

Start-up hones culinary skills of housewives, brings food to connoisseurs

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Nagpur: Bringing together homemakers whose culinary skills are restricted to their dining tables, is Nativchef, a start-up being steered by Leena Dixit. Working to leverage the recipes from different parts of India, prepared regularly in household kitchens, Nativchefs is seeking to popularize and preserve them by taking them to food connoisseurs.

Dixit was among the 100 women entrepreneurs selected under the Women Startup Programme 2018 conducted by NSRCEL under IIM Bangalore. A total of 6,200 women had applied for the programme.

“Out of the selected hundred, ten are from Maharashtra and we have IIM Nagpur as our incubator,” Dixit said. “My pitch was building a digital platform for native cuisine, and help women with excellent culinary skills to monetize their talent.”

The process involves reaching out to women living in the city who otherwise hail from different parts of India. “I approached Chitra Soni who runs Ruchira cookery classes to help me find such persons and she connected me to many women who have honed their cooking skills,” said Dixit.

She then took food samples “from them which were paid for by me”. “The second step was to get natives taste the preparation and approve the authenticity. The final step involved working out the costing, quantity and find methods for standardization of the recipe,” adds Dixit.

In the first lot, Dixit has managed to get 16 homemakers on board with two recipes each from regions like Rajasthan, Bengal, Gujarat, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and the local Saoji. All have won cookery awards at various contests.

“I need to assure that the recipes have been in the family for generations. We get pointers on their quality, taste and authenticity from the natives of these regions whom we invite to taste. Soni is working on the standardization part of it to ensure that each time a dish is ordered the taste remains consistent,” she said.

A workshop was conducted for these 16 ‘chefs’ who were trained in aspects like appearance, authenticity, quantity, taste and price.

There are certain guidelines which must be followed by the chefs for coming on board. “They need to have a FSSAI registration, and a doctor’s certificate saying they have no skin diseases. They also have to sign a non-disclosure contract. We will also be uploading the pictures of their kitchens on our website,” Dixit says.

The menu will remain fixed to what these women chefs have been roped in to prepare and as of now there are only 24 recipes. “Ordering will be from our website where the details of each dish, its history and origin will be posted along with a ‘know your chef’ section. Fortunately, Nagpur is a very cosmopolitan city and we have been able to find women from various regions,” Dixit adds.

Dixit began testing waters recently and is moving slowly. The orders have to be placed by 10am so that delivery can be made by 12.30pm and by 5pm for a delivery time of 7.30pm.

“We have to appreciate that these women do not have the commercial expertise nor storage facilities. Cooking begins right from the first step of buying ingredients. So we don’t want to flood them with orders and are waiting to get them more accustomed to the working,” Dixit says and adds, “If the model succeeds we will go to other cities.”