



Media Release

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Food startups graduate from Accelerator transformed

In May 2019, six of Australia's most exciting new food-based startups were selected to take part in Mars Food Australia's inaugural *Seeds of Change Accelerator* program.

Fast forward four months and last night in Sydney there was only one final presentation to potential investors, partners, industry representatives, program mentors and advisers which stood between the startups and graduation.

The presentations showed the world what they had to offer at the end of a rigorous program of mentoring, market analysis, branding work, product and strategy development and financial investment of \$40,000 in their businesses.

Founder of the *Human Connection Project*, Matt Boyce said, "We went in with a food business, and we graduated with a totally different proposition – a multi-layered social enterprise with a clear set of guidelines and directions".

"The Accelerator has been a sensational experience, and quite literally life altering. We started with one food prep pillar and a scattergun approach, but we now have four clear pillars including community and education that work in sync to help us play a critical role in connecting people in a digital world where we are more disconnected than ever.

"We lose nine Australians a day to suicide, and human connection needs to be bigger part of our lives," he said.

For another of the startups, plant-based cheese company *Grounded*, the program set them up to take the next step which saw them move to New York as a participant in the US venture capital fund and startup accelerator Big Idea Ventures.

Grounded co-founder, Veronica Fil said, "The Mars Accelerator has completely changed the path of our lives. Up until the program, we were just doing the vegan cheese thing as a bit of a side hustle".

"It was amazing having a whole team of mentors and advisors purely focussed on making us a success, and we really needed knowledgeable people who could steer us in the right direction. As a result, we went from nearly selling half our business to a mate for \$30,000 to securing \$200,000 USD in pre-seed investment, which has taken us to New York to develop our products for an international market," she said.

The Accelerator was created by Mars Food Australia to help early stage food-focused startups fast-track their growth and help build a healthier, more sustainable future. More than 224 start-ups applied for one of the six spots available in the national program.

Mars Food Australia research and development director and Accelerator mentor, Peter Crane said, "The Accelerator has been a journey of learning both for the startups and the wider team at Mars Food Australia.

"We started the Accelerator because we're committed to nurturing the next generation of food innovators and were overwhelmed with the response. We selected a group of open, coachable and agile founders prepared to come with arms wide open to new possibilities.

“All of the startup founders have responded amazingly - taking on feedback and pivoting their business models where needed. Their journeys have been inspiring and had a huge impact on the Mars Food Team who, through their interactions with these fresh and enthusiastic small business entrepreneurs, have been reminded what’s possible in food innovation and encouraged to push the boundaries around new product development.

“The world is changing at a rapid pace, with consumer needs evolving and technologies transforming business. We hope the Accelerator acts as a catalyst to help forward-thinking innovators – big and small - bring their purpose-driven food-focused visions to life. And to remind us all about the value of relationships and networks if we want to make change happen,” he said.

The Seeds of Change Accelerator startups are:

- **Spiralz Fermented Foods**, Tuggerah NSW: Michelle Amor and Tracey Rochford create gourmet fermented foods. They use traditional methods to ferment without the use of any starter culture or preservatives. The range is organic, vegan, free of gluten, dairy and nuts.
- **The Australian Superfood Co**, Oakleigh Vic: Hayley Blieden and Ralph Wollner produce a range of food products from Australian native bush foods such as native fruit powders, herbs and spices, fruit and granolas. Ingredients are sourced from indigenous communities and local growers to enhance respect for Australia’s indigenous culture, increase access and affordability and promote local food producers.
- **Edible Bug Shop**, Sydney NSW: Skye Blackburn runs Australia’s first and largest commercial edible insect farm and manufacturing facility producing insects such as ants, crickets and meal worms. The insects are made into ‘invisible’ ingredients to enrich everyday food products with safe and nutritious protein.
- **Human Connection Project**, Brisbane Qld: Human Connection Project is a multi-layered social enterprise endeavouring to make dinner time matter through education and facilitation. Connecting over a shared meal has diminished due to busy lifestyles and greater time constraints. Our goal is to help reduce human disconnection and the impact of mental illness and suicide for a more connected and inspired future.
- **Fable**, Sunshine Coast Qld: Michael Fox, Chris McLoghlin and Jim Fuller are focused on producing plant-based meat products that are healthy, environmentally sustainable and difficult to distinguish from the real thing. Using shredded shiitake mushroom stems as the base ingredient, the product is healthy, sustainable and superior in taste and texture to other vegetable protein products.
- **Grounded**, Melbourne Vic: Veronica Fil and two hatted chef Shaun Quade have produced their first line of plant-based cheese products using all-natural ingredients without preservatives or additives. They are allergen free and lower in fat than traditional and vegan cheeses. Using the same cultures and processes as traditional cheese-making, they taste exactly like real specialty cheese such as Camembert and Roquefort.

About the Seeds of Change Accelerator: The Australian Accelerator was established by Mars Food Australia, in conjunction with Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL), whose goal is to help businesses build their skills to develop innovative products and access new markets. [Seeds of Change Accelerator website.](#)

About Mars Food Australia: Mars Food Australia has been creating healthy, easy, affordable and tasty meal solutions for Australians since 1967. Based on the NSW Central Coast at Wyong, Mars Food Australia manufactures more than 500 products ranging from mustards to flavoured sauce, marinades, ready to heat rice, recipe bases herbs and spices, relishes and pasta across its brands of *Masterfoods*, *Uncle Ben’s*, *Dolmio*, *Kan Tong*, *Seed of Change* and *Promite*. These brands can be found in nine out of 10 Australian kitchens, exported to the Asia Pacific region and sold to commercial kitchens, caterers and quick service restaurants. [Mars Website.](#)

About FIAL: Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL) is an industry-led, not-for-profit focused on growing the share of Australian food in the global marketplace. FIAL works with the food and agribusiness industry to share knowledge, build capability and create connections. FIAL is a part of the federal government’s [Industry Growth Centres](#) initiative which aims to drive innovation and growth in Australia. [FIAL website.](#)

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Further information and photos: available for [download here](#) via Dropbox