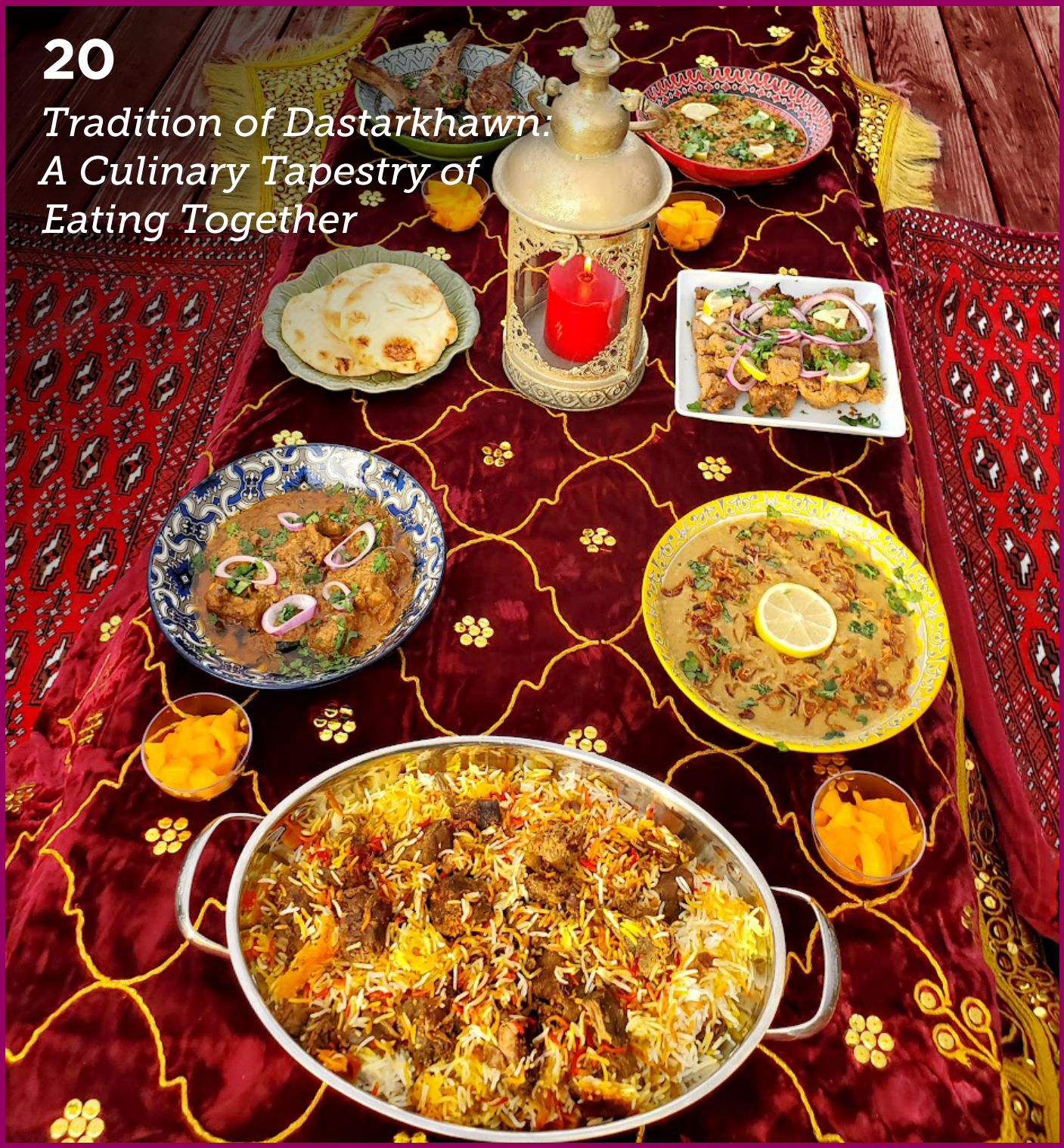
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Summer 2024
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# Halal Consumer

A Publication of the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America
Magazine



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*Tradition of Dastarkhawn: A Culinary Tapestry of Eating Together*




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**CHICKEN & NOODLES:** A winning combination with chunks of light and dark chicken meat, homestyle Kluski noodles, peas and carrots in a lightly seasoned sauce.

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**BEEF STEW:** A satisfying and delicious stew! It has chunks of lean beef, with potatoes, sweet peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, zucchini, chickpeas and carrots in a flavorful sauce.

**OLD WORLD STEW:** Chunks of lean beef, with brown rice, tomatoes, zucchini and pinto beans. The sauce is seasoned with the aromatic flavors of the Middle East.

**PASTA WITH GARDEN VEGETABLES:** This delicious and robust meal has rotini pasta with peppers, mushrooms, zucchini and tomatoes. It is perfectly flavored with traditional Italian seasonings.

**VEGETARIAN STEW:** A meal fit for vegetarian and hearty eater alike! With macaroni, vegetables, potatoes, barley, lentils, peanuts and seasonings, this meal has great taste and a variety of textures.

**CHEESE TORTELLINI:** Cheese-filled tortellini are simply delicious in a well-seasoned tomato sauce, with the added protein and texture of pinto beans.

**FLORENTINE LASAGNA:** A meal influenced by the tastes of Florence. Savor the combination of small lasagna noodles in a tomato sauce with Ricotta and Parmesan cheeses, spinach and pinto bean pieces which add texture and protein.

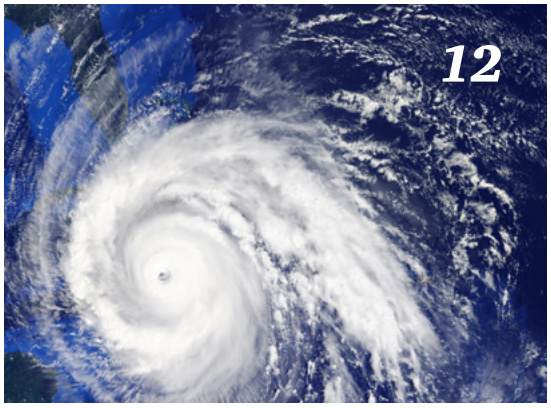
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*In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, Most Merciful*










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ABOUT HALAL CONSUMER
Halal Consumer is a publication of IFANCA (Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America). IFANCA is a non-profit Islamic organization with the mission to promote halal food and the institution of halal. IFANCA objectives include making halal foods conveniently available, introducing halal to food companies and institutions, creating awareness of halal among consumers, and providing halal solutions to consumer needs.

DESIGNED BY Annan Shehadi
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# Editor's Note

Assalaamu alaikum,

It's been a whirlwind of events for us at IFANCA. Earlier this year, we hosted a community solidarity-building event at our Sabeel Center in Des Plaines, IL, to raise awareness and unite communities in response to global conflicts. The event featured two renowned Palestinian-Americans, Linda Sarsour and Tariq Luthun, alongside leaders from Islamic organizations, mosques, educational institutes, and charities, all working together to advocate for human rights and explore how American Muslims can drive global change in the challenges that we face today.

As we reflect on the importance of community and shared values, our cover story "Tradition of Dastarkhawn: A Culinary Tapestry of Eating Together," takes us on a journey across various lands as we discover the royal meals eaten by the Nawabs in Lucknow to the vibrant celebrations of Navruz in Tajikistan. Meals around this spread are more than just about food—they're about connection, culture, and community.

The next time you are hosting, let us help you plan your dinner menu! You can create your own dastarkhawn with our mouthwatering recipes, originating from North Indian cuisine. I'm really excited to share recipes for some of my favorite foods, especially my mom's Shami Kebabs!

Continuing with traditions from different cultures, our article "Diving Into The Blue Zone" explores the secrets of the world's longest-living communities. Find out what these groups have in common and what aspects of their lifestyle may contribute to a healthier life.

Similarly, "Ashwagandha: Traditional Wisdom for Modern Wellness" highlights the power of this time-tested herb in enhancing our physical and mental well-being. As we explore its diverse benefits, we uncover how this traditional remedy can enrich our contemporary lives and support a balanced lifestyle.

The growing concerns around climate change often lead to overwhelming feelings of anxiety and stress. Tornados, severe storms, floods, and raging wildfires leave many grappling with concerns about their safety and the effects of climate change. In our article, "Weathering the Storms of Climate Anxiety," we explore strategies to help alleviate the anxiety triggered by natural disasters.

"Make Your Breathwork for You" reveals how something as simple as breathing can significantly impact your physical and emotional well-being. By learning to control your breath, you can reduce stress, improve mental clarity, and unlock a greater sense of calm and balance in your everyday life.

IFANCA is dedicated to advancing our mission by creating educational programs and funding scholarships. We established the Food Diversity Innovation Program (FDIP) in partnership with Texas A&M University. Find out more in our *Spotlight* article, "Pioneering Food Diversity: How IFANCA and Texas A&M University are Leading the Way."

To stay up to date with all the latest IFANCA and Halal Consumer Magazine news, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X. You can also email us at halalconsumer@ifanca.org with any questions or feedback. We love hearing from our readers!

Sincerely,
Zehra Jafri editor

# From the Publisher's Desk

Assalaamu alaikum,

**"Seek knowledge even if you have to go as far as China" is a famous saying attributed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).**

Even 1500 years ago, China was recognized for its advancements in education. The first verse revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in the Qur'an was "*Iqra*," meaning "read." The subsequent verses emphasize concepts such as seeking *ilm* (knowledge) and refer to the *qalam* (pen), a symbol of the preservation and transmission of knowledge through teaching and learning. This highlights the importance Islam places on the pursuit of knowledge as a lifelong endeavor.

Today, understanding halal practices is crucial, especially as modern products have become increasingly complex, often containing hidden ingredients. Unfortunately, education about ethnic and religious dietary laws is rarely taught in schools. While scientific education is secular, religious certifications were not part of university curriculums until recently.

Ten years ago, IFANCA began its mission at Cornell University in collaboration with a professor specializing in kosher education. This initiative eventually led to a partnership with Texas A&M University, resulting in the establishment of The Food Diversity Innovation Program (FDIP). Graduates of this program are equipped with the knowledge of halal requirements for the industry worldwide, enabling them to cater to halal-observant communities and shape the future of food innovation.

Through the IFANCA fellowship program, students engage in research that addresses pressing issues related to food sustainability, nutrition, and cultural culinary traditions. This hands-on approach empowers them to develop innovative solutions that positively impact their communities. Educated individuals can advocate for better policies, lead local initiatives, and inspire others to prioritize health and sustainability, aligning perfectly with the Islamic ethos of knowledge sharing and community service.

As Muslims, it is our duty to uphold the value of education and leverage it as a tool for community empowerment. Initiatives like the IFANCA scholarships not only fund education but also cultivate informed citizens who can address societal challenges and build a more inclusive future, embodying the teachings of our faith.

So, while we no longer need to journey all the way to China to seek knowledge, we can now turn to The Food Diversity Innovation Program (FDIP) within the Department of Food Science and Technology at Texas A&M University, and other ever-growing similar programs closer to home.

Sincerely,
Muhammad Munir Chaudry president

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# DIVING INTO THE BLUE ZONE

By Taskeen Khan

IMAGINE FINDING OUT THAT SCATTERED ACROSS the globe are very special towns where people live remarkably long, healthy lives. Not only do these regions support healthy populations, they also boast unique communities, including the highest concentration of men over 100, and the world's oldest women. You would probably be googling plane tickets, and figuring out how to tap into these apparent "fountains of youth." But there is nothing supernatural about these towns; rather, these communities benefit from a shared set of lifestyle tenants, and you can incorporate them into your own life without ever boarding a plane.

These regions, called "Blue Zones," are places where residents live significantly longer than their peers globally, and maintain their quality of life into old age. The term "Blue Zone" was created by National Geographic Explorer and Fellow Dan Buettner who, alongside a team of researchers, studied communities that exhibited longevity and vitality. The team found five regions that exemplified what it means to be a blue zone, Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Ikaria, Greece; and Loma Linda, California. The research teams found that the communities in these regions all share 9 lifestyle habits, dubbed "The Power 9."

## THE POWER 9

**1. Moving Naturally**

In Blue Zones, movement is naturally integrated into daily life, as people walk to work, tend to their gardens, cultivate the land, or spend time outdoors. This is good news for those of us who can't squeeze in a gym visit. It means that we can reap the same benefits by making simple changes like parking at the far end of the office parking lot and getting a few extra steps in as we go to work. Another way to incorporate movement is to multitask. Instead of sitting on the couch while you chat with your friend, enjoy each other's company while going on a walk. If you want to include the children in your life in your effort to be healthier, choose toys for them that incorporate movement, like hula hoops and bikes, and join them when they play.

**2. Purpose**

In Blue Zone communities, people have a strong sense of purpose in their lives. The study "Association Between Life Purpose and Mortality Among US Adults Older Than 50 Years" delved further into this, and after interviewing 6,985 Americans over 50, it concluded that a "stronger purpose in life was associated with decreased mortality." However, this doesn't mean that having a purpose in life cures all health issues. The study emphasizes that while there is an association between life purpose and mortality due to "heart, circulatory, and blood conditions," there is



**The term "Blue Zone" was created by National Geographic Explorer and Fellow Dan Buettner who, alongside a team of researchers, studied communities that exhibited longevity and vitality.**



**"Blue Zones," are places where residents live significantly longer than their peers globally, and maintain their quality of life into old age.**

no association between life purpose and mortality due to cancer, tumors, and respiratory tract system conditions.

**3. Downshift**
Stress can't be avoided, but people in Blue Zones have regular routines they use to decrease their stress. In Okinawa, stress reduction looks like taking time to remember ancestors, while in Ikaria, it means taking a nap. *The Harvard Health* article, "Six Relaxation Techniques to Reduce Stress" includes repetitive prayers as a method for managing stress, a technique which may be especially beneficial for Muslims, who are already prescribed to turn to God five times a day.

**4. 80% rule**
Rather than eating until full, people in Blue Zones eat until they feel 80% full. This aligns with the prophetic tradition, which also emphasizes not eating to the point of fullness. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said: "The human does not fill any container that is worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat what will support his back. If this is not possible, then a third for food, a third for drink, and third for his breath" (Tirmidhi, Hadith 2380).

Blue Zone communities also have patterns in when they eat. In the *CNBC* article, "I talked to 263 of the world's longest-living people—their 9 'non-negotiables' for a long, happy life," Buettner describes that in blue zones, people don't eat after the final meal of the day. This may sound familiar, as a common piece of health advice is not to eat after dinner, and there is research to support that. However, there is also research leaning the other way. In the study "The Health Impact of Nighttime Eating: Old and New Perspectives," published in the academic journal *Nutrients*, the authors describe that evening meals of "small, nutrient-dense, low energy foods and/or single macronutrients" and nighttime eating paired with exercise training do not have negative health impacts, and may even have positive impacts. The authors also point out that those with conditions such as Type I diabetes may require nighttime eating in order to maintain their health. There likely is not a cut-and-dry answer for the best times to eat, but fitness, health, and food type likely play a large role in determining what is best for each individual.



**5. Plant Slant**
In Blue Zones, diets revolve around plants, especially, as reported by the *Blue Zones* website, "beans, greens, yams and sweet potatoes, fruits, nuts, and seeds." Additionally, Blue Zone diets are diverse and often vary seasonally. Meat is eaten only a few times per month, and even then, it is only a 3-4 ounce serving, which is roughly the size of a quarter-pound patty. Buettner emphasizes that the folks in Blue Zones enjoy their food and eat plant-based diets because they taste good, not because they are focusing on food restriction. The dietary trends in Blue Zones align with existing health advice, with *Mayo Clinic* advising that fruits and veggies should take up half your plate, and if meat is part of the meal, the serving size should be right around 3 oz. Therefore, when it comes to food, reducing meat, and increasing plant-based meals, is key.

**6. Wine**
Wine is different from the rest of The Power 9 because it is not a commonality across all Blue Zones. Buettner and his team included wine as part of the shared lifestyle habits because, in most of the Blue Zones, it is consumed. However, there is an important outlier, Loma Linda. Loma Linda is a Blue Zone that has a primarily Adventist population, and their faith prohibits the consumption of alcohol. Likewise, wine is not permissible for Muslims, and as demonstrated by Loma Linda, is not a ubiquitous part of Blue Zone communities.

**7. Belong**
In the 5 original Blue Zones, almost everyone interviewed belonged to a faith group. Faith groups provide community, and a sense of belonging, which are both important to a long and healthy life. For those already involved in their faith community, joining smaller groups, such as those oriented specifically towards youth, or parents, may be a way to further increase their sense of belonging.

**8. Loved Ones First**
In Blue Zones, families stay close. Older family members live with, or near, the rest of their family and help raise the children, who are given time and love. But living in a cross-generational home is not the only way to put loved ones first. Eating dinner together, listening to each other share stories of how the day went, and creating family traditions are all ways to prioritize family. And for families who don't live together, there are still a myriad of ways to put loved ones first. Making time for phone calls and emails are great ways to help those who are far away feel close. Additionally, the prioritization of loved ones doesn't have to be limited to relatives, but all those in our community who we feel loved and supported by.

**9. Right Tribe**
Those who live in Blue Zones have social networks, and groups of friends, who not only support them, but also encourage positive, healthy behaviors. This tribe may be a family who gardens and goes on walks together, or a group of friends who take part in community projects together. In our busy lives, it can feel hard to find a tribe, but prioritizing activities we are passionate about, be that through book clubs, volunteer groups, or sports teams, is a great way to find others to connect with.

From an Islamic perspective, many principles of the Blue Zone lifestyle resonate deeply with teachings in the Qur'an and prophetic traditions. The emphasis on community, family, and having a sense of purpose aligns with the Islamic concept of Ummah, where social ties and mutual support are paramount. *"The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you" [Qur'an, 49:10].* The Qur'an and hadiths also highlight the importance of eating in moderation, having a balanced diet, and consuming natural foods.

There are countless quick fixes that claim to lead us to health and happiness—whether it's doing a crossword puzzle a day, eating flax seeds, or adding chia seeds to your smoothie. But, based on the research of Buettner and his team, those who live in Blue Zones have truly cracked the code to longevity, with demographic data to prove it. By incorporating lifestyle habits that align with Islamic principles—such as eating in moderation, regular prayers, and maintaining a sense of purpose through faith and family—Muslims can adopt elements of The Power 9 and move toward a life of health and well-being.

**The emphasis on community, family, and having a sense of purpose aligns with the Islamic concept of *Ummah*, where social ties and mutual support are paramount.**

**TASKEEN KHAN** has a bachelor's degree in integrative biology and a minor in sustainability, energy, and the environment from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is passionate about science education and communication, as well as research.





# Ashwagandha: Traditional Wisdom for Modern Wellness

**By Asma Jarad**

PROPHET MUHAMMAD (ﷺ) EMPHASIZED THE importance of seeking treatment when needed, saying, "God has not sent down a disease without sending down a remedy for it" (Mishkat al-Masabih, 4514). Ashwagandha, with its diverse medicinal uses, aligns with this holistic approach to well-being.

Ashwagandha, a perennial shrub with yellow flowers and red berries, grows in India, North Africa, and the Middle East, where it has been cultivated for over 3,000 years for its medicinal benefits. Often called "Indian Ginseng," it plays a key role in Ayurvedic medicine, the ancient holistic healing system from India. The name "Ashwagandha" comes from the Sanskrit words "ashva," meaning horse, and "gandha," meaning smell, reflecting the belief that the herb bestows the strength, vitality, and endurance of a horse.

Historically, Ashwagandha was used by Indian soldiers to build strength and endurance before battles and by scholars who sought to sharpen their focus during long periods of study, as documented in the ancient Ayurvedic texts *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*. It was also given to the elderly to boost vitality and often prescribed to those recovering from illness to help restore energy and health.

**A study...found that people who took Ashwagandha showed a significant reduction in stress and cortisol levels, emphasizing its effectiveness in managing stress.**



**Whether used to reduce stress, improve cognitive function, or enhance physical strength, Ashwagandha offers a wide range of benefits supported by both traditional wisdom and modern science.**

A study published in the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* found that people who took Ashwagandha showed a significant reduction in stress and cortisol levels, emphasizing its effectiveness in managing stress.

**Benefits of Ashwagandha**

As interest in natural remedies continues in the West, Ashwagandha is gaining popularity due to its wide range of health benefits, which are supported by modern research. For example, a study in *PLOS ONE* demonstrates its potential to improve muscle strength and recovery, making it popular among athletes. Additionally, research in the *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine* highlights its ability to enhance cognitive function and reduce anxiety, reinforcing its role in mental health support.

More benefits include:

- Boosting energy levels and enhancing physical endurance throughout the day
- Improving sleep quality by promoting relaxation and reducing insomnia
- Supporting male fertility by improving sperm quality and reproductive health
- Regulating blood sugar levels, helping to manage symptoms of diabetes

**How to Use Ashwagandha**

Whether you are looking for a quick supplement or you prefer a more traditional approach, Ashwagandha can be consumed in various forms, catering to individual preferences:

- The traditional Ayurvedic method involves mixing Ashwagandha powder with warm milk or water, often sweetened with honey.
- Capsules or tablets offer a convenient, tasteless option.
- Liquid extracts can be added to tea or juice for quick intake.
- Ashwagandha-infused creams and oils are used for muscle relaxation and skin health.



Ashwagandha is widely available in health food stores, pharmacies, and online retailers. When purchasing, consider opting for organic products from reputable brands to ensure you're getting the highest quality.

**When to Avoid Ashwagandha**

Despite its many benefits, Ashwagandha isn't suitable for everyone. It should be avoided in situations such as:

- Pregnancy, as it may cause complications or affect the fetus
- Autoimmune conditions, where it might overstimulate the immune system
- Thyroid problems, as it can potentially alter hormone levels and interfere with treatment

It's also essential to stop using Ashwagandha before surgery, as it can lower blood sugar levels and interfere with anesthesia. While generally well-tolerated, some individuals may experience side effects like digestive upset or drowsiness, and Ashwagandha may interact with medications for diabetes, thyroid disorders, or high blood pressure.

Ashwagandha's journey from ancient Ayurvedic medicine to modern wellness practices speaks to its enduring relevance. Whether used to reduce stress, improve cognitive function, or enhance physical strength, Ashwagandha offers a wide range of benefits supported by both traditional wisdom and modern science. Its ability to adapt to the needs of different individuals, from those seeking mental clarity to those looking for physical rejuvenation, highlights its versatility. While generally safe for most, caution should be exercised by those with specific medical conditions or who are pregnant. When incorporated thoughtfully, Ashwagandha can be a valuable addition to our routine, helping us find balance and vitality in today's hectic world while staying grounded in natural healing traditions.

**ASMA JARAD** is a Chicago-based writer and communications strategist. Her diverse body of work spans health, food trends, and the intersection of Islam and American culture.

# Weathering the Storms of Climate Anxiety

**By Kelly Izdihar Crosby**



WHENEVER WE TURN ON THE TELEVISION OR read the latest news article, it seems like we can't avoid the topic of climate change. Whether it is hurricanes in the Gulf South or wildfires on the West Coast, melting polar ice caps or rising ocean temperatures, climate change has made "once-in-a-lifetime" storms and other weather events an almost common occurrence. It is natural to be concerned about the state of our world's climate, but those concerns can devolve into debilitating emotions of hopelessness, guilt, and anger known as climate anxiety.

Climate anxiety, also known as eco-anxiety or climate change anxiety, are feelings of distress related to the impacts of climate change. These feelings are often centered around the uncertainty and lack of control many feel when faced with the existential threat of climate change. Sarah Lowe, a clinical psychologist and associate professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Yale School of Public Health (YSPH), delves into further detail: according to Lowe, climate anxiety "can manifest as intrusive thoughts or feelings of distress about future disasters or the long-term future of human existence and the world, including one's own descendants."

Climate anxiety can affect people of all ages and backgrounds, but some groups are more vulnerable to its effects. Younger generations are more prone to feelings of anxiety due to their childhood exposure to environmental education and social media, According to the *American Psychological Association (APA)*, "more than two-thirds of adults (68%) [say] that they have at least a little 'eco-anxiety,' defined as any anxiety or worry about climate change and its effects. These effects may be disproportionately having an impact on the country's youngest adults; nearly half of those age 18-34 (47%) say the stress they feel about climate change affects their daily lives." Children, teenagers, and young adults, already dealing with feelings of uncertainty about their futures, can feel heightened unease about a world troubled by climate crises and our responses to them.

But it's not just young people. Parents and caregivers share similar worries and concerns for themselves and the futures of their children and loved ones. As frequent, destructive storms disrupt food and supply chain distribution, many wonder how they will be able to care for their most vulnerable relatives when disaster strikes.

Those who suffer from mental health conditions are also at risk of developing climate anxiety. Managing depression, anxiety disorders, and other mental health issues are challenging. Climate anxiety, with its feelings of perceived lack of control and uncertainty, may exacerbate existing symptoms.

**...nearly half of those age 18-34 (47%) say the stress they feel about climate change affects their daily lives.**





People from marginalized communities, such as those of lower incomes or people of color (POC), experience more climate anxiety due to concerns over economic inequalities and environmental racism. In a paper for the *National Library of Medicine*, it states, "Studies of adults have found evidence of racial disparities related to climatic changes with respect to mortality, respiratory and cardiovascular disease, mental health, and heat-related illness." Communities with more resources tend to recover quicker from climate disasters. Lower-income communities may need to rely on government institutions to provide aid. These communities bear the brunt of environmental pollution due to societal and political neglect. In an article for *Scientific American*, Daniel Cusick and *E&E News* state, "Almost all the most vulnerable communities are located along the Gulf Coast from Mobile, Ala., to Corpus Christi, Texas — a flood- and hurricane-prone region with significant levels of poverty, poor health, and economic and racial inequities. Communities in Memphis, Tenn., Birmingham, Ala., and Chattanooga, Tenn., also scored high on the index." This index, called the *U.S. Climate Vulnerability Index*, measures which communities face the greatest challenges from the effects of climate change across the nation.

Another vulnerable group are environmental activists. Environmental activists and advocates can feel the effects of climate anxiety acutely, as they have made environmental justice their life's passion. Oftentimes, the stress can come because of their commitment to the cause in contrast with the glacial speed of progress on climate change policy. Dealing with corporate and government bureaucracy can be draining, even for the most passionate activist. The pressure to act quickly is intense, as scientists warn that the gap to avoid the worst effects of climate change is narrowing, so environmental activists must be extra careful not to be hampered by climate anxiety.

What can we do when we're faced with the challenges of climate anxiety? Here are some steps you can take to protect your mental health while maintaining the fight for climate justice:

1. **Maintain a healthy media intake**. Just as an overconsumption of junk food is unhealthy, so is doom scrolling on our devices. Don't consume news close to bedtime, as it will make it difficult to sleep. Turn off social media notifications on your phone and computer, and limit online news consumption.

2. **Practice self-care by engaging in activities that nurture your well-being.** These activities can include mindfulness meditations. Instead of envisioning an apocalyptic future, focus on the present and what you can do here and now to make the future better.

3. **Choose your favorite form of exercise or hobby to relax.** Being outdoors in nature is a huge stress reliever, so go for a walk in a park where you can appreciate nature's beauty.



4. **Seek community support.** The isolation of our minds is where we can feel the most lonesome. By being active in our communities, we can mitigate our feelings of loneliness and intact change in society. In an article by Matt Kristoffersen for *YSPH*, Assistant Professor of Public Health (Social & Behavioral Sciences) Sarah Lowe says, "There is definitely more research to be done, and we can't make any claims about causality or the direction of the relationships [but our findings] suggest that engaging in collective action can buffer the effects of climate change anxiety and prevent it from leading to feelings of sadness and hopelessness that would be consistent with major depression."

5. **Join local and national environmental groups** that promote causes you are passionate about, such as wildlife preservation, sustainable agriculture, waste reduction, or recycling. You can even start small and join a local clean-up crew.

6. **Seek out the help of mental health professionals** if the feelings of hopelessness and depression begin to interfere with daily life. While climate anxiety is not an official anxiety disorder, therapists can always help you navigate the storms of these troubled times. Ⓜ

**KELLY IZDIHAR CROSBY** is a freelance writer and artist based in Atlanta, GA.


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# Make Your Breathwork for You

**By Ali Othman, NSCA-CPT®**



BREATHING IS ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL aspects of life, but we don't learn how to perform the activity. Yet we couldn't survive without it. Since we don't learn how to breathe, and don't put conscious effort towards breathing, we often overlook its significant impact on our overall wellbeing. The reality is, that the way we breathe has a profound impact on our physical and emotional wellbeing.

Normal breathing is controlled by the involuntary nervous system and doesn't require thought or conscious effort. Muscles surrounding the lungs contract and relax, allowing them to pull in, and push out air. Rather than controlling these movements ourselves, our internal systems control the rate of breath based on the body's need for oxygen. The body uses breathing as a regulatory mechanism, and you can control your breathing to normalize an emotional state, or to charge yourself up for a sporting event.

Breathwork is the act of regulating your physical and emotional state by controlling your breath, and it's been used for centuries by many cultures in their traditional healings. Controlling breath rate and depth can influence both the physiological and emotional state. It can potentially help reduce stress, lower blood pressure, improve sleep, increase energy, and improve mental clarity; and here are some of the common techniques:

**Diaphragmatic Breathing** — Also known as belly breathing, this technique helps strengthen the diaphragm by using the lungs at a higher-than-normal capacity. You can perform diaphragmatic breathing lying down or sitting in a chair, whichever is more comfortable.

1. Lie on your back on a flat surface with your knees bent and feet planted on the floor, or sit in a chair in a comfortable and relaxed position with good posture.



**Controlling breath rate and depth can influence both the physiological and emotional state. It can potentially help reduce stress, lower blood pressure, improve sleep, increase energy, and improve mental clarity...**

2. Place one hand on your stomach just below the ribs, so you can feel your stomach rise and fall as you breathe. Place the other on your upper chest, where it should remain as motionless as possible.
3. Inhale slowly through your nose. You will feel your stomach rising to allow air into your lungs.
4. Purse your lips and exhale fully through your mouth by tightening your stomach muscles to push the air out of your lungs. You will feel your stomach get smaller as the air leaves your lungs.
5. Repeat the cycle for 10 minutes, 3-4 times a day to maximize the benefits.



Diaphragmatic breathing can help relax a person in a stressful situation, increase blood oxygenation, reduce blood pressure and heart rate, and improve lung efficiency. It is especially helpful for those with chronic conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

**Box Breathing** — Also known as square breathing, box breathing is a technique used to heighten performance and improve concentration. Perform box breathing, before, during, or after stressful situations to feel its benefits. It can be helpful to visualize a box with 4 sides of equal length, each side representing a phase of breathing.

1. Inhale through your nose for four seconds.
2. Hold your breath, with full lungs for four seconds.
3. Exhale through your mouth for four seconds.
4. Hold your breath, with empty lungs for four seconds.
5. Repeat the cycle for 5 minutes and perform as often as needed.

Box breathing is a favorite among professionals in high-stress environments such as athletes, executives, and even the Navy SEALS for its renowned ability to produce a sense of calm and focus, bring mental clarity, reduce stress, and enhance performance.

**Pursed Lip Breathing** — This technique is an effective way to force your airways to stay open longer, improving oxygen exchange and assisting those who experience shortness of breath. Imagine you are blowing out birthday candles, or preparing to whistle, and maintain this mouth position during the exhale phase.

1. Inhale through your nose for two seconds, it doesn't need to be a full breath.
2. Purse, or pucker your lips as if you are going to whistle.
3. Exhale through your pursed lips for four seconds; don't force the air out.
4. Repeat the cycle for 10 minutes, 3-4 times a day to maximize the benefits.

Pursed lip breathing is helpful for anyone looking to improve respiratory health, especially those with chronic respiratory conditions. It is one of the simplest ways to slow breathing while getting more oxygen into the lungs and is so versatile that it can be performed at rest, or during physical activity.

**Alternate Nostril Breathing** — Also known by its yogic name *nadi shodhana*, this technique is said to be an effective tool to lower heart rate and blood pressure. Try to keep your breath smooth and continuous without forcing air in or out, and use one hand to control both nostrils.



1. Close your right nostril with your thumb and inhale deeply and slowly through your left nostril.
2. Close your left nostril with your ring finger, release your right nostril, and exhale slowly through your right nostril.
3. Inhale deeply through your right nostril.
4. Close your right nostril with your thumb, release your left nostril, and exhale slowly through your left nostril.
5. Repeat the cycle for 5 minutes and perform in the mornings to get focused for the day ahead.

**Imagine a world where each breath brings you closer to a healthier, more relaxed, and better-focused version of yourself.**



Alternate nostril breathing is a profound technique that is designed to harmonize left and right brain activity to reduce stress, improve respiratory function, and enhance mental clarity. Sit in a comfortable position while performing, and concentrate on the breathing cycle.

**4-7-8 Breathing** - This technique is an effective method to promote relaxation, fall asleep faster, reduce stress, and over time can help manage your emotional response to stressful stimuli. Before starting 4-7-8-Breathing, find a quiet place where you can sit up straight or lie comfortably on your back.

1. Position your tongue so that the tip touches the back of your upper front teeth, and maintain this tongue position throughout the breathing cycle.
2. Exhale completely, through your mouth, allowing the air to woosh around your tongue and out of your mouth.
3. Close your mouth, inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
4. Hold your breath for a count of 7.
5. Exhale completely, through your mouth for a count of 8.
6. Repeat the cycle 3-5 times and perform twice a day, or as needed.

4-7-8 Breathing is an effective way of inducing feelings of deep relaxation and can be used as a method of moderating the fight-or-flight response. Fight-or-flight is the body's mechanism for responding to a perceived threat, and with practice, 4-7-8 breathing can support this physiological reaction.

Breathwork techniques are safe and easy to perform, but certain individuals may be at a higher risk for adverse situations such as shortness of breath or lightheadedness. People with severe respiratory conditions like Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or asthma, those with cardiovascular issues like heart disease or hypertension, people who recently underwent surgery involving the chest or abdomen, pregnant women, or those with a history of fainting are prime candidates to use breathwork to help manage these conditions, but should consult a healthcare professional before adding breathwork to their routine.

Imagine a world where each breath brings you closer to a healthier, more relaxed, and better-focused version of yourself. Incorporating these breathwork techniques into your daily activities can lead to profound changes in your physical and emotional health. Inhale deeply, exhale completely and harness the power of breathwork to enhance your ability to manage stress, exercise better control over physiological responses, and maintain your emotional equilibrium.



**ALI OTHMAN** is an NSCA-certified personal trainer with over fifteen years of experience in the health and wellness industry. He is passionate about giving people the tools to live a healthier and better-informed tomorrow.

# Tradition of Dastarkhawn: A Culinary Tapestry of Eating Together

**By Tayyaba Syed**



"DASTARKHAWN" IS A PERSIAN AND TURKISH term, meaning tablecloth or a big ceremonial dining spread that was laid out on the floor meticulously. It was so highly regarded that it could be used to place serving utensils on. Historically, the dastarkhawn originated in the palaces of Iran and was brought to India by the Turks and Mughals, who ate in a rich and extravagant manner. Their dining etiquette was a reflection of their social status. Food is served on the dastarkhawn, which is placed on the floor, ground or over a low table known as a 'thakat' or 'chawki.'

Zeenat Rizvi of Riverview, Florida, cannot help but smile reminiscing over her childhood when asked about the dastarkhawn. Many core memories unlock as she remembers the joy of eating around a dastarkhawn. She grew up in the small north Indian town of Barabanki, twenty miles outside of the state's famous capital city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh (Awadh region).

"The *ronak* (liveliness) around a dastarkhawn growing up was unlike anything else," recalls Rizvi, who holds a Master's in Urdu Literature and finds great contentment serving food and hosting guests as her love language. "There was a place for everyone, and you felt special sitting together and enjoying a delicious, fresh meal with one another."

Breakfast, lunch, dinner were all served around the dastarkhawn in Rizvi's family home. Her village foods included different types of soups, lentils, rice dishes, cutlets, flatbreads made with lots of *ghee* and flour mixed with milk like *roghni tikkiya* or the deep-fried warqi *parata* or the flaky sweet-tasting *sheermal*, creamed yogurts, soft biscuits, spiced chutneys, veggie curries, and potato patties to name a few.

Some popular dishes made from lentils, pulses, and beans, are *maash ki daal*, an ivory-white split urad daal, *shahi daal*, *arhar ki daal* or *toor daal* made from split pigeon peas, and *kyunti daal*, which is a mix of urad and toor cooked in fresh onion and ghee with garlic, ginger, salt, and chili powder. A speciality was to serve daal inside a flatbread cooked on an inverted pan called the *ultay taway ka parata*. Chutneys like *kachumber* made with raw onion, vinegar or lemon juice (depending on the season), salt and crushed red pepper, *aam ki chutney* (from green raw mangoes), or *naw rathan ki chutney* containing nine different spices may be found on the dastarkhawn.

Lucknow is renowned for its rich cultures and traditions and is celebrated for its culinary heritage. It was the seat of power for the Nawabs in the 18th and 19th centuries, who really valued and honored eating around a dastarkhawn with at least 12 dishes served on it. There was a certain order, manner and grace with how they ate food. Their chefs, also known as *bawarchis* or *rakabdars*, developed complex cuisine that was refined for the Nawabs with finesse and slow-cooking methods.

One legendary dish that came from that era is the melt-in-your-mouth Galawati Kebab. When Nawab Wajid Ali Shah grew old and lost most of his teeth, his royal chef (*khansama*) created this special kebab that held all the rich flavors without the need to chew. Some say the authentic kebab had over 150 spices, packing it with flavor but also to aid with digestion. The Galawati Kebab therefore feels light despite its richness.

This delicacy along with meat stews like beef *nihari* and goat *korma*, a variety of *pulaos*, and other non-vegetarian *saalans* such as gosht made with potato (*aloo*), bottle gourd (*loki*), or taro root (*arvi*) were reserved for special occasions or for guests on Rizvi's family's dastarkhawn.

"We hosted guests often," shares Rizvi, mother of three adult children and seven grandchildren. "We would stage everything on our beautiful yellow dastarkhawn, which was made of a thicker cloth and covered with red printed floral work and some supplications. The daily use one was made from cotton to make it easier for washing, while the fancy one with intricate embroidery was saved for guests. We had one special dastarkhawn inherited from my paternal grandmother that we all loved."

The *pulaos* are prepared with a variety of spices but are generally less spicy than the popular *biryani* rice. The meat, either chicken or lamb, is boiled with yogurt, onion, ginger, garlic, and some garam masala, creating a hearty broth called *yakhni*. This broth is layered with rice and steamed until softened. *Pulaos* are typically served for simpler meals at home, while biryani is reserved for festive occasions. The spiciness and additional complementary flavors come from the accompanying *raita*, and some kewra water may also be added for aroma.

Aside from delicious foods, their dastarkhawn was adorned with copper vessels instead of glasses and a clay water jug called a *surahi* with a wide base and narrow neck. The *surahi* was placed at the corner of the dastarkhawn and kept the water cold and fresh-tasting.
A pink tea called Gulabi Chai was also served on the dastarkhawn. This tea is known as noon chai or Kashmiri chai and is made with gunpowder tea, milk and baking soda. The tea compliments desserts like Shahi Tukray, crisp fried bread slices soaked in sugar syrup and milk, *sheeranay* made with sweetened potato or eggs, *rasawal*, which is prepared with sugar cane juice, rice and ricotta cheese, or kheers and halwas garnished with thin, tiny pieces of edible silver foil to symbolize the royalty and wealth of the Nawabs.



To uphold Islamic teachings of washing the hands before and after the meal, guests would remain seated around the dastarkhawn while a water pot (*chilamchi*) was brought to them for washing. It was a sign of respect, and Rizvi appreciated this daily tradition.

In southern India, the dastarkhawn is readily used as well. Originally from Hyderabad, India, Sultana Quadri was raised in a town called Amravati in the state of Maharashtra. She and her family would visit her maternal and paternal relatives at least twice a year in Hyderabad.

"I absolutely loved sitting around the dastarkhawn with all my family at my grandmother's house," states Quadri, who is a mother of four grown children and works as an elementary teacher in Illinois. "We had up to three generations sharing a meal together, but in actuality, we were creating such close and unforgettable bonds and lifelong memories." She remembers the dastarkhawn there to be very festive and a rich red in color. Hot, steaming dishes like *kidchi keema*, *papad*, *achaar*, omelets, *haleem*, *khatti daal*, *mirchi ka saalan*, meat cutlets, kebabs, *marag*, *biryani*, meatballs, tomato *katt*, *talawa gosth* (fried meat) were placed on it and served family style, not like a "buffet."

This form of communal eating is highly encouraged in Islam and a sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), who said, "Eat together, and do not eat separately for the blessing is in being together" (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith 3287). We see this especially in our mosques during the holy month of Ramadan. A simple form of a dastarkhawn is rolled out in rows on the ground for the evening iftar meal, where people of all stature sit side-by-side, breaking their fast together. Quadri makes sure to carry on the dastarkhawn tradition whenever her grandchildren, ranging from age 5 to age 20, come to visit her.

"It makes me so happy to see them all sitting together and enjoying each other's company and grandma's cooking," Quadri says. "It takes me back to my own childhood and all the great times we had together around the dastarkhawn."

Nigora Aminova, from Khujand, Tajikistan, mother of two and grandmother of two, shares how having a dastarkhawn is "mandatory" in her culture and an important way to honor one's guests. It can be for daily use or brought out on special holidays like Eid and Navruz, which is typically celebrated on March 21st to welcome the spring season. Loved ones get together and prepare *sumalak* from flour, wheat, sugar and boiling water. It can take up to 24 hours to cook and requires group participation. Mostly in southern Tajikistan but in some northern parts as well, they have to display dishes or food items on the dastarkhawn that start with the letter seen (س) and sheen (ش), seven of each to be exact.

"Every weekend felt like a holiday to us, because we would always have family over," says Aminova. "We would fill the entire dastarkhawn with all types of traditional foods like baked *sambusa* for appetizers, *osh pilav* as the main dish layered with meat, rice and carrots, and *chak chak* made with fried dough and honey, which is usually served with *choy* (tea). My mom would make fresh bread in the tandoor and there would be an assortment of fresh foods, salads, and fruits. You could have the same set up indoors or outdoors like picnic-style."

In the Tajikistani tradition, the dastarkhawn is handmade from luxurious fabrics like velvet and silk with gold embroidery added onto it. Another simpler fabric is sewn under it to preserve the original material. It can be in the shape of a full-sized tablecloth or a table runner. There are also some dastarkhawns that can be placed directly onto a dining table to uphold the tradition in modern homes. Clear plastic with hanging tassels on the edges is placed on top for easy clean up. Aminova's mother makes beautiful dastarkhawns by hand, which can take up to a month to craft.

"Anything to honor and uphold tradition," Aminova adds. In Somalia, the tradition is not so different. According to Rukia Sheikh-Mohamed, most households do not use a dining table. Instead, they use a mat called dirin, similar to the concept of a dastarkhawn, which is handmade by the mothers of the family.

"All foods, meals, teas and coffee are served on it," says Sheikh-Mohamed, who is a mother of one from Columbia Heights, Minnesota, and works as an operations developer. "In some homes, instead of a formal living and dining area, families meet in the fadhiga to sit, gather, or eat together. When I think back to sitting around the dirin at my grandmother's, all I remember is laughter and joy as our elders shared their stories with us. Some of my fondest memories are sitting and eating around it."

Today, many households around the world still eat around a dastarkhawn or a variation of it, making the atmosphere more intimate and less formal. Meal time is a special time, and the dastarkhawn is a symbol of eating together. It brings together families and communities, where food is shared and dishes are passed around, everyone looking to serve one another. In this way, each person has a place and a role around the dastarkhawn.

**TAYYABA SYED** is a multiple award-winning author, journalist, and Islamic studies teacher. She conducts literary and faith-based presentations for all ages, serves on the board of directors for Rabata, and is an elected member of her local school district's board of education in Illinois, where she lives with her husband and three children. Learn more at www.tayyabasyed.com.



Inspired by the opulent feasts of the Nawabs, this *dastarkhawn* offers a delicious spread of North Indian flavors. These ten recipes highlight a blend of spices and techniques, showcasing the essence of the region's cuisine. Each dish on the table provides a flavorful experience, perfect for sharing and enjoying with family and friends.



# Aloo Tikki with Imli Chutney

By Nikhat Jafri

Servings: 10 | Time: 1 hour 15 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

- 5 medium potatoes
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 green chilies, thinly sliced
- ½ bunch of cilantro, chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon roasted cumin powder
- 1 teaspoon anardana (dried pomegranate seeds)
- ⅔ teaspoon semolina, corn flour, or bread crumbs
- Oil for frying

**For Imli (Tamarind) Chutney:**

- ⅔ cup tamarind
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon roasted cumin powder
- ½ teaspoon ginger powder
- Pinch of salt
- Pinch of chili powder

## DIRECTIONS

1. Wash potatoes and place them in a large pot. Fill the pot with enough water to cover the potatoes and boil for about 30 minutes. Check for tenderness with a fork; if they are not tender, cook for an additional 10 minutes.
2. Turn off the heat and carefully remove the potatoes. Peel the skin while they are still warm. Use a flat masher to mash the potatoes until smooth.
3. On a cutting board, chop the onion, green chilies, and cilantro. Mix these into the mashed potatoes. Add salt, roasted cumin powder, dried pomegranate seeds, and semolina (or corn flour or bread crumbs). Mix thoroughly until combined.
4. With moistened palms (water or oil), shape the mixture into patties.
5. Heat oil in a skillet over low heat. Lay out the patties in the pan, ensuring they do not touch. Fry the patties until golden brown on one side. Flip and fry until the other side is golden brown. Remove and place on a platter.
6. In a small pot, boil the tamarind in water. Strain through a sieve to remove seeds and fibers, returning the pulp to the pot. Add sugar, roasted cumin powder, ginger powder, salt, and chili powder. Cook for 10-15 minutes until the mixture thickens to a ketchup-like consistency.
7. Serve the Aloo Tikki with Imli Chutney, and any other sauce of your choice. Ⓜ



# Shami Kebabs

By Nikhat Jafri

Servings: 24 | Time: 1 hour 30 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

**For the meat mixture:**

- 2 lbs halal boneless beef cut into cubes
- 4 cups of water
- 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon coriander powder
- 2 teaspoons of turmeric powder
- 2 tablespoons ginger/garlic paste
- 1 tablespoon fennel seeds
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- 2 onions quartered
- 2 cups of chana daal (split chickpeas)
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon garam masala

**For the filling:**

- 1 large onion, chopped
- 5 green chilies, chopped
- 2-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 bunch of fresh cilantro chopped
- ½ teaspoon salt
- juice of 1 lemon

**For binding and frying:**

- 2 eggs
- oil

## DIRECTIONS

1. Wash the halal beef thoroughly until the water runs clear.
2. In a large pot, add the halal beef cubes and pour in 4 cups of water.
3. Add the cumin seeds, coriander powder, turmeric powder, ginger/garlic paste, fennel seeds, chili powder, onions, chana daal, garam masala, and salt.
4. Cook the mixture on medium heat for about 30 minutes until the meat is tender and the mixture is thick, but not too dry. If needed, add more water and cook for an additional 5 minutes on low heat.
5. Once the meat is tender, use a handheld mixer to grind the mixture into a homogenous mixture.
6. Mix in 2 eggs thoroughly to bind the batter.
7. On a cutting board, chop the onion, green chilies, ginger, and cilantro. Transfer them to a bowl.
8. Add ½ teaspoon of salt and squeeze in the juice of 1 lemon. Mix everything well.
9. Wet your palms with water and take a fistful of the meat batter. Flatten it into a small cup shape in your hand. Place ½ a spoonful of the chopped filling inside the cup, then close and gently flatten it into a patty, making sure there are no creases where the filling can escape.
10. Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat to shallow fry the kebabs.
11. Place the kebabs in the skillet, but do not overcrowd the pan. Turn them gently with a flat spatula until both sides are golden brown.
12. Remove the fried kebabs and place them on a plate lined with paper towels to absorb the excess oil.
13. Enjoy the Shami Kebabs with parathas.

*Note: You can also freeze them before frying them to save them for another day.* Ⓜ



# Choqander Ka Raita

By Zainab Razavi /@bismillahbros

Servings: 4–6 | Time: 20 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

**For the Yogurt (Raita):**

1½ cups whole milk yogurt
3 tablespoons sour cream
½ cup water (adjust according to preference)
1 small beetroot (boiled, skin removed, and shredded)
1 Persian cucumber, shredded
½ purple onion, shredded

**Spices:**

½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon chaat masala
¼ teaspoon black pepper
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon dried mint leaves
½ small green chili, de-seeded and finely chopped

**Baghaar (Tempering):**

2 tablespoons oil
¼ teaspoon cumin seeds
½ teaspoon mustard seeds
1 teaspoon urad daal
2 garlic cloves, sliced
4-5 curry leaves

## DIRECTIONS

1. In a mixing bowl, combine the shredded beetroot, cucumber, onions, yogurt, sour cream, and water. Stir until well mixed.
2. Add the salt, chaat masala, black pepper, garlic powder, dried mint leaves, and green chilies to the yogurt mixture. Stir well to combine all the flavors.
3. For the baghaar, heat the oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the cumin seeds, mustard seeds, urad daal, sliced garlic, and curry leaves. Sauté until everything turns golden brown and starts to crackle.
4. Remove the baghaar from heat and allow it to cool slightly. Once cooled, drizzle the tempered oil and spices over the yogurt mixture.
5. Garnish with fresh cilantro and serve immediately! Ⓜ



# Yakhni Pulao

By Iffat Zaidi

Servings: 6–8 | Time: 1 hour 30 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

3½ cups long-grain basmati rice
2 lbs halal mutton
3 medium onions, sliced
½ cup oil
2 tablespoons yogurt
1 tablespoon ginger-garlic paste
5-6 garlic cloves
2-inch piece of ginger
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cumin seeds,
4-5 cloves
4-5 green cardamoms
1 black cardamom
1 cinnamon stick
5-6 black peppercorns
1 tablespoon fennel seeds
2-3 bay leaves
1 tablespoon whole coriander seeds
1 small piece of mace
5 cups water
1 tablespoon kewra water (pandanus water)
Fried onions (for garnish)

## DIRECTIONS

1. Soak 3½ cups of basmati rice for 30 minutes.
2. In a pressure cooker, add the mutton, 5 cups of water, whole spices, whole ginger, garlic, and 1 onion. Bring to a boil and cook for 4-5 whistles, approximately 15-20 minutes. After cooking, strain the broth, discarding the onion, whole spices, garlic, and ginger, and set the meat and broth aside.
3. In a separate pot, heat the oil and fry the sliced onions until golden brown. Set some aside for garnish. In the same pot, add the ginger-garlic paste and sauté for a minute. Add the boiled meat and sauté briefly.
4. Pour in the reserved broth, adding water if needed, and bring to a boil.
5. Once boiling, add the soaked rice, ensuring the water level is about 1 inch above the rice. Add the salt.
6. Cook on high heat until the water evaporates. Then reduce the heat and simmer for an additional 5-6 minutes.
7. Drizzle with some kewra water, garnish with the remaining fried onions, cover, and simmer for another 10-12 minutes.
8. Let it rest for 10 minutes, then fluff and serve hot with raita.

# Raita

Servings: 6–8 | Time: 10 minutes

## INGREDIENTS:

2 cups yogurt
½ teaspoon cumin powder
1 green chili finely chopped
1 small cucumber finely chopped
1 small onion finely chopped
1 small tomato finely chopped
1 tablespoon fresh cilantro
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon red chili powder
Water as needed

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a bowl, whisk the yogurt until smooth and creamy. Add a little water depending on your preferred consistency.
2. Stir in the cumin, salt, and red chili powder.
3. Add the cucumber, onion, tomato, green chili, and fresh cilantro. Mix everything well.
4. Serve chilled with Yakhni Pulao.



# Maash Ki Daal

By Aasia Farooqi

Servings: 4–6 | Time: 40 minutes (soaking time 2-3 hours)

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup split white urad dal
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 inch piece of ginger, finely chopped
- 1 inch piece of ginger, julienned (for garnish)
- ⅛ teaspoon asafetida
- 2 dried red chilies
- ⅓ cup ghee or oil
- ½ bunch cilantro leaves, chopped
- 4 green chilies, finely chopped
- juice of ½ a lemon

## DIRECTIONS

1. Wash and soak the dal for 2-3 hours. After soaking, boil the dal in 2 cups of water with chopped ginger and salt. Once it boils, skim off the foam and cook on a low flame for 15 minutes. Ensure the dal soften while retaining their shape, not becoming mushy.
2. Heat oil or ghee, add dried chilies, asafetida, and onions. Fry on medium heat until the onions turn golden brown.
3. Add the tempered spices to the dal, and gently mix in the lemon juice. Garnish with julienned ginger and cilantro.
4. Simmer the dish on low flame for 2-3 minutes and serve hot. Ⓜ



# Rumali Roti

By Zehra Jafri

Servings: 8–10 | Time: 30 minutes, plus 1 hour rest time

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup water, adjust as needed
- Extra flour for rolling

## DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, mix the all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, and salt.
2. Gradually add water, little by little, while kneading the mixture into a soft, pliable dough. The dough should be smooth and elastic.
3. Cover the dough with a damp cloth and let it rest for about 1 hour. This resting time helps in gluten development, making the roti more flexible.
4. After resting, divide the dough into small balls.
5. On a lightly floured surface, take one ball and roll it out as thinly as possible into a circle, using extra flour to prevent sticking.
6. Heat a large kadhai (wok) upside down over medium-high heat. To prepare the wok, sprinkle some salted water over the surface to create steam and help cook the roti.
7. Place the rolled-out roti onto the hot kadhai and cook for around 10 – 15 seconds until light brown spots appear on the bottom.
8. Flip the roti using a spatula and cook for a few more seconds until both sides have light golden spots.
9. Remove the roti and place it in a container lined with a clean cloth to keep it warm and soft. Repeat the process for the remaining dough balls.
10. Serve hot with your favorite curries or side dishes, adding ghee or butter on top for extra flavor. (M)



# Nargisi Koftay

## By Aasia Farooqi

Servings: 8 | Time: 1 hour

### INGREDIENTS

**For the Koftay:**

¼ cup chana dal (split gram)
1 tablespoon poppy seeds
2 teaspoons coriander seeds
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 lb halal mincemeat (mutton, chicken, or beef)
½ cup cilantro, chopped
4-5 green chilies, chopped
1 medium-sized onion, chopped
1 teaspoon red chili powder
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
1 teaspoon coriander powder
1 teaspoon cumin powder
½ teaspoon garam masala
½ teaspoon turmeric powder
1 teaspoon ginger paste
1 teaspoon garlic paste
2 tablespoons ghee
1 teaspoon salt
6 boiled eggs, peeled (whole or cut in half)

**For the Curry:**

⅓ cup oil
2 bay leaves
4 green cardamom pods, crushed
4-5 cloves, crushed
1 teaspoon ginger paste
1 teaspoon garlic paste
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon red chili powder
1 teaspoon Kashmiri chili powder
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
½ teaspoon garam masala
1 tablespoon coriander powder
1 teaspoon cumin powder
¼ cup fried onion
½ cup yogurt

### DIRECTIONS

1. In a pan, roast the chana dal, poppy seeds, coriander seeds, and cumin seeds until golden brown. Let them cool, then grind into a fine powder.
2. In a food processor, combine the mincemeat, chopped cilantro, green chilies, onion, and all spices (red chili powder, crushed red pepper, coriander powder, cumin powder, garam masala, turmeric powder), ginger paste, garlic paste, ghee, and salt. Blend until smooth.
3. Take the boiled eggs (whole or halved) and wrap the spiced mincemeat mixture around them to form koftay.
4. In a deep frying pan, heat oil over medium heat. Fry the koftay until golden brown on all sides. Remove and set aside.
5. In the same oil, add bay leaves, crushed cardamom, and crushed cloves. Sauté briefly until aromatic. Add ginger-garlic pastes, salt, red chili powders, garam masala, coriander powder, and cumin powder. Fry the spices for a few minutes, adding a little water to prevent burning.
6. Place the fried koftay into the curry sauce and simmer for about 5 minutes. Then, add ¼ cup water and let it cook for another 5 minutes.
7. Blend the fried onions and yogurt together, then add this mixture to the curry. Cover and cook for another 10 minutes on low to medium heat until the sauce thickens and flavors meld together.
8. Garnish with cilantro and serve hot with naan or rice. (M)



# Shahi Tukray

By Nikhat Jafri

Servings: 4–6 | Time: 55 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

10 10 pieces of sliced bread
Oil (for frying)
1 cup sugar
2-3 cups water
½ gallon milk
1 tsp saffron
Crushed pistachios and slivered almonds (for garnish)

## DIRECTIONS

1. Cut the edges off of the bread.
2. Heat oil in a skillet and fry each bread slice until light brown. Set aside.
3. In a pot, combine the sugar and water.
4. Cook on medium heat until the syrup becomes slightly sticky.
5. Pour the sugar syrup into a shallow pan and immerse the fried bread slices in it, laying them in a single layer.
6. In a separate pot, cook ½ gallon of milk over medium heat, stirring continuously for about 30 minutes until it thickens slightly.
7. Add 1 teaspoon of saffron and mix well.
8. Pour the thickened milk over the syrup-soaked bread slices, ensuring each piece is well-covered.
9. Sprinkle crushed pistachios and slivered almonds over each piece.
10. Let the Shahi Tukray rest for a few minutes, allowing the flavors to meld, then serve.

*Notes:*
*For thicker milk, add 1 cup of crumbled khoya (dried milk solid) to the milk during cooking. Stir continuously until it melts and the mixture thickens.* Ⓜ



# Chana Halwa

By Kazma Zaidi

Servings: 12 | Time: 30-40 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup chana dal (gram flour)
- ½ cup ghee
- ¼ teaspoon cardamom powder
- ½ cup sugar
- 1½ cups milk
- ½ cup water
- 1 teaspoon coconut powder (for garnish)
- ¼ cup chopped almonds and pistachios (for garnish)

## DIRECTIONS

1. Soak the chana dal in a bowl with water overnight.
2. Heat ghee in a heavy-bottomed pan over medium heat.
3. Add the chana, stirring continuously, until golden brown and fragrant for around 8-10 minutes.
4. In a separate pot, bring milk and water to a boil, then add sugar and stir until dissolved.
5. Gradually pour the liquid mixture into the roasted chana while stirring continuously to avoid lumps.
6. Cook on low heat for 15-20 minutes until thickened and the ghee separates.
7. Stir in cardamom powder and cook for an additional 5 minutes.
8. Remove from heat, garnish with chopped nuts and/or coconut powder, and serve warm. For square pieces, transfer the halwa to a flat tray, pat it down with a spoon while it's still warm, and use a knife to slice it into squares. Ⓜ



# Gulabi Chai

By Zehra Jafri

Servings: 4 | Time: 40 minutes

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups water
- 4 teaspoons Kashmiri green tea leaves
- 2 cups whole milk
- 3 cardamom pods, crushed
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 star anise
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon crushed pistachios and almonds (for garnish)
- ¼ teaspoon rosewater
- ½ cup of ice

## DIRECTIONS

1. In a saucepan, bring 2 cups of water to a boil. Add the Kashmiri green tea leaves and spices.
2. Let it simmer on low heat for about 15 minutes, allowing the tea to release its flavor and color.
3. Add the baking soda and stir for 10 minutes. The tea will turn into a reddish-brown color.
4. Add ½ cup of ice and continue to whisk or stir the tea for another 5 minutes. This process helps deepen the color and create a frothy texture.
5. In a separate pan, bring the milk to a boil. Let it simmer for about 5 minutes.
6. Slowly strain the brewed tea into the milk while stirring. Add the salt and sugar. Let the mixture simmer for another 5-10 minutes until you get a beautiful pink color and the desired flavor.
7. Pour the Gulabi chai into cups, garnish with crushed pistachios and almonds, and add a drop of rosewater for a fragrant touch.

# Pioneering Food Diversity: How IFANCA and Texas A&M University are Leading the Way

**By Dr. Mian N. Riaz**




*The First Food Diversity Award was presented to Dr. Chaudry at Texas A&M University — 2019*

THE ISLAMIC FOOD AND NUTRITION COUNCIL OF America (IFANCA) leads the promotion of halal food practices, ensuring food diversity and quality. In 2016, IFANCA partnered with Texas A&M University, establishing The Food Diversity Innovation Program (FDIP) within the Department of Food Science and Technology to foster education and research in ethnic and faith-based foods. Through various endowments, professorships, scholarships, and symposiums, the IFANCA program at Texas A&M University advances food diversity, prepares students for a multicultural food industry, and supports innovative research.

## IFANCA Endowment

In 2016, IFANCA provided funding to establish an endowment at Texas A&M University's Department of Food Science and Technology. This endowment aims to foster a comprehensive understanding of diverse food systems among students, researchers, and industry professionals, promoting an inclusive and knowledgeable approach to food science and nutrition. The endowment supports the development of specialized programs addressing unique aspects of ethnic and faith-based foods, offering students a well-rounded education that incorporates cultural, religious, and regional diversity in global food systems.

A key component of the IFANCA endowment includes an undergraduate seminar course dedicated to ethnic and religious foods. Offered every spring and fall semester, this course engages over 1,000 students each semester, introducing them to various food traditions and practices worldwide, including religious dietary laws, the cultural importance of traditional foods, and the challenges in producing and marketing ethnic foods. Additionally, the endowment supports lab-based exploration, providing practical experience in analyzing and processing ethnic and faith-based foods, equipping students with the skills needed to address the unique challenges of a multicultural food landscape. Through these initiatives, the IFANCA endowment promotes inclusivity and innovation in food science, preparing students to meet the evolving demands of a global market.



*IFANCA endowment signing ceremony with the Vice Chancellor and Dean for Agriculture and Life Sciences, Texas A&M University — 2016*

### Non-Endowed Gift Agreement

The Non-Endowed Gift Agreement 2020 between the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) and the Texas A&M Foundation established the Food Science and Technology Excellence Fund with an initial donation of $100,000. This fund is dedicated to advancing high-impact learning experiences, student activities, seminar series, and research programs within the Department of Food Science and Technology. The agreement details the fund's purpose, contribution schedule and format, donor recognition, and fund administration, ensuring that the use of funds aligns with the donor's intentions and benefits the university effectively. This partnership is designed to enhance educational and research opportunities, driving progress in food science and technology.

### IFANCA Professorship in Food Diversity

The establishment of the IFANCA Professorship in Food Diversity at Texas A&M University, held by Dr. Mian Riaz from December 1, 2022, to November 30, 2027, marks a significant milestone in advancing food diversity studies. This prestigious position leverages Dr. Riaz's expertise in ethnic and faith-based foods, acknowledging his exceptional contributions to food science through research, publications, and education. Dr. Riaz's work spans developing Halal and Kosher certification processes, studying traditional and ethnic foods, and advocating for food diversity in academic and industry settings, thereby enhancing the educational and research capabilities of the Department of Food Science and Technology.

## Food Diversity Certificate Program

The Food Diversity Certificate Program at Texas A&M University offers a meticulously designed 15-hour curriculum to provide students with an in-depth understanding

of religious and ethnic foods, food processing techniques, quality control measures, and global certification standards. Covering topics such as Halal and Kosher foods, food processing technologies, quality assurance, and global certifications, the program prepares students for dynamic careers in the food industry. Incorporating high-impact learning modules, research activities, and experiential learning opportunities, the program ensures students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills necessary to excel in a diverse and evolving food industry.

## IFANCA Scholarships and Fellowships

Understanding the vital role of supporting talented students committed to promoting food diversity and sustainability, the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) provides a comprehensive range of scholarships and fellowships. Established in 2024, the IFANCA Endowed Dean's Excellence Scholarship offers significant financial aid to three undergraduate students in the Department of Food Science and Technology at Texas A&M University. Since 2018, the IFANCA Graduate Fellowships have been advancing graduate research, initially supporting three students, with three more added in 2023. Additionally, the IFANCA Undergraduate Endowed Scholarships provide financial support to promising undergraduates, enabling them to focus on their studies and make meaningful contributions to the field of food science.

### IFANCA-FDIP Grants

The IFANCA-FDIP (Food Diversity Innovation Program) has significantly advanced food science through the establishment of the Food Science and Technology Excellence Fund. This fund fosters high-impact learning experiences and supports both graduate and undergraduate activities within the Department of Food Science and Technology at Texas A&M University. It also underwrites seminar series and research programs, enhancing



*IFANCA scholarship endowment signing ceremony with the Vice Chancellor and Dean for Agriculture and Life Sciences, Texas A&M University — 2024*

the academic and research infrastructure of the department. Importantly, it covers the salaries of scientists and staff essential to these initiatives.

In 2024, the IFANCA-FDIP awarded grants of $20,000 each to several researchers and students to support groundbreaking research projects. These projects target key areas such as food diversity, authentication and traceability, AI technologies for quality and safety, sustainability of the food system, and supply chain management. Notable research topics include enhancing agricultural practices and developing natural flavors from grasshopper insects through Koji-based fermentation. These grants play a crucial role in fostering academic and research excellence, enabling participants to contribute valuable insights and innovations to the field of food science.

## IFANCA-FDIP Symposiums

The IFANCA-FDIP Symposium has established itself as a crucial event for advancing food diversity, authentication, and certification. The inaugural symposium on *"Food Authentication and Certification,"* held on February 21–22, 2019, at Texas A&M University, brought together national and international experts. The distinguished keynote speakers from academia and industry discussed critical issues in food supply chain standards and verification processes. Poster presentations by students showcased innovative research, reflecting Texas A&M's commitment to fostering future food science professionals. After a pandemic-induced hiatus, the symposium resumed in

**"Seek knowledge even if you have to go as far as China." Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)**

2022, focusing on *"Current Trends in Food Industry—Challenges and Strategies"* in Frisco, Texas, featuring presentations from leading companies that provided networking opportunities for students and industry professionals. Poster topics ranged from cultured meat to the impact of cranberry juice on gut health, with five undergraduates, six graduates, and two postdoctoral students presenting a total of 13 posters.

The upcoming IFANCA-FDIP Symposium on October 30, 2024, at Texas A&M's AgriLife Center will focus on "Alternative Proteins," highlighting sustainable protein sources as alternatives to traditional animal-based proteins. The event will include keynote addresses, panel discussions, and technical sessions on plant-based proteins, cultured meats, and novel protein sources such as insects and algae. These symposia, through fostering academic excellence and innovation, ensure Texas A&M University remains at the forefront of food diversity education and research, promoting an inclusive and sustainable food system.

The collaboration between IFANCA and Texas A&M University epitomizes a pioneering effort in advancing food diversity and innovation. By establishing endowed programs, offering specialized courses, and funding transformative research, they have significantly contributed to understanding and improving ethnic and faith-based foods. The IFANCA-FDIP grants and symposiums have driven critical research in areas like food authentication, sustainability, and alternative proteins, fostering an environment of academic excellence and industry innovation. Dr. Riaz's distinguished role as the IFANCA Professor in Food Diversity highlights their dedication to merging academic prowess with practical industry solutions. Scholarships and fellowships provided by IFANCA ensure the development of future leaders in food science, reinforcing a commitment to an inclusive and sustainable global food industry.

In conclusion, the partnership between IFANCA and Texas A&M University has established a benchmark in advancing food science education and halal industry practices. Together, they are shaping the future of food diversity by integrating academic rigor with real-world application. Through initiatives like the Food Diversity Innovation Program, research grants, symposiums, and hands-on training in religious and ethnic food systems, this partnership not only fosters inclusivity in the food industry but also drives innovation in halal food production and global standards. Their leadership sets a powerful example, preparing the next generation of food scientists to address the evolving demands of a multicultural and diverse food landscape. This pioneering approach positions both IFANCA and Texas A&M as leaders in creating sustainable, inclusive, and innovative solutions for the future of the global food industry.

**DR. MIAN N. RIAZ** is the Associate Department Head and IFANCA Professor in Food Diversity in the Department of Food Science and Technology at Texas A&M University. He joined Texas A&M University 32 years ago after completing his Ph.D. in Food Science. Dr. Riaz has published seven books. His first book, "Halal Food Production," is widely used in universities for Food Science and Nutrition majors and has been translated into Chinese, Persian, and Korean. He has received several prestigious awards from various institutions.

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