

Kumaoni Preserves & pickles

Anita Paul, co-founder of the Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation, talks to Good Food about UMANG, the unique women-centric company she helped set up and its Kumaoni brand of pickles, preserves and natural foods

As told to VIDYA BALACHANDER Photographs courtesy KALYAN AND ANITA PAUL

My husband Kalyan and I set up the Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation in 1992 after having worked in the development sector for over a decade. Since its inception, Grassroots has focused on enabling mountain communities in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh to plan, implement and share the costs of bringing forth change and development in various sectors that have a direct bearing on their quality of life. We began by addressing

basic issues like safe drinking water, sanitation, renewable energy and rainwater harvesting.

After almost a decade of such work, the communities began to organise Self Help Groups i.e. groups of about 10 to 15 neighbours and friends, coming together to help each other financially and personally. Each producer-member of the group could participate in one or more business ventures to supplement the family income in a sustainable manner.

orange marmalade, strawberry jam, guava jelly and apple and pear jelly. The small team of specially trained women also produces fruit chutneys such as mango, apricot and plum, pickles such as lime, green chilli and garlic, and natural honey in eucalyptus, lychee and wild flower flavours. They are all completely natural and no artificial colours are added. The product range also includes natural *attas*, spices and pulses. All products are sold under the common brand names of Kumaoni and HimKhadya.



We encouraged some of our women team leaders to assist village women to establish businesses that support the poor. Within a span of a few years, the Mahila Umang Producers Company was set up. The businesses that fall under the UMANG umbrella include fruit preserves and pickles, natural seasonal honey and organic spice powders, among other things.

Our product range is not organically certified. However, only fruits that are not sprayed with chemical pesticides are processed by UMANG. We have also initiated the process of certification for staple foods such as millets and bean through a unique method called the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). All items are branded as HimKhadya, which indicates safe food from the Himalaya region.

HOW ETHICAL IS UMANG?

Organic: The Kumaoni range of products is not organically certified. However, the company follows the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), an organic certification system that enables producers and consumers to collectively define certification standards. No artificial colours or flavours are added.

Fair trade: UMANG is founded upon the idea of sustainability and fair trade. The organisation is governed by a board constituting of producer-members. According to Kalyan Paul, the idea of UMANG is for consumers to "directly assist economically poor households through 'trade and not aid'."

The soft, temperate fruits of the hills such as apricots and plums are difficult to transport over long distances and therefore fetch low prices. In order to add value to these fruits, we decided to set up a processing unit for making fruit preserves and pickles. Over the years, the product range has increased to 15 items that are available through the year.

The fruit preserve range includes apple jelly, apricot jam, plum jam,

UMANG has its own flagship showroom in Naini village, located 10 km outside Ranikhet town at a height of 6,000 feet. This showroom is very popular and our annual sale from the store is now ₹ 30 lakh per annum. Besides this, there are 50 shops and hotels in the region that retail UMANG products. In recent times, they have also reached metros like Delhi and Bangalore through a marketing initiative called Himjoli.

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Anita Paul with the Kumaoni range of jams, jellies, pickles and honeys

