

Research Labs

Editorial Lab

In March, the editorial lab has been working on better commissioning practices, in order to make sure we have the time we need to adhere better to our deadlines but not compromise on the quality of stories we produce. Since some longer pieces have a lead time of up to three months, we worked on commissioning multiple pieces to ensure that we have a constant flow of stories coming in that we can work on. We now have three stories being worked on in parallel.

We have also been discussing internally how we can increase the reach of our stories with collaborations with other publishers, while ensuring we are being fair and transparent about the possibility of this with our writers, and should be able to have a plan ready for this in May.

Apart from this, we also collaborated with CEEW to publish our first book excerpt in March, from their book Millet Mantra. Collaborating on this means that we were able to leverage the reach of both organisations, and send out this excerpt to separate audiences, who are linked through their concerns towards sustainability, food systems, and rural livelihoods, but might not follow the work of both, CEEW as well as The Locavore. Moving forward, these kinds of collaborations will result in a wider reaching impact.

In both the stories we published for March and April, we were also able to link to recipes. For the field story from Madhya Pradesh, our writer sourced a recipe for little millet rice from a farmer she interacted with. For the book excerpt, which looks at a self help group in Odisha and how they process ragi flour that is made into laddoos for Anganwadi centres, we linked the recipe to the laddoo, which had been previously provided to us by the Odisha Millet Mission. Linking these stories to recipes makes them tangible to the reader in some ways, and shows a way to bring these into our own kitchens.

The editorial lab is constantly on the lookout for these kinds of intersections, whether it is with organisations, our readers, or even within our own labs.

Cooking Lab

March '24 saw a change in active participation amongst the volunteers. Absence amongst volunteers has decreased and recipe submission rate has increased. The weekly Touchbase call has become more interactive than it was before with increased participation of volunteers. Mutual cooperation and support amongst volunteers have been seen. Four recipes, two from different states of India, were assigned to each volunteer for this quarter. March 30th is the deadline for all recipe submission. Based on our last Touchbase call, most of the volunteers are on track for submission of recipes on time. The recipes assigned to her shall be distributed amongst four other volunteers next week so that some recipes from all the states of India are covered. Once a month Townhall Meet is being arranged starting from April '24 where all volunteers from all Labs with their respective Lab Leads, Sreyasi and

Chef Thomas Zacharias will be discussing all the roadblocks that everyone might have faced or are facing with regard to their respective work.

Resource Lab

In March, the Resource Lab underwent significant changes, aiming to adopt a more holistic approach toward its future steps and impact. Weekly targets were set to enlist 5 new entries per volunteer. Additionally, 2 new research volunteers were inducted, expanding the team's capacity to 4 members.

In order to optimize the utilization of the MRP's resources, a fresh outreach strategy has been devised to spotlight its existing network into the resource bank. This strategy encompasses 6 key touchpoints: CPL & Cooking Lab, BTP, Offline Events, Locavore's producer partnerships, Locavore's Social Media, and collaborations with grassroots projects.

To foster enhanced collaboration and participation, a new monthly town hall involving all labs has been initiated. Through this we also aim to generate unconventional leads for the bank.

With a sufficient number of entries secured, the lab is now aiming to enhance its user experience and delivering tangible impact. Therefore, for the upcoming round of hiring, we are seeking to recruit 3 volunteers with expertise in UI/UX and digital product design backgrounds.

Climate & Policy Lab

In March, the CPL onboarded 3 new volunteers. The volunteers spent a week settling into the lab and familiarising themselves with current literature on millets.

We conducted a Beyond the Plate session titled 'Making Millets Desirable: Millets in Food Establishments' in order to explore the role that restaurants and snacks companies play in exposing people to potentially new ingredients and shaping one's tastes. The panellists included Raghav Simha from Project Hum, Umang Bhattacharyya from Wholsum Foods, Borra Srinivas Rao from Manyam Grains and Debjani Das from Trishakti SHG.

Other than the BTP, the Lab is also working with T4G to secure a server with DigitalOcean to host our survey, which is aimed to be live by early May. The lab had also started working on Millet FAQs for the MRP website. The proposed collaboration with DDS has not yet unfolded, due to some lack of clarity about personnel on their front, but we are expecting to get back to it by mid-April.

TL Interventions

Events

As mentioned above, the BTP conducted on 21st March was titled 'Making Millets Desirable: Millets in Food Establishments' with the following panlists who head restaurants and millet focused companies: Raghav Simha, Umang Bhattacharyya, Debjani Das and Borra Srinivas Rao. The discussion saw enthusiastic participation from the audience; with many of them also sharing their favourite millet dish. The audience size was around 50, with sustained participation throughout, including interesting questions for the panelists.

A few unexpected challenges we faced at this BTP was a period of lack of clarity on an invitee, Dr. Bhrigupati Singh's attendance and a last minute cancellation by Shauravi Malik from Wholsum Foods (in whose place Umang attended), leading to an all men panel. We therefore invited Debjani Das, to bring a balanced perspective to the topic.

Communications

March has been an exciting month for us with respect to social media communication for the Millet Revival Project.

This month we explored collaborating with content creators for our recipe video. The video recipe of the month - Bajre ki Raab was done in collaboration with Chef Surabhi - a popular home chef specialising in Marwari food. Chef Surabhi was also the guest chef for the cooking workshop in New Delhi where she demonstrated this recipe in person. Partnering with Chef Surabhi allowed us to tap into a whole new audience base and the post did very well, garnering over 46k views and 630 saves.

Another endeavour that worked well in March was the campaign around the Millet Summer Bowl, a limited edition summer salad launched in collaboration with Project Hum . There was a lot of excitement and buzz around the launch of the salad on social media - with a lot of people commenting about seeing this unusual combination of millets and local summer vegetables in a salad format, the post also received over 173 shares on Instagram.

Outreach

There are 2 potential restaurant collaborations in the pipeline. Nair on fire - a popular restaurant renowned for its Kerala flavours, is keen on doing a multi-level collaboration around millets. Additionally, Ishara (which has 6 outlets across India) and is run by service staff with hearing and speech impairment, is also keen on introducing a special Millet dish on the menu in collaboration with The Locavore.

A collaboration with WASSAN is also under works; the project aims to build entrepreneurial capacity by working with SHGs in Andhra Pradesh and training them to create tasty millet snacks and providing assistance in setting up

small businesses. Secondary goals are to understand nutritional baselines of the community we shall be working with, as well as understanding the local agro-ecological conditions.

We are also in conversation with Wholesum Foods to work collaboratively on a project focused on transitioning towards responsible and fair sourcing of Jowar and Ragi directly from farmers in the Haveri, Gadag, and Davangere regions of Karnataka. This project is designed to begin with a comprehensive needs analysis phase, aimed at identifying and addressing the key areas that can enable Wholsum Foods to source Jowar and Ragi more sustainably and equitably.

Collaborations

We launched The Locavore Summer Bowl—a wholesome summer veggie millet salad—in collaboration with Project Hum Cafe on March 15th. The dish is available for dine-in, take-away, and delivery until the end of April. This partnership with Project Hum - a restaurant that shares our values, was effective and successful. The chef-partners and wider staff of the cafe were enthusiastic about the dish and effectively communicated its message. The salad also got a lot of buzz as it featured 'unconventional' salad ingredients like lauki, tendli and bhindi, making it a conversation starter. There is significant potential in expanding the availability of this salad to other FnB outlets across the country.

Producer Partnerships

In the month of March, we onboarded Earth Focus Foundation as a Producer Partner.

Based in the Kanha forest of Madhya Pradesh, Earth Focus Foundation (EFF) is a community-led organisation working with farmers from the Baiga and Gond tribal communities. While their vision is to restore the landscape surrounding the forests, they recognise that to do this means to work closely with its forest-dwelling communities. EFF supports the livelihoods of these farmers by showcasing and selling these products through their website. These include millets like kodo and kutki, and mahua syrup, all of which can be traced back to their farmlands.

Overall

We have successfully concluded our hiring campaign for the Millet Revival Project (MRP). The labs are now fully equipped to seamlessly navigate through their various activities, ranging from developing recipes to hosting events. Additionally, we've brought on board new leads for both the Resource and Cooking labs. Our new Leads, Shivanghi & Sayani, who initially volunteered for their respective labs, have since evolved in their roles, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of our team. It's heartening to note the increasing number of restaurants and organisations reaching out to collaborate on the Millet Revival Project. Furthermore, we are diligently processing our social media engagement data related to millets. Our goal is to discern patterns that will enable us to engage with our audience more comprehensively.

As we approach the final quarter of this phase of the millet revival project, we are actively identifying gaps in our

work within the millet ecosystem. Our focus for this period is to streamline our operations and apply the knowledge we have acquired thus far. This will allow us to systematically address challenges in the millet landscape with greater efficiency and effectiveness.