

Fighting food waste with wonky fruit and tasty snacks, meet Gusto Snacks

As part of a series about Virgin StartUp's Collective Impact programme, Maddyness spoke to Giuseppe Baidoo, Founder and CEO of Gusto Snacks.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Gusto Snacks was born out of the urge to do something good for our society and the planet. During our summer breaks from university, my co-founder and I used to go fruit picking. That is where we saw first-hand how much fruit never really makes it onto our plates.

On the other hand, both of us come from a background of semi-professional athletes. When shopping around, we noticed how bland and boring the options were in the healthy snack section of supermarkets, especially the dried fruit section, which didn't offer any exciting options for consumers, while the unhealthy snacks section burst with flavour and excitement, attracting customers to indulge in them.

So, we decided to join forces on a mission to raise awareness of food waste and offer better snacking options to the consumer, improving our overall food system. That's where Gusto Snacks was born.

Can you share your elevator pitch?

Gusto Snacks is an ethical-focused company that reduces food waste through innovative snacking. Our mission is to improve consumers' well-

being and the planet. We work with farmers, helping them become more environmentally sustainable and potentially increase their profitability. This is achieved by rescuing fruits that they can't sell due to the supermarket's strict aesthetic specifications, such as shape, size, or colour, and turning them into delicious air-dried fruit crisps.

Our goal is to provide consumers with a healthier alternative to traditional potato crisps, minus the drawbacks of saturated fat, oil, and excess salt, all while replicating the satisfying crunchiness and exciting flavours.

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with Virgin StartUp?

Since our inception, we recognised the potential in our business and sought ways to grow as a brand and secure investments to fuel our expansion. That's when Virgin's start-up entered the picture.

Through the Virgin StartUp Collective Impact Accelerator, we refined our strategy, established a more robust business structure, and connected with industry experts who significantly elevated our business.

Thanks to Virgin StartUp Demo Day, we made valuable connections with several investors, enabling us to secure a portion (£170K) of our ongoing pre-seed funding round of £250K.

This support has been instrumental in propelling our business to new heights.



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Tell us about the working culture at Gusto Snacks?

My co-founder and I came from Italy and started from scratch in a country we knew nothing about.

We learned how to work together, support each other, and be there for one another when needed the most. We maintained persistence in our work ethics, had the courage to dream big, and achieved more with less.

This is the culture we foster at Gusto Snacks and aim for everyone who joins the company to be a part of it.

What has been your biggest challenge so far

and how have you overcome this?

We began our business in our bedroom after purchasing a dehydrator machine. We tested our products and started selling them in our local markets.

The most significant challenge we faced was securing funding and transitioning from a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) to finding the right manufacturer to bring our products to the market.

For approximately two years, we dedicated ourselves to researching, applying for funding and business competitions, and meeting various suppliers and manufacturers. There were moments when we faced setbacks.

However, through persistence, we managed to secure our initial funding through a university competition. Through networking, we eventually found the right manufacturing partner to initiate our first production round.

What's in store for the future?

We aspire to become one of the leading sustainable and healthy brands in the UK and Europe, rescuing over 60,000 tonnes of fruits from going to waste. Additionally, we aim to become the top fruit snack company in the dried fruit market.

Our mission is to make healthy and impactful snacking accessible to all, with the goal of serving over 1 million UK consumers by 2026.

Currently, there is a gap in dried fruit manufacturing in the UK, presenting us with an opportunity to reshape the industry landscape.

Our vision includes establishing our own manufacturing plant in the UK, further solidifying our commitment to sustainable practices and ensuring the availability of high-quality, environmentally conscious products for our consumers.

Can you talk about why you put purpose at the centre of building Gusto Snacks?

During my time in Italy, I used to work for the national service, collaborating with different charities. Together, we would pick up food that would have otherwise gone to waste from supermarkets and distribute it to various families.

This experience profoundly inspired me and made me realise how broken our food system is, prompting the need for change.

This experience also instilled in me the courage to step out and initiate change. It taught me that significant change doesn't always require grand gestures; every small step and action contributes to the betterment of our society and the planet.

We aim to use Gusto Snacks as a platform to raise awareness of these issues within our food system. And what better way to do it than through delicious snacks, transforming a societal challenge into an opportunity for positive change.



What barriers have you faced in realising your entrepreneurial ambitions?

As a black founder, the barriers to becoming a successful entrepreneur are immense. Less than 2% of funding goes to black entrepreneurs, and the food industry suffers from a lack of diversity.

Throughout our journey, my co-founder and I faced numerous rejections while seeking funding and attempting to launch our brand into supermarkets. Despite these challenges, we remain naturally confident individuals and refuse to easily give up.

Our persistent approach, even after encountering countless rejections, has proven fruitful. Each 'No' we received became an opportunity to try again, eventually leading us to open many doors.

While the fear of rejection initially haunted us, we learned to cope with it and keep moving forward. Personally, I believe that rejection has not only strengthened our character but has also taught us that fear has no place in our plans for success.

How can we make entrepreneurship more accessible in the UK?

I strongly believe that organisations like Virgin StartUp play a pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurship. Having a guiding force and financial support from an organisation like Virgin is invaluable for aspiring entrepreneurs.

It provides an excellent foundation for anyone looking to start their own business.

We need more organisations that offer the kind of support that Virgin provides. Many individuals out there have the passion and ideas for a business but might lack the knowledge or resources to begin. Virgin does an excellent job of igniting that spark and giving budding entrepreneurs the tools and encouragement, they need to turn their dreams into reality.

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

One valuable piece of advice I would offer to fellow founders is to become the most passionate advocate for your brand. Continuously talk about it and share your vision with others. Never settle for anything less than what you believe your brand can achieve.

There are countless opportunities waiting out there, and with persistent effort, self confidence, and unwavering belief, founders can tap into these

opportunities.

Additionally, networking is key. By actively engaging with people, attending events, and making connections, you open doors that you might never have imagined. Networking not only expands your business connections but also exposes you to diverse perspectives and ideas, enriching your entrepreneurial journey.

So, never underestimate the power of networking; it can truly transform the trajectory of your business. And finally, a more personal question!

What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I wake up every morning filled with gratitude for where I am in this moment. Years ago, I used to pray to be where I am today, so I cherish every day as an opportunity to grow and become a better version of myself.

Being an entrepreneur is incredibly demanding; the days blur together, and there's often no distinction between weekdays and weekends. Despite the constant hustle, I've learned the importance of prioritising my mental health.

I understand that if I burn out, my company will suffer too. Therefore, I take self-care seriously. I've learned to manage my time effectively, ensuring that I carve out moments for myself and my family.

This balance is not just essential for my well-being but also for the sustained success of my business. Taking care of my mental and emotional health allows me to approach challenges with resilience and creativity, ensuring that both I and my company can thrive in the long run.

Giuseppe Baidoo, Founder and CEO of *Gusto Snacks*.

Virgin StartUp is the not-for-profit home of entrepreneurship at the Virgin Group, helping early-stage founders start, fund and scale the businesses they're passionate. Its *Collective Impact programme* is an investment-readiness accelerator specifically for UK startups that want to have a positive impact in the world and are raising investment for the first time. In 2022, 24 founders completed the seven-week programme and raised £4M.

Article by Giuseppe Baidoo