

When Mumbai native Sana Javeri Kadri founded her California spice company four years ago, she set out to bring the freshest flavors possible to the States, while offering fair pay and an equitable partnership to farmers across India in the process. Diaspora Co. is the vibrant and game-changing result.

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SPICE *of* LIFE





FLAVOR BLAST

The ingredients for the popular spice blend Andhra gunpowder—a rich, tingly mix that gets sprinkled on finished Indian dishes, rice, and naan—include (clockwise from top left) cumin seeds, coriander seeds (with wooden spoon), shredded coconut, garlic, roasted split chickpeas, Guntur sannam chiles, sugar, curry leaves, and salt. *Opposite:* Diaspora Co. founder Sana Javeri Kadri sits atop bundles of freshly milled turmeric. She travels to India at least once a year to visit farmers and replenish her inventory.

ONA TRIP to the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh in February 2017, Sana Javeri Kadri, right out of college and working in marketing at Bi-Rite, San Francisco's beloved specialty-grocery chain, was introduced to a turmeric so flavorful and nuanced, it changed the direction of her life. That might sound dramatic, but given the dusty old spices she was familiar with, this golden, glowing powder, packed with zesty, floral notes, was nothing short of a revelation. The man behind the bounty was a third-generation farmer, Prabhu Kasaraneni, who had planted heirloom turmeric using ancient, self-taught farming methods among fields of marigolds, bananas, and black rice. Within days, Javeri Kadri decided to put an income-tax return toward purchasing roughly seven hundred pounds of turmeric from him, promising to return to India to buy more if she sold it. Six months after that first trip, Diaspora Co. launched with one spice: Kasaraneni's single-origin Pragati turmeric. It sold out on her website within days, and a partnership was formed, in which she purchases his entire harvest directly at a price he sets. The response from consumers and the food industry was overwhelming, and chefs such as Preeti Mistry and cookbook author Julia Turshen gushingly spread the word. Javeri Kadri knew she'd hit on something big, not only with her product, but with her revolutionary business model.

To understand why a spice company rooted in equity is groundbreaking, it's important to recognize that the colonial conquest of the Indian subcontinent was inextricably linked to the spice trade. "Thousands of years of indigenous spice-growing knowledge have been buried by an exploitative spice trade that removed farmers' stories from the equation," explains Javeri Kadri. European colonizers relied on indentured labor to grow, harvest, and transport goods. Under this system, large companies and middlemen—processors, auctioneers, and wholesalers—maintained power and made the profits. Though India gained independence in 1947, many farmers there continue to feel those effects. Diaspora Co. sells directly from farm to consumer, and sends a share of profits straight to growers. Consumers win, too: While spices often reach stores three to seven years after leaving the farm—by which time they're reduced to nearly flavorless powders—Diaspora's are amazingly fresh and potent.

In close partnership with a network of agricultural scientists, farmers' co-ops, and regional community leaders, Javeri Kadri now works with more than 30 farms to source her current 12 varieties, ranging from Aranya black pepper (with notes of fig, citrus, and chocolate) to lemony, nutty Nandini coriander. More offerings are on the way. "Many of our farms are preparing for future harvests," she says. To meet Diaspora's high standards, they must convert from conventional growing methods to regenerative and sustainable agriculture, a process that can take years. Once it's completed, Javeri Kadri purchases whole harvests in bulk, paying an average of six times the commodity price, and provides health insurance. "You can pay the farmer a lot of money, but that still



EGGPLANT ROTLI
PACHCHADI



**SANA'S
TURMERIC GIN
AND TONICS**

For all the recipes in this story, see page 99.



GOLD DUST

Clockwise from top left: Venkayamma, a farmworker, sifts Pragati turmeric into an ultrafine powder. The spice gives gin and tonics a sunny glow. This indigenous variety of turmeric, gathered from the Thekkady forests, was distributed to select farmers by the Indian Institute of Spices Research in Kerala starting in 2013. “When Sana came to our farm, we were able to show her not only our fields, but our mill and the techniques we use,” says Prabhu Kasaraneni. Fresh vegetable chutneys—like this eggplant roti pachchadi, made with roasted Guntur sannam chiles, Nandini coriander, and curry leaves—are a staple in many Andhra homes, typically made with a mortar and pestle to retain the ingredients’ original flavor and texture.



GUNTUR-CHILE
CHICKEN



isn't often true equity," she says. "The farmers are mostly men, while the majority of laborers are migrant women and/or Dalit women." Access to health care and higher wages for all, from farmers to workers who manage the day-to-day planting, weeding, irrigating, and harvesting, is a crucial step toward balancing benefits across the supply chain.

The dishes on these pages, which feature flavors like pungent black mustard and perfumed cardamom, were inspired by the traditional midday meals enjoyed by farmers in the region. "Lunch is an elaborate, sit-down affair, meant to give farmers the nourishment they need for the rest of the day," explains Archana Pidathala, a cookbook author who created most of these recipes and is based in Andhra Pradesh, the state where Javeri Kadri tasted the turmeric that would rock her world. For Javeri Kadri, seeing Diaspora Co.'s spices resonate in authentic, home-cooked recipes from the very region where they were grown, harvested, and processed is a dream come true. As she puts it, "this is a spice company by us, and for us."

HEAT WAVE

Clockwise from top left: For this intensely aromatic chicken dish, marinated bone-in breasts, thighs, and drumsticks are cooked in a caramelized masala reduction, which concentrates the flavor of the spices. In the Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, region of India, the Narne brothers, who grow chiles, and their neighbors survey the fields, which are about a week from harvest. Chiles dry in the sun; later, workers will pound the hot peppers into a powder with sesame oil and rock salt to extract their smokiness.





ASHA'S CACAO
COOKIES

SWEET DREAM

Cookies flavored with Diaspora Co.'s Anamalai cacao powder pair nicely with a steaming cup of chai. When launching the company, Javeri Kadri imagined a day when she could make a cup of chai using only its own spices. That dream will come true this year with the addition of cloves, ginger, fennel, and cinnamon to the company's offerings.

PRO TEAM

Ratna Kumari (far left), the Kasaraneni farm group's leader, rests with her crew (from left, Malleswari, Kamala, Rani, and Rama) after a morning of gathering turmeric. To harvest the spice, a buffalo and cart pull the plant's rhizomes (which resemble ginger roots) from the earth. The women follow behind, picking up and cleaning the pieces loosened by the buffalo, then adding them to shallow plastic buckets. Later, they will peel, boil, and dry each piece before grinding and sifting it three times.



COLD CREAM

This refreshing summer dessert is typically made with strained full-fat yogurt and mango purée. Archana's rendition swaps in ripe peaches enlivened with Baraka cardamom and Kashmiri saffron. A sprinkling of rose petals and pistachios adds a splash of color and crunch.

PEACH
SHRIKHAND