

# Diverse Founders Programme: Healthy fruit snack brand offers an exotic twist

WeWork has partnered with UK social enterprise Foundervine to launch its Diverse Founders Programme, supporting 100 diverse founders with workspace and support for one year. We spoke to Sam Fajemilua and Manny Fajemilua, cofounders of dried exotic fruits brand Jungle Fruits.

---

## What is Jungle Fruits?

*Sam:* Jungle Fruits is an exotic dried fruit snack brand that includes passionfruit, mango and watermelon, to name a few. Our aim is to inspire a healthier lifestyle by making 'super fruits' more affordable, accessible and convenient for everyone.

We dry these tropical fruits and leave them be – exactly as nature intended – with no added sugar or preservatives, just 100% fruit. The dried fruit market has been very traditional, so we wanted to bring a modern twist with exotic flavours. We work directly with our customers and usually make sales via our website, but we are also in a few local stores in South London. It's been a

rewarding moment to see our product stocked in stores we used to go to as kids!

## What were your backgrounds before founding Jungle Fruits?

*Sam:* Before we became chiefs of the jungle – on a mission to inspire healthier communities – we both went to university in the Midlands. Manny studied Sport Science at Coventry University while I studied Chemical Engineering at Loughborough University. Manny then spent some time working as a sport scientist and I became a financial business analyst, before we found our true passion – Jungle Fruits!

## What was the catalyst for launching the business?

*Manny:* As kids, our mum would buy loads of fruit and vegetables and try to make sure we had our five a day, but the fruit would either go off or it wouldn't be easy to take on the go. Because of this, we have always had the idea in our heads but never really actioned it.

If we were to really think about it, the catalyst was the pandemic. Our work-life balance and everything we knew completely shifted and it created an opportunity for us to reflect on numerous different things, including our health and wellbeing and what we were truly passionate about. After mapping out Jungle Fruits as an initial business plan, we then went all in – researching, planning and preparing – before launching in September 2020. It's been an incredible journey so far!

## How has the business evolved since its launch?

*Manny:* Since our launch, we've gone even more exotic! We've added flavours like dried lychee and dried dragon fruit into the mix. We have also evolved in terms of how we fulfil orders, run the business and work together as business partners. We are lucky that Sam and I have always been close and bounce off each other, so it's been a great experience for both of us. We work with friends and family too, and continually brainstorm new ideas to grow our business.

# What challenges have you faced so far?

*Sam:* As every entrepreneur will know, launching a business is a bold move and there are many rewards that come with it, but it can sometimes be lonely, daunting and stressful. We are lucky we have each other, and the incredible support from our friends and family, but we found it challenging to find networking opportunities and to build brand awareness.

Organisations like social enterprise Foundervine have been invaluable and we have been lucky enough to be part of its Diverse Founders Programme in partnership with WeWork. This offers mentoring opportunities and space to diverse founders. We have already learned so much.

*Manny:* We have also faced some operational challenges; mainly delays in our supply chain due to the pandemic and Brexit, which has meant we have had to adapt and alter some of our strategies and goals to accommodate this. We continue to learn, adapt and evolve everyday.

# What are your aspirations for Jungle Fruits in 2021?

*Sam:* We want to get even more exotic and grow our community, so we will be pushing hard on research and outreach this year. Whether it is discovering new 'super fruits' or looking at different drying methods, we will be looking for the healthiest and most sustainable options for our customers. Despite the current situation, we can't wait to bring our Jungle Fruits to more communities. Watch this space!

# What has been a personal highlight since launching the business?

*Sam:* My personal highlight would probably be having the support of our family members to help fulfil orders. We are a pretty big family, but it is so much fun working alongside everyone (and also kind of funny having to tell our parents what to do!) but overall, definitely a memorable experience, and one we are so grateful for.

*Manny:* Definitely! We are so lucky to have an incredible family support system. I would also say being part of the Foundervine x WeWork programme, and seeing our products in local South London shops - sorry, there are too many to choose from!

*Learn more about Diverse Founders Programme [here](#).*

---

Article by KIRSTIE PICKERING