

Meet Jon Manekin, Founder at Falls Road Mushroom Co.

Jim Ries: Hello and welcome to Java with Jim. I'm Jim Ries, Director of Business Development at Offit Kurman joined here today with John Manekin, Founder at Falls Road Mushroom Company. Hey John, how are you today?

Jon Manekin: Hey Jim, how are you?

Jim Ries: I'm doing great. So John, tell us about Falls Road Mushroom Company.

What do you guys do there and what makes your company different from other companies if there are others in your industry?

Jon Manekin: Thank you. Well here Falls Road Mushroom Company, we are working to repurpose agricultural waste into healthy, nutritious, fresh gourmet mushrooms, and then repurposing our byproduct into micro remediation projects in the Chesapeake Bay watersheds.

This is all done from our urban farm. We're here in 2,800 square feet in Hampden. I'm in the old property management office that we converted to this controlled environment farm. And we're committed to growing these healthy, delicious mushrooms for [00:01:00] our customers, which are businesses, restaurants, country clubs in the area.

And we have growth plans, exciting plans beyond that. But that's what we do here at Falls Road.

Jim Ries: Yeah, so it's sort of like a vertical business proposition. 'cause you've got a couple businesses under one roof and literally nothing goes to waste.

Jon Manekin: That's right. We joke, we like to eat the whole buffalo. And you're asking, how we do it differently.

By virtue of the way we're doing it we're kind of unique in this space and I'm really proud of that. But about a year ago I had someone from the University of Maryland, say, I think there are about 15 registered specialty mushroom growers in the state of Maryland. And only a few of those are in the city and not many are sort of growing at the scale that we are. And we're also creating our own blocks which is kind of an industry term, but we're a fully integrated, vertically integrated mushroom production company. Some guys source blocks fruit on site, others don't, but we do it all.

Jim Ries: Love it. Love it. So John, when it comes to Falls Road Mushroom [00:02:00] Company, what are you most proud of?

Jon Manekin: You know, I'm, many things. I'm proud of the mission. We talked about an urban agriculture farm, a controlled environment farm. Baltimore City is important to me. It's been my home, my entire life and when I, coming from a commercial real estate perspective, looking at the vacancy issue in downtown office buildings, we wanted to solve for an alternative use for these spaces.

How can we bring new life and new vibrancy downtown to Baltimore City? And the idea was, let's grow food and that role of growing food for my community is a privilege and it's something I'm really proud of. And it's something different in my life from the way that we get to sort of engage a community at that level and be a part of that health and bringing that health back to a city, I hope. But we're proud about the mission and as we grow, I'm also very proud of this team that we're building here that are not only incredibly talented at what they do respectably, but [00:03:00] also committed to the vision and the culture of the company, and the passion for, doing more than just mushrooms.

So, proud of the team we're building here and proud of the direction we're heading with the, the purpose of the company.

Jim Ries: Awesome. Speaking of growing, John, what are the next six months look like for you and Falls Road Mushroom Company?

Jon Manekin: Thank you. So, this past year was our first year in business, and we were able to accomplish a lot in a short amount of time.

Engaging with a lot of customers in that restaurant and country club space has been the bulk of our fresh business. And in 2026, we are going to be working to develop a line of tinctures, nutraceuticals basically dual extracts, harnessing the power and potency of these active compounds in our Lion's Mane mushroom to the start and producing a line of those tinctures for sale.

We're special and unique in that we'll be one of the only farms in the country growing our own mushrooms for input into our line of tinctures. And it's not official yet, but we're [00:04:00] gonna be partnering with another top tier Baltimore company in the production of those tinctures which just reinforced that sense of community and a Baltimore proud brand that we'd be bringing to market.

And right now we're in the research and development phase. Getting our best practices in place, making sure the flavor profiles, where we want it. Engaging third party labs to verify our tests. Really making sure that everything's sort of done well and done and right. And we'll be doing that quietly in the first part of this year.

But six months from now, we should hopefully be in a place where we're reaching that product to the market, which is really exciting.

Jim Ries: So the tinctures you talk about I'm assuming there are health benefits for tinctures. Usually when I think of tinctures, I think of some kind of a, nutrient or something.

So tell us the health benefits or what direction are you going, or to the extent that you can share that with us.

Jon Manekin: Absolutely. And yeah, admittedly I learned a lot about this stuff just over the last year and a half. So I was never one who was focused on the label and understanding this whole world.

But as I learned more about [00:05:00] mushrooms and the medicinal benefits they offer, my head exploded. I'm like, this is real medicine. This is really fascinating and I'd be careful, of course, about medicinal claims. I'm not a doctor. This is not medical advice. I encourage everybody to pursue their own research. But to confine it to discussion around Lion's Mane, it's a hot topic conversation because of its cognitive enhancing benefits. What they've been able to see in lab tests with mice is that the active compounds in Lion's Mane, the hericium erinaceus are able to penetrate the blood brain barrier, which is a very unique thing on its own.

And by penetrating barrier, they actually aid in the growth and spread of the neurons, your brain cells, your invigorated, and they provide a number of different cognitive inhibiting benefits. It's like a natural form of Adderall, and there are a number of different processes designed to extract those benefits.

And we're proceeding with what's called a dual extraction, where there are [00:06:00] fat soluble and alcohol soluble active compounds that include things like polysaccharides and beta glucans or beta glucan, which is a polysaccharide, which is an incredible for your immune system. And anti inflammatory properties.

And then the alcohol soluble properties include these hericium erinaceus , which we can then extract out and then mix them all together in a tea and refine with honey, which is another thing we're really proud of by the way, is infusing other farming partners, but we can come maybe back to that. But to finish your question around the tincture and the medicinal benefits itself, all of these various species, whether it's Reishi, Turkey Tail, Lion's Mane, Cordyceps, have these incredibly potent innate compounds within them and through our process, which is a very laborious process, and we only use the best kind of ingredients and equipment and all that but what we're working to do is deliver a premium quality product, isolating bees extracts so that we can target those health benefits. So with our Reishi mushroom, that'll help [00:07:00] with sleep, that'll help with relaxation and immune support. Lion's Mane is more for a focused work week kind of application. And again as we evolve our practices, the goal is to bring to the market, something that the customer can understand the process, not only how it was made, but where these ingredients were sourced. What we've learned is that nine outta 10 of these products are sourcing their inputs, powdered mushrooms from China, that the providence is sort of uncertain.

And there are all these different ways that you can get around the labeling and describing it as this, they'll buy the block from China and then fruit it in the United States, and all of a sudden it's made in America and that's just not true. So what we wanna do and what we're committed to is through our social media channels and other means, shining a light and being truly transparent with our process. Again, we're the ones to be growing our own mushrooms for this process and these inputs, but let's show the whole process and let's show our customer from soup to nuts how this all [00:08:00] works, and arm them with their own information on how and why it's good for their bodies.

Jim Ries: Love it. It's one thing that I continue to hear and tell myself is that food is medicine. So there you go.

Jon Manekin: Food is medicine. Yeah.

Jim Ries: John, here's the fun question. What do most people watching this video not know about you?

Jon Manekin: Well, to be honest It's probably that I was growing mushrooms and I didn't,

Jim Ries: There you go.

Jon Manekin: Yeah. I'd been in this other industry, in commercial real estate for decades and for many years. The question, was sort of, which one are you? And the fact that I've bump into people these days and they ask how the businesses is or, what I'm up to. Some people are in the know and know that I made the change and I'm now growing mushrooms.

But I never get tired of telling people that i'm now a farmer and if I wasn't farming, I would've liked to fly fishing. That would've been a fun little hobby. But I'm so content and happy with this space and what we're hoping to accomplish in the coming year and down the road and being an active part of this community.

Jim Ries: Truly an urban farmer, that's for [00:09:00] sure.

Jon Manekin: That's it. Yeah. And that was the idea, of the name. Falls Road is obviously the road of my youth. I mean, I went to two schools off of Falls Road. I've gone up and down Falls Road more than times, like many people than I can imagine.

But I wanted that sense of connectivity from a community perspective as well as, it goes all the way from the city to the county. I mean, it connects everybody in a way. But in terms of the logo and the name itself, I wanted to challenge people's perception of what a farm is.

I think everybody kind of imagines that red barn on a hill in this bucolic setting, and that's where all the food comes from. But in fact, no, like we're coming to you from Hampden, in a brick property management office. And that's pretty cool.

Jim Ries: Love the logo and the swag too, John. That's very nice.

Jon Manekin: Thank you. Yeah. More merch on the way. Yeah.

Jim Ries: Good, good. Well, listen, thanks for spending time with us today. I appreciate it. And I know our viewers are gonna really appreciate it too. So I'm sure I'll be seeing you around. But thank you for being here.

Jon Manekin: Thank you for having me. Eat more mushrooms.

Jim Ries: Yeah, you got it. Bye.

Jon Manekin: Take care.