

## **70 kinds of exotic fruits and vegetables so you won't get bored And that's just one part of Infuzn's business plan**

PINE ISLAND — “Cultures are fusing and cuisine is evolving,” said Chandu Valluri, co-founder of Infuzn Foods, a new food processing venture in Pine Island. “Our vision matches what’s happening globally.”



Infuzn’s catchphrase is *Indian inspired food with a global twist*. The company’s concept is to deliver the product – fresh, flavorful, nutritious and with that international spin – direct to customers.

### **Following their business plan**

In November 2016 when founders Valluri, Bhaskar Iyengar, and Ananth (Andy) Kollengode opened Infuzn, its inventory consisted only of Indian cuisine staples, paneer (a unique cheese) and daals (lentils and beans). The distribution method then – and now – is, customers order online at [infuznfoods.com](http://infuznfoods.com), and Infuzn delivers direct to homes in the Rochester, Winona, and La Crosse areas.

One step at a time – and baby steps at that – is part of the business plan, Iyengar said. But a few months past startup, the founders took a giant baby step. They bought the former Cathy’s Catering building at 300 South Main Street and during the summer and fall, transformed it into a food processing plant.

Then last November, they introduced Infuzn’s line of tropical fruits and vegetables. “Our idea is to bring in 70 different exotic fruits and vegetables in addition to the three varieties of paneer and 11 varieties of daals so you won’t get bored eating the same thing,” Kollengode said. “The next step is to teach how to use them.” He, Iyengar, and Valluri have been doing that, giving demos at area food co-ops and farmers markets.

### **Meet the founders**

Infuzn’s creators bring to their enterprise diverse skill sets, distinct cultural backgrounds, and a relevant likeness. Iyengar, a native of India, is a professor of computer science at Winona State University. Valluri is a professor of marketing at Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wis. He grew up in the US, Canada, and Germany, and his wife is from South Africa. Kollengode, referred to by his partners as Infuzn’s official food guru, is a food scientist and quality control expert. He works as an operations manager at Mayo Clinic.

Far-flung upbringings, a common appreciation: “We all enjoy food,” Iyengar said. “We always experiment with cooking.” From their culinary adventures came delicious mealtimes and the inspiration for Infuzn Foods. The four cultures represented “are our building blocks,” Valluri said. “The best of four worlds.”

### **Next step: meal kits**

Infuzn’s market presentations not only brief shoppers on the culinary fundamentals of paneer, daals, and exotic produce, but also tell the three entrepreneurs which foods click with the public. “We want to learn what goes well in this community, Kollengode said, because the next step in the business plan is packaged meals. This summer, Infuzn Foods will begin producing kits – healthful vegetarian meals, complete with all ingredients and instructions for preparation. The kits will reflect Infuzn’s international flair, said Iyengar. “The core is Indian, but a fusion – a confluence of blends from throughout the world.”

“The kits will accent freshness, nutrition, value, convenience, and making cooking fun again,” Kollengode said. “Our goal is four or five steps and 30 minutes to prepare. The customer will make curry and other easy as a-b-c dishes; but if it’s something complicated like chutney, we will make it. And then you just simmer it and make rice and enjoy.”

### **About paneer and daals and exotic produce**

In another multicultural touch, Infuzn’s paneer is made fresh at a cheese factory in Wisconsin. Paneer stars in versatility and thwarts comparison. Kollengode listed its attributes: It’s mild, has a little bit of a nutty flavor, and absorbs other flavors.” It can be cubed, crumbled, fried, and used in many dishes, even desserts. “It’s good in salads, chutney, and pesto sauce. And on pizza. And as an appetizer with salsa. And–”

“And I’m getting hungry,” said Iyengar, who got even hungrier when Kollengode added that paneer mixed with strawberry jam makes a scrumptious spread.

To paneer’s considerable virtues, add these: The cheese is rennet- and gluten-free and a rich source of protein and calcium.

Daals, likewise nutritious and versatile, come in an assortment of flavors and colors. Familiar examples are garbanzo beans, kidney beans, and black-eyed peas. Used in soups, stews, salads, curries, and chutney, daals are basics of the Indian diet.

Regarding the fresh produce, you won’t be able to get all 70 kinds at the same time. Selection depends on what’s in season. Among the fruits are mangoes, which are considered the king of fruit and come in hundreds of varieties and big, small, and in-between sizes. You can even get mangoes for pickling. And look for guava, papayas, green papayas, sugar cane, plantains, litchis, custard apples, jackfruit (“It’s huge,” Iyengar said. “Cut it, peel it; the tissue inside is aromatic and flavorful”), pomegranates, coconuts, and more.

For vegetables, expect okra, egg plant (“several varieties, very flavorful and small, not like in the US,” said Kollengode), spinach, drumsticks (from Indian drumstick trees), squashes (“each has its own personality and each is used differently,” Iyengar said), tindora, daikon, and more.

No, you won’t get bored eating the same thing.

### **Practicing charity**

Philanthropy is a guiding principle at Infuzn Foods, said Iyengar, a member of the Lions Club and other service organizations. “We would deliver to your church or temple or wherever – to nonprofit groups – and contribute to them.”

“We already do that with the Rochester Muslim Community Circle,” Kollengode said. “A portion of the profit from deliveries there goes back to RMCC.” He, Iyengar, and Valluri hope other nonprofits will make similar arrangements. “Our core competency is in eliminating the middleman so we can be more efficient and help people in need.”

Opening a business requires having faith in yourself and in your community, Iyengar said.

Infuzn founders believe they chose the right community. “The Rochester region is a great place, with diversity and inclusiveness and a welcome to entrepreneurs and innovators,” Kollengode said. “Even if it’s too cold, it has the right ingredients to get things done.”