**Media Release**

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# Six new Aussie start-ups chosen to accelerate food innovation

Mars Food Australia has selected six innovative food start-ups to take part in the inaugural SEEDS OF CHANGE™Accelerator program.

The Seeds of Change Accelerator is designed to help early stage Australian food-focused start-ups fast-track growth and build a healthier and more sustainable future. A panel of expert judges chose the final six start-ups from 15 finalists shortlisted out of an overwhelming 224 applicants nationwide.

In addition to a grant of up to $40,000 (AUD), each of the final six start-ups will undertake a tailored four-month program to help tackle the biggest individual challenges to their business growth, whether that’s branding, product development, market intelligence, sales or supply chain.

The finalists have access to an extensive support system to help them become the next generation of food businesses transforming the way Australians eat and share meals. The Accelerator program also offers a series of face-to-face workshops and access to a team of expert mentors and advisers from within the Mars business and across the wider Australian food innovation network.

The final six Australian participants selected to take part in the Seeds of Change Accelerator in Australia are:

1. **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. Their products are widely sought after for their probiotic and gut health benefits.
2. **The Australian Superfood Co,** Oakleigh Vic:HayleyBlieden 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. They source their ingredients from indigenous communities and local growers to enhance respect for Australia’s indigenous culture, increase access and affordability and foster the local food movement.
3. **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 manufacturers can use to enrich everyday food products with safe and nutritious ingredients to feed more people, more sustainably.
4. **Your Prep,** Brisbane Qld:The focus of Matt Boyce’s business is to bridge the gap between nutritious, healthy meals and anxiety and depression. There is a documented link between gut health and mental health, and his business provides dietician-designed, chef-prepared, cooked meal components direct to the customer to help maximise family time and human connection via easy-to-access nutrition.
5. **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.
6. **Plant-based Meat,** Sunshine Coast Qld:Michael Fox is focused onproducing 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.

Peter Crane, Research and Development Director at Mars Food Australia and Program Mentor for the Seeds of Change Accelerator, said the program is one of the many ways Mars works to bring its purpose – *Better Food Today. A Better World Tomorrow* – to life.

“Mars Food is committed to nurturing the next generation of food innovators and dedicated to

creating and delivering healthier, easier and tastier food for more people,” Mr Crane said.

“The world is changing at a rapid pace with consumer needs evolving and new approaches and technologies transforming business. We hope this accelerator acts as a catalyst to help forward-thinking innovators bring their purpose-driven food-focused visions to life,” he said.

One of the six successful start-up entrepreneurs, Michael Fox, has developed slow braised beef and pulled pork products from shredded shiitake mushroom stems.

“Using mushroom stems as the base ingredient makes the product very healthy and, because they are a by-product of the mushroom production process, we can source vast quantities in a sustainable way,” Michael said.

“I’m hoping to launch in a few months’ time, and then looking to scale up, so the opportunity to connect with people experienced in the food industry to help me do that is invaluable. I need to fill some gaps around product and recipe development, distribution locally and internationally, and even with things like labelling laws. Now I’ll have access to the right people who can help me in each of those areas,” he said.

Another finalist, Skye Blackburn, is a food scientist and entomologist and founder of the Edible Bug Shop in Sydney. Skye feels that by educating people about the way that edible insects can be farmed as an eco-friendly alternative protein, she can help reduce some of the misconceptions about eating bugs.

“You don't just have to eat bugs if you are stuck in the bush and have nothing else to eat. When prepared properly, and you get over the initial ‘yuck’ factor, bugs are very tasty and are also good for you,” Skye said.

“I’ve developed robotic technology specifically for use in insect farming and implemented processes to extract nutritional ingredients from insects. We turn food waste which would normally go to landfill into delicious and highly nutritious food products that can feed more people with less resources more sustainably,” she said.

The Seeds of Change Accelerator has been 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. The Australian Accelerator is part of a joint US-Australia initiative selecting 12 start-ups to take part in the program: six in the US and six in Australia.

**Further information and photos** available for [download here](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4la1deqrxygi8ee/AACvQTIjZ7zjttCvPWzASVpUa?dl=0) via Dropbox.

**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®, SEEDS OF CHANGE® and PROMITE®. These brands can be found in 9 out of 10 Australian cupboards and are exported to the Asia Pacific Region, as well as being available to commercial kitchens, caterers and quick service restaurants. Our

team

of more than 330 Associates has

been creating healthy, easy,

accessible, tasty meal solutions for Australians since 1967 through our

popular DOLMIO

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MFA offers

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[Mars Website](https://www.mars.com.au/brands/food).

**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](https://www.industry.gov.au/strategies-for-the-future/industry-growth-centres) initiative which aims to drive innovation and growth in Australia. [FIAL website](https://fial.com.au/).

**About the Seeds of Change Accelerator:** Visit the [Seeds of Change Accelerator website](http://www.socaccelerator.com/australia).

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