelihood of consumers and the existence of the planet. So, make sure you have a bigger picture in sight rather than short

term fixes to capitalise on!

Azhar Murtuza is the founder of *Born Maverick*.

The *Sustainable Impact Investment Programmme* (SIIP) is a three-month accelerator, specially designed for selected startups who have previously received funding from Innovate UK's Sustainable Innovation Fund (SIF). The objective of the SIIP accelerator is to prepare both the business and founders of the winning startups with the knowledge, tools and investor connections to raise their next round of investment up to £5M through a confident proposition, materials, and communications.

SIIP is an initiative led and funded by *Innovate UK KTN* to support high growth impact-driven startups from the UK who were awarded grants from the Sustainable Innovation Fund to aid economic recovery after Covid. This programme is a collaborative effort by Innovate UK KTN and *Growth Studio*.

Article by Azhar Murtuza