

## A Conversation with Arnulfo Ventura, CEO of 2023 INFRA Brix Award Winner Alter Eco

Alter Eco is a name many INFRA Retailers are very familiar with, a name synonymous with innovation and sustainability. It's for that reason Alter Eco was awarded the 2023 INFRA Brix Award for Leading Innovation. Their commitment to sustainability, social good, and quality is robust – Certified B Corp, Non-GMO Project Verified, Climate Neutral Certified, plus helping farmers transition to regenerative practices with the Alter Eco Foundation – and their product offerings are always evolving.

A few weeks after the 2023 INFRA Annual Conference, we had the chance to catch up with Arnulfo Ventura, Alter Eco's CEO, to discuss the INFRA community, Alter Eco's approach to sustainability and their upcoming initiatives, and Arnulfo's Alter Eco product desert island choice.

(INFRA – this interview has been edited for length and clarity) We're a few weeks past the 2023 INFRA Annual Conference now. We saw you out and about on the Tabletop Show floor, talking to members and rocking a very cool jacket. How was the experience for you to meet the INFRA community face-to-face?

(Arnulfo Ventura, Alter Eco) Above everything else, it was just very touching and moving to see all the different members that were there and to hear about the support, to hear about, you know, their appreciation for the brand and the way that we've gone about growing the brand, just really that, that interaction just goes a long way. You know, it's like they're on the front lines with our consumers. There's a very big partnership there.

(INFRA) So, Alter Eco recently won the 2023 INFRA Brix Award for Leading Innovation – congratulations! Your acceptance speech at the awards ceremony during the INFRA Conference was really inspiring. What does it mean to you to be not only recognized for what Alter Eco is doing but to be recognized by the grassroots independent retailer community?

(Arnulfo) I think, in short, it's what it's all about. You know, from one small business to another, just getting that kind of recognition is very special for so many small brands in our space. It's how we get our start. It's by reaching out to INFRA Members and trying to pick up distribution. You know, one store at a time. When I first started in this industry, I delivered out of the trunk of my car for two years.

And I think more than anything else, all these years later, but you know the brand's been around for 18 years, to roll out innovation on and it is recognized by this special group. You know, to me signals not only is it game-changing innovation because it's so much on the on the front of what you guys are really leading for the industry.

In speaking of innovations, one always wonders what's next. What's the next thing coming from a brand known to be innovative? We wanted to know – what opportunities to raise the bar for what it means to be a sustainable brand are coming up for Alter Eco?

The answer is continued transparency and accountability. Combined with the efforts of the Alter Eco Foundation, which helps farmers transition their operations to regenerative agriculture, Alter Eco is walking the walk. Part of walking the walk means always reevaluating and finding ways to improve. For example, in their past year's regeneration report, they found that their footprint had increased, not decreased. Alter Eco experienced record growth that year, but Arnulfo attributed the increase not to their growth, but to not having accurate proxy data for farming – a control group to compare, essentially. But finding a proxy farm to measure the effectiveness of their regenerative practices isn't the only project Alter Eco is up to.

For the first time in their company's history, Alter Eco is gathering primary source data from the locations where they support their farming partners, such as Ecuador, Peru, and the Dominican Republic. Whether the results of the research are positive, negative, or neutral, Arnulfo expressed excitement at what they will learn from them, saying that "what doesn't get measured doesn't get managed."

In other words, they're covering the bases and identifying where Alter Eco can improve their sustainability by getting the most realistic understanding of their footprint possible.

But of course, we couldn't leave without getting the scoop on Arnulfo's favorite Alter Eco products.

(INFRA) You've got a bit of a reputation for bringing unique and successful products to market. What recent product drops, or soon-to-be-released products, from Alter Eco are you most excited about?

(Arnulfo) What I'm really excited about for Alter Eco is our truffle. Our new Truffle Thins and our Blackout Bars that we're rolling out

here in 2023. Truffle Thins were a breakthrough, kind of disruptive form factor for us. Taking that awesome, good ganache filling from our Truffle Balls and putting it in the middle of a chocolate bar, we just learned so much about our Truffle Thins last year. So, with that, we see it as the more permissible indulgence, a side of the line.

Today, I'm quite proud and happy to say that, at least according to SPINS in the last 12 weeks, we're the number three brand in chocolate in the natural enhanced channel and we continue to be and have been the number one brand in dark chocolate.

(INFRA) Alright, now I want to know – of all of Alter Eco's offerings, what's your desert island choice?

(Arnulfo) Oh, man. I'm probably going to go with a crème brûlée. The Crème Brûlée Truffle Thin because it wasn't where we were intending to go and what I love, and all the years that I've done innovation and R&D is that my favorites are the "oops" moments where you just stumble upon something, and so crème brûlée started out with not even crème brûlée in mind – it just started out in a different kind of terrain altogether. I was like, wait, wait, wait, what if we did these things and we, you know, we had the naturally white ganache filling with little crystallized sugar crystals inside? And it mimicked like you're breaking that.

You heard it here folks – Crème Brûlée Truffle Thins. And regeneration and stewardship. In an age where greenwashing is a very real concern for many shoppers, Alter Eco is one company to watch that is always evaluating its practices, finding innovative ways to be more sustainable and more regenerative, and helping others in their sustainability journeys. Regarding their soil analysis project, Arnulfo shared that the transference of knowledge is a big driver – Alter Eco wants to keep raising awareness and sharing their learnings so that everyone can benefit.

"Good, bad, or indifferent, I'm looking forward to the data coming around and us being able to share that with the larger trade community," Arnulfo shared. "So that we can all have learnings and that transference of knowledge, and figure out how to have better practices."

Find Alter Eco online [here](#). [Click here](#) to learn about the Alter Eco Foundation.



**"You know, it's like they're on the front lines with our consumers. There's a very big partnership there."**

Arnulfo Ventura – CEO of Alter Eco

