

WE'VE GOT IT ALL WRAPPED UP

Here in the UK, there seems to be a never-ending stream of information about how to make healthy eating choices, much of it contradictory. This means that the simple act of selecting our lunch becomes more confusing by the day.

When **Anishya Kumar** noticed the number of preservatives and other undesirable ingredients in the average tortilla, she decided the solution lay in good, solid home cooking. Today, her award-winning AirWrap and preservative-free fillings are making a significant, if lighter, impact on many appreciative stomachs

MAKING A DECISION about what to put into our bodies feels like a minefield these days. Alongside the barrage of public messages about what we should and shouldn't be eating, consumers have to navigate the wealth of products that are marketed as healthy but, once we inspect the ingredients, actually aren't very healthy at all.

Former consultant Anishya Kumar has always had a passion for cooking and a few years ago, after having children, she was looking to make the transition out of corporate life.

"It wasn't really a lightbulb moment, I didn't wake up one day with an allergy that I needed to accommodate or anything like that," Anishya said. "It was a very natural process. My husband and I had relocated from India to the UK and it was a normal transition to move into food. I love cooking and I wanted to eat the food I grew up with, but the only way to do that was to cook it myself. Sometimes life fixes the path you should follow for you."





Having been given the opportunity to sell her own ready meals at a local convenience store in 2104, Anishya noticed that her filled wraps were proving the most popular with shoppers. The wraps presented the simplest proposition in terms of making the move to a commercial operation, so she founded Zinda Foods in 2016 and set up her small factory in West Drayton, Middlesex.

"I didn't have any investors or source of funds, I just took out two bank loans," Anishya said. "People thought that I was mad and would never be able to do it, but everything is a risk and I'd rather take on the risk myself than get someone else on board when I didn't know if it was going to work or not."

That year Zinda Foods received a Highly Commended award for one of their hand-

cooked, preservative-free fillings at the prestigious British Sandwich Association Awards. But now Anishya wanted to focus on the wrap itself, which was prepared in the simple Indian tradition.

Unlike most tortillas and other sandwich wraps, Anishya's AirWrap contains no additives, preservatives, trans fats, lard, palm oil or hydrogenated oils. Made from only five ingredients, combined in exactly the right ratio and with a special artisan technique, the AirWrap has a light texture and natural taste that has always been a hit with consumers. Anishya was determined that the AirWrap and its fillings should have no nutritional 'red lights' on the packaging and she has managed to achieve that, without compromising on flavour.

In 2017 she entered the AirWrap itself into

the British Sandwich Association Awards and won Best New Sandwich Ingredient of the Year.

"That was a big win for us," Anishya said. "To get that validation from the industry and for the judges to recognise it was amazing. It's been a long time since someone has really innovated with the carrier. You see different fillings coming into the market all the time, but it's very difficult technically to get the carrier right at all levels. It has to hold the fillings well and be commercially viable, shelf-stable and versatile."

Realising that this simple innovation could make a big impact in the market, Anishya trademarked the AirWrap. Production is now outsourced to a company that still makes each wrap by hand, allowing the West Drayton factory to focus on producing fillings

“ I didn't have any investors or source of funds, I just took out two bank loans. People thought that I was mad and would never be able to do it, but everything is a risk and I'd rather take on the risk myself than get someone else on board when I didn't know if it was going to work or not ”

and assembling the final product.

"Although the production process is artisanal, it's still quite technical; even the hot plate that's used has to be at a certain temperature, so there's been a lot of trial and error," she said. "But it's a healthier choice compared to tortillas, which often have a six-month shelf life. The AirWrap is fresh-frozen and because it's only a wheat-based product, it doesn't get mouldy until it's about 10 to 15 days old, so it has a good shelf life."

"We're not trying to replace anything that's already out there, but we think that customers should be aware there's another choice and it's probably a better, healthier choice than a tortilla."

Zinda Foods' star really started to rise when Tesco discovered Anishya's recipes, inspired by her mixed Indian and Persian



“ When it comes to scaling up though, the products will have to remain mostly handmade and couldn’t be mechanised to a high level... That kind of attention to detail is crucial – when you have control of the ingredients and make all the fillings in-house, you can keep on top of the nutritional and the quality ”

background. Her wraps are now stocked in 78 Tesco Metro, Express and Extra stores in the London area, with new sites being added all the time.

Anishya runs a tight ship from the compact premises, but she has no concerns about the challenges of scaling up further, should the need arise.

“This isn’t a massive factory, but I’d like to keep my overheads down and I think there is a lot more potential here to maximise capacity,” she said. “When it comes to scaling up though, the products will have to remain mostly handmade and couldn’t be mechanised to a high level. The sauces will be critical; for example, whoever is making big batches will have to ensure that the

onions are cooked down at just the right time and to the right consistency. That kind of attention to detail is crucial. When you have control of the ingredients and make all the fillings in-house, you can keep on top of the nutritional and the quality.”

Currently the company is focused on providing value-added food-to-go, but Anishya sees a strong future for the AirWrap as a standalone product.

“The AirWrap will have such a long journey,” she said. “It could be sold separately to restaurants for people who want a better alternative to naans; it goes wonderfully with curry. Over time, I think it will be a natural transition to find the AirWrap in the supermarket bread aisle. We want people to have access to this at home and also for it to be available in restaurants, food service outlets, everywhere.

“For me, this isn’t about disrupting a food category, it’s about disrupting a mindset, because people have to know there is an alternative choice.”

The company is in the process of developing a zero starch, zero sugar gluten-free AirWrap, which would tap into another growing sector of the food-to-go market. Next on the list of priorities will be a major marketing campaign to identify exactly who is buying Zinda Foods’ products and to raise awareness of this lighter, healthier option.

“We’re not just a one-product wonder – we’re more than just manufacturers, we’re innovators and the AirWrap is just one product we have,” Anishya said. “We have several more in various stages of new product development. We don’t make average food. We will take things a notch higher, break that glass ceiling and do something radically different, because we’re food-to-go innovators.” ■

zindafoods.com