INTERVIEWS | INTERVIEW

Driving Dairy Diversification

- Srideep Kesavan, CEO, Heritage Foods

By **Mansi Jamsudkar** | September 4, 2025



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As part of **NUFOODS Spectrum's 12th Anniversary Special** interview series, we present the fourth feature, *Driving Dairy Diversification*, with **Srideep Kesavan, CEO, Heritage Foods**. In

this edition, Kesavan outlines the company's **Vision 2030** to blend India's deep-rooted dairy heritage with modern nutrition, convenience, and mindful indulgence. He shares how Heritage Foods is reinterpreting tradition through its four guiding principles of innovation, investing in fortified and high-protein offerings, and creating new consumption occasions — all while upholding transparency, farmer partnerships, and an unwavering pursuit of better. Edited Excerpts;

Value-added dairy has long been a high-growth segment within India's mature dairy ecosystem. How do you assess its role in driving margin expansion and portfolio diversification in such a heritage-rich category?

By definition, value-added dairy hints at innovation, creating value, expanding margins, and more. Dairy consumption has been around in India for close to 8,000 years. Almost all categories of value-added dairy have existed for centuries — curd, butter, ghee, paneer, and more. Sweets in the Indian context have always been made from dairy, primarily khoya- or ghee-based. Dairy is deeply interwoven into our society, with categories that carry personal, cultural, and even religious connotations.

Heritage Foods operates in a category with deep cultural roots and high consumer familiarity. How do you structure innovation to stay relevant?

Our philosophy acknowledges this challenge. Innovation cannot simply be about creating something entirely new. It must be about reinterpreting tradition, staying relevant to evolving consumers, and connecting heritage with modern lifestyle needs. Most importantly, it must serve our Vision 2030 — to become India's most admired dairy nutrition company. This vision is the driving force behind how we think about innovation, and why our framework is built on four immutable principles, each grounded in our values yet responsive to the modern consumption economy.

Could you outline how Heritage Foods' four guiding principles of innovation translate into tangible operational practices and competitive advantage for the company?

Our four guiding principles of innovation are not abstract ideas — they are deeply embedded into the company's day-to-day operations, shaping both its competitive advantage and its

connection with consumers.

It all begins with the belief that Excellence at the Source is the Secret to Great Taste. For us great taste doesn't start in the factory; it starts at the farm. The company works hand-in-hand with farmers, ensuring that every drop of milk meets rigorous standards from the moment it's collected. By keeping sourcing close to the point of origin, raw milk travels minimal distances before it is chilled to 4°C within hours of milking.

But purity alone doesn't win loyalty. That's where Creating Value Through Consumer Delight comes in. At our company, value is not simply about price competitiveness — it's about delivering more than the consumer expects. Every product is designed with the consumer experience in mind, balancing quality, affordability, and relevance. Whether it's the creamy texture of curd, the high protein content of paneer, or the refreshing simplicity of a glass of milk, each offering is meant to surprise and delight.

To keep delight fresh and relevant, we actively focus on Shaping New Occasions, Inspiring New Tastes. By reimagining traditional products for modern lifestyles, Heritage Foods has transformed curd from a mealtime staple into a refreshing 4 pm snack in South India, and turned paneer into a breakfast choice through dishes like paneer upma or paneer idli. These new consumption occasions not only drive sales growth but also embed dairy deeper into consumers' daily routines, making the brand a part of more moments in their lives.

Underlying all these principles is the conviction that The Pursuit of Better Never Ends. We treat innovation as an ongoing discipline rather than an occasional breakthrough. From improving product freshness to enhancing nutrition profiles, from reducing wastage to increasing operational efficiency, the company is always asking, "How can we do this better?" This continuous improvement mindset ensures that we remain competitive, adaptable, and ahead of consumer expectations.

Convenience is increasingly critical in urban dairy consumption. How is Heritage Foods adapting packaging, shelf-life, and distribution models to meet this demand without compromising quality?

Convenience has emerged as the new currency in today's time-starved urban lifestyle, driving the growth of quick commerce, instant delivery, and on-the-go formats. In dairy, where most value-added products are deeply rooted in tradition and personalisation options are limited, we see convenience as a solvable challenge. The company designs products to seamlessly align with the specific occasions consumers purchase them for. For instance, its curd range offers multiple variants tailored to different uses, ensuring the right texture and taste every time. Recognising the realities of modern distribution, Heritage Foods also engineers its products to withstand thermal shocks and less-than-ideal cold chain conditions, ensuring consistent quality across diverse markets.

Nutrition is no longer a niche differentiator but a baseline expectation. What functional or fortified product innovations are you prioritising to address this shift?

Nutrition has moved from being a niche differentiator to an everyday expectation, with consumers increasingly looking for foods that fuel health as much as they satisfy hunger. At Heritage Foods, this shift has long been part of our ethos. We were among the first in the industry to fortify 100 per cent of our milk with Vitamin A and D, well before it became mandatory. Today, we are leading the charge toward high-protein and protein-rich products that deliver tangible health benefits without sacrificing taste — a balance achieved through sustained R&D investment. For us, the greater the functional benefit, the more we focus on enhancing flavour, ensuring nutrition is never at the cost of enjoyment. We are also fostering a daily probiotic habit with innovations like Probiotic Buttermilk, repositioned as a refreshing meal accompaniment that supports gut health.

Balancing indulgence with health remains a challenge. How do you position your products to deliver on both sensory appeal and functional benefits?

Consumers today navigate a unique paradox — the desire for indulgence coupled with the need to feel good about their choices. We address this through what we call "mindful indulgence," where taste and wellness coexist in perfect balance. This means investing significant time in understanding consumer expectations through direct interactions, tasting sessions, and meticulous recipe refinement. We insist on the highest-quality ingredients, ensuring no compromise on richness or sensory appeal. A prime example is our Livo High-Protein Yogurt

range, designed for those who seek creamy, satisfying indulgence while also reaping the benefits of high protein. It delivers both pleasure and purpose, perfectly encapsulated in our campaign line: “Guiltfree never tasted so good.” This approach allows us to bridge the gap between indulgence and health, creating products that consumers can enjoy wholeheartedly and trust completely.

Transparency and trust have become non-negotiable for brand equity. How does Heritage Foods ensure traceability, clean-label compliance, and consumer confidence across the value chain?

Transparency is woven into every stage of our value chain. From ensuring prompt and fair payments to farmers, to conducting stringent quality checks at our collection centres, we leave no room for compromise. Our commitment extends to clean-label products, such as paneer made without starch or fillers, using only pure milk and tested coagulants. We share openly what goes into our products because every moment of clarity strengthens loyalty, while even a single lapse can erode it.

Finally, given your heritage advantage and evolving consumer trends, what is your outlook for the Indian value-added dairy market over the next five years, and where will Heritage Foods focus its competitive bets?

In an industry steeped in centuries of tradition, true innovation lies in honouring heritage while redefining relevance for the modern consumer. Our four immutable principles and commitment to the key drivers of contemporary consumption serve as our compass, ensuring every product embodies both timeless appeal and present-day value. We see innovation not as a final destination but as an ongoing journey — one where evolving tastes, lifestyles, and technologies continually shape our path. Over the next five years, our focus will remain on creating value-added dairy products that blend authenticity with functionality, catering to health-conscious, convenience-seeking, and experience-driven consumers. And through it all, one truth will remain constant: our pursuit of better never ends.

Mansi Jamsudkar Padvekar

mansi.jamsudkar@mmactiv.com

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