



# FOOD FILES

At AAHAR-2022, held after two years, several important discussions around the food industry specifically occurred.

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), in partnership with the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO), hosted Asia's largest international food and hospitality fair, AAHAR-2022, at New Delhi's Pragati Maidan. The event saw over 80 exporters from various agricultural product segments, including geographical indication products, processed food, organic, and frozen food products, make their presence felt. We speak to Germain Araud, Managing Director, Monin India, Apurv Patel, Founder, Petpooja; Sanjay Jain, Director, Elanpro and Vikram Goel, MD - India, Unox India, to understand more in this round table.



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— Vikram Goel, Managing Director India, Unox India

## Please share your experience at AAHAR-2022?

**Vikram Goel (VG):** AAHAR lived up to its expectations by attracting close to over 90,000 trade visitors from the HoREca sector, including prominent hoteliers, restaurant owners, chefs, influencers, food journalists and many overseas international buyers. It turned out to be quite a successful event for us to create our brand awareness. Although there were glitches on the first day in terms of organisation, overall, we were pretty satisfied with the results we achieved.

**Germain Araud (GA):** Monin India participated in the 36th AAHAR with its most prominent presence in the exhibition. AAHAR provided us with an unrivalled opportunity to generate new business leads, interact with customers, partners and friends from the industry and exchange ideas after a gap of two years since the last edition. Tasting sessions with our seasoned beverage innovators were an excellent way to connect with the visitors to the stall. For us, this was the most important event of the year, and we picked this event to launch the new and improved global variant of Le Frappe de MONIN Vanilla, specifically curated for the Indian Market. Another highlight was winning the Gold Award for Excellence

in Display in Food Products & Beverage category.

**Sanjay Jain (SJ):** AAHAR has always been an excellent platform to showcase the latest and most outstanding products and services. Likewise, AAHAR 2022 provided an opportunity to demonstrate and examine technologies that drive the ever-evolving foodservice industry. With the aim to revolutionise the industry, Elanpro unveiled an array of innovative technologies carefully tailored to the requisites of the Indian food and hospitality sector. Our new launches, such as Vertical Combi and Scooping Parlour, were key crowd-pullers. The success of these products proved yet again that customers are looking for highly efficient products that work perfectly in Indian weather conditions. In addition to this, our recent acquisition, Thingify's AI-enabled temperature monitoring system-generated tremendous interest in the visitors as it detects, optimises and monitors cold chain storage.

**Apurv Patel (AP):** We were delighted with our experience at AAHAR 2022- International Food and Hospitality Fair. It presented us with

the perfect opportunity to engage with our existing clients and interact with potential prospects. When our customers came to us either with complaints or appreciation, we quickly addressed them. Our commitment bears testimony to our brand's valuable impact in the F&B industry. As a SaaS provider, it is an incredible achievement for us to receive such a response in one of the biggest Food and Hospitality B2B events.

## What changes have you seen at AAHAR-2022 after a two-year pandemic break?

**VG:** Considering that this was the first major physical industry event post the pandemic, we experienced a lot of excitement, both among exhibitors and visitors. The venue is still not ready, and it played a spoilsport in the overall experience.

**GA:** The apprehensions we felt about setting up our stall at the event were real. AAHAR was our first exhibition after the pandemic. The unique 1000-feet-square presence was first of a kind experience for our customers and us. We pledged ourselves to provide our Indian customers with an experience that's unique and sure to satiate their ever-demanding palate. Indians like to experiment with their drinks, and we want to experiment with our mix. Our live counter was undeniably 'live' with people tasting, reviewing, and just making merry at the stall.

**SJ:** I felt AAHAR 2022 was more focused in terms of business. The trade show saw a fair number of visitors with purchase intent.

**AP:** This was much eagerly awaited by the F&B industry, and the two-year hiatus did bring some welcoming changes to this edition. We saw a rise in the focus on technology, sustainable packaging, and cost-effective automation to make business easier and smoother for F&B owners.

## What expectations did you have at AAHAR-2022, and could you meet them?

**VG:** This edition of AAHAR was extremely important for us. We considered this as a launch pad for UNOX in India. We have made considerable investments in the Indian market. We now have a 4500 sq.ft. office in Gurgaon, which includes a state-of-the-art demo experience centre with a huge team of chefs and service people to support our customers. To facilitate smooth and efficient delivery of our units, the company has already arranged a huge warehouse in Delhi which will always hold local stock of all our products. Through this year's edition of AAHAR, we proved and demonstrated our sustainable commitment to buyers in the Indian market.



**GA:** We were hoping to meet and greet business visitors, enthusiasts, and prospects along with our Indian customers. The tremendous footfall at our stall amidst the sweltering Delhi heat indicates that we had an eventful show.

**SJ:** This year, we wanted to reach out to new segments that emerged during the pandemic. AAHAR has always provided an excellent platform for visibility and credibility in the industry. 2022 was similar, where we had crowded aisles with relevant customers. Indeed, it outdid our expectations.

**AP:** We were all ready for AAHAR, but the astounding response and footfall came as a pleasant surprise for us.

## What are the new food trends you see for 2022?

**VG:** During AAHAR 2022, we launched EVEREO®, a holding cabinet equipped with brand-new technology making it possible for chefs to vacuum-pack hot food and maintain it at service temperature for days. The concept of EVEREO is being seen now as a new chapter in the science of preserving food. EVEREO® is the first-ever hot fridge that preserves cooked meals for days at the temperature you will serve them by using a combination of highly accurate temperature and atmosphere controls, eliminating long waiting times for your customers. Very soon in India, we will be launching the SPEED-X™, a new breed of oven and the only one in the entire world designed to combine the capabilities of a combi oven and those of a speed oven self-washing feature included.

**GA:** AAHAR was an indicator of changing trends. Going healthy by being sustainable and organic is the new mantra for foodies worldwide. Locally cultivated produce gained much attention worldwide. People are now more conscious about what they consume daily. They are mindful of what they eat. Over and above, India has a legacy of an organic way of living and growing produce. We have always looked towards its rich heritage of sustainability and conserving nature as much as possible



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— Germain Araud - Managing Director - Monin India Pvt Ltd



and learning from it.

**SJ:** A wave of innovative food trends has energised the commercial refrigeration industry. I believe innovation is the key to standing out from the competition. The focus will be on products that are highly efficient and easy to access while optimising space. With energy efficiency becoming the pivotal point for profit margins, data-driven technologies are also expected to take a front seat. Technologies that help monitor refrigeration equipment on-site and remotely will become an essential element of energy management.

**AP:** The food industry is growing rapidly and has become very dynamic. Cloud kitchens and delivery-only F&B models are growing at an exponential rate. With people opting for healthier food options post-pandemic, the organic food industry and Vegan cuisine have also garnered much attention from both the customers and restaurateurs. India is also experiencing a wave of globalisation in its cuisine style, and the rise of fusion food and western cuisines is a significant testament to it.

**What impact has the pandemic had on the food industry?**

**VG:** Although the F&B sector was a direct victim of the pandemic, the industry has showcased great flexibility to strongly revive and come out of it. I feel the consumer sentiment has changed, and people are increasingly relying on the promise of hygiene and safety being provided by restaurants. On the other hand, F&B business owners, too, have started realising the dynamics of technology's application in the kitchens to elevate the hygiene standards and maintain food safety and therefore have begun to invest more in technology.

**GA:** The pandemic gave us all time to introspect. We saw the world questioning its food, travel, and work choices. Every week there was one new hashtag-showstopper recipe circulating on social media. We all have jumped on the bandwagon at least once during the lockdown. Remember the baking wave? All these were innovative recipes using ingredients at home. Topics like sustainability and climate change took over our conversations. We are growing towards a leaner pattern of consumption overall, and that's the biggest takeaway of the last two years where the world went to a standstill, only for us to be able to open our minds to creativity.

**SJ:** Pandemic had a devastating impact on the food industry. Survival became a challenge for many businesses. The National



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— Sanjay Jain, Director, Elanpro



Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) report states that the Indian food services market witnessed 53% growth in FY2021 compared to the previous fiscal.

**AP:** Pandemic has severely struck the F&B industry, and restaurant owners are still reeling from its effects. These businesses focus more on growing sustainably to effectively withstand any such hindrances. The increasing technology adoption and kitchen automation are helping business owners to reduce their operational costs and increase their margins. Even the mindset of consumers has undergone a significant shift, effectuating a substantial boom in the online order business and more preference for standard hygiene practices at eateries.

**Do you see organic foods as the way forward?**

**VG:** There is already noticeable demand for organic beverages, cereals, food grains, spices, pulses and meat, poultry and dairy. I feel in India, eating organic food is still more of a style statement than due to health worries because organic food is more expensive. Organic food consumers tend to be a younger generation, which is a strong indication that this will become more popular and will be adapted to our country's eating habits in the years to come.

**GA:** Local producers are in the first place on the food chart. We source responsibly by being the first brand in our niche industry to have started making the switch to natural ingredients /clean labels. There are no artificial or natural identical flavours or colours and no added preservatives in more than 70% of our India portfolio. We aim at 100% fully NAF/NAC/NAC by 2030. We also exclusively use the highest grade of pure cane sugar for our syrups.

**AP:** The F&B market is an ever-growing sphere of taste and innovation. Post-COVID, consumers have gotten more cautious of their eating habits and choose to lead a healthier lifestyle. This has led to an increase in the organic food market, providing customers with the right

balance of taste and nourishment.

**What do you think of veganism, and how do you see the trend pan out in future?**

**VG:** Veganism, as a lifestyle and ethical choice, is gaining steady popularity in India, with more people engaging actively in what can be termed the Indian vegan movement. The concept is, however, only restricted to the TIER 1 cities. There is no denying that the hospitality industry, in general, has been very receptive to the idea of plant-based foods, even if you see the way almond and soy milk have picked up across cafes. It's too early to say what the future of this cuisine will be, but it's definitely a need of the hour. Though many people might not adapt to this today, with time, I see that this will be a part of the food chain in the future.

**GA:** The vegan way of life is like going back to the roots. The impact of animal cruelty and climate change can be seen in the eating habits of people around the world. With its rich culture, India has always been a true blazer of veganism. The effect of climate change can be seen and heard from every corner of the world. Heatwaves the capital city experiences are a part of rapid change in the climate. Even fast food is getting a vegan twist these days.

**AP:** Veganism is on a considerable rise globally, and the Indian F&B market has also welcomed this cuisine category openly. We have started seeing some restaurants inculcate this category in their menus. With more awareness and knowledge about vegan food and its benefits, we might see more people switching to the Vegan lifestyle in the future.

**There is a return to traditional and local foods. What do you make of this trend?**

**VG:** In my opinion, traditional local food was never out of trend. Mothers' food is still regarded as the best. The world went back to conventional food during covid due to the closure of eating joints. With space, energy and manpower costs going higher with each passing day, F&B professionals are looking at alternate solutions to create these traditional recipes trying to retain the same taste and quality but using modern, efficient technology-driven equipment.

**GA:** West has always looked at Indians for how they embrace their culture in how they eat- it is more about retaining their status as growers of local products than blind consumption and wastage at every stage. France's organic agriculture boomed exponentially in line with these broader trends.

**AP:** The Indian consumer market is strongly invested in celebrating their culture and food. So, the local and traditional cuisines will always be a significant faction in our F&B industry. The increasing efficiency of online delivery channels and technological innovations have enabled many local SMBs to expand their reach and take their traditional and authentic delicacies to a bigger audience.

**What is the role of technology in the F&B space?**

**VG:** Restaurants across the globe, including India, are upgrading themselves with new-age technology, which depends a lot on Artificial Intelligence and complete automation. Smart Combi Ovens are the new normal. These smart appliances can be programmed in such a way that they can cook the best meals with minimal intervention. Most of the intelligent equipment comes with an automatic self-cleaning function hence nothing is left to chance when it comes to matters of cleanliness and hygiene.



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— Apurv Patel, founder, Petpooja

**GA:** Technology is a big boon to the F & B industry, from digital menus to service robots. It helps bring transparency to customers and, in turn, helps the brand build trust and credibility. For us, technology allows supporting sustainable growth by collecting real-time data about how much energy we are using in manufacturing a product.

**SJ:** Technology is set to become the backbone of F&B space as it is instrumental in creating a collaborative and hygienic environment.

**AP:** Petpooja strives to simplify operations like billing, inventory, online orders, and CRM for restaurant owners to focus more on growing their business profitably. We are also building new innovative technologies like Waiter Calling systems, Voice-ordering Kiosks, etc. to help restaurateurs upgrade their customer service. Tito's, the latest Petpooja product, is a new-age marketing tool that allows F&B businesses optimally market their brand in this digital age faster, simpler, and cheaper way. 📌