

Fighting food waste in Singapore

Proper inventory management, promotional sales and donations help supermarkets cut dumping of unsold items



GILAINENG

Last month, 24-hour store Mustafa Centre was found to be disposing of nearly 100kg of fruits and vegetables daily, sparking concerns about food waste in Singapore.

According to the National Environmental Agency, the amount of food waste generated in Singapore has increased by about 40 per cent over the past 10 years.

This number is expected to increase with Singapore's growing population and economic activity.

Last year alone, 676,800 tonnes of food waste was disposed of. Only 133,000 tonnes of food waste was recycled. The remaining food waste was disposed of at waste-to-energy plants for incineration.

Mustafa Centre typically throws out produce that remains unsold after three days, Shin Min Daily News reported.

It also receives new stock of fruits and vegetables daily.

"There are no stipulated rules or regulations in place, with employees free to determine what types of produce should be disposed of and what can be kept," a worker from Mustafa Centre told Shin Min.

But most major supermarkets – including Giant, Cold Storage, FairPrice and Sheng Siong – emphasised the importance of minimising food waste and environmental sustainability, when interviewed by The New Paper.

Sound purchasing policy and proper inventory management systems help supermarkets prevent overordering from suppliers.

Reduced-to-clear promotions for fruits and vegetables that are close to expiry or blemished are a common strategy adopted by these supermarkets.

A FairPrice spokesman told TNP that by doing so, it was able to save 675,000kg of fruits and vegetables across 145 stores islandwide last year.

Where products still remain unsold, FairPrice donates them to Food from the Heart (FFTH) as part of a long-term partnership.

The donations amount to more than \$25,000 worth of



People wait for produce to be distributed to them by Food Bank Singapore. (Below) Produce being sold at a Save the Uglies Market held at the Singapore Management University. PHOTOS: SMU GROW & SUSTAINABILITY

items monthly, distributed across 41 charities.

"Over the recent Hari Raya, we partnered FFTH and Food Bank (another charity) to benefit the community in line with their celebrations for the month of Ramadan.

"We also supported Ngee Ann Polytechnic's 10-Tonne Food Drive for Food Bank, which gives to the needy and reduces food waste by providing three collection points for the public to drop off their food donations," the spokesman said.

The spokesman added: "Our efforts are paying off as we contribute less than 0.3 per cent of the yearly total food waste generated in Singapore."

RECYCLE

As part of an initiative to recycle food waste, Giant hypermarkets at Tampines and Suntec have installed the Eco-Wiz, an on-site food waste treatment system that converts food waste to potable water.

The water is then used for a number of applications in store, such as general washing and cleaning.

Organic supermarket Ryan's Grocery provides staff discounts and gives away items to drivers so they can distribute to their family and friends to combat food waste.

"As we deal with organic food, we not only appreciate the farmers for their effort, but we



also believe strongly in sustainability," a spokesman for Ryan's Grocery told TNP.

It also puts up a box for items that are near expiry and allows customers to pick any items they want free of charge.

In return, customers have to donate at least a dollar to the Association for Persons with Special Needs, which Ryan's Grocery supports.

The box, with items such as fruits, vegetables, meat and frozen foods, is put up when the supermarket has goods to clear.

The Ryan's Grocery spokesman told TNP: "Through these initiatives, we are usually able to clear any produce within two to three days and our friendly neighbours love it.

"Drivers are also more than happy as they are able to try our gourmet foods."

In April, Sheng Siong helped the anti-food waste effort by supporting the Food Unfiltered campaign, which was launched by four final-year students from Nanyang Technological

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University.

The campaign encouraged members of the public to embrace "ugly food" as a simple way to reduce food waste in Singapore and featured educational posters across Sheng Siong supermarkets.

Said Ms Lin Ruiwen, executive director of Sheng Siong Group: "It is natural that not all fresh produce is perfect-looking. Small blemishes can definitely be tolerated."

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Movements out to save 'ugly' greens

Singapore Management University (SMU) Grow believes "ugly" produce is worth saving.

Since October last year, the group has worked with B3, a restaurant located on campus, to hold the Save The Uglies market every Friday.

The market is open to members of the public and offers fruits or vegetables that suppliers were unable to sell to supermarkets due to cosmetic imperfections, such as odd sizing or slight bruises, at discounted rates.

Ms Bernadette Toh, an SMU staff member who founded the programme 3½ years ago, said: "Although the market starts only at 11am, we have quite a loyal following that would come early to start queueing."

"Some faculty members even send their parents or children with a list of what to buy when they don't have the time to come down themselves – it's really heartwarming."

The group is part of a university-wide movement involving staff, faculty, tenants and students which aims to get the community to think about sustainability issues.

Ugly Food dining experiences are also held every four months. Customers pay around \$38 for a three-course meal made from "ugly" produce.

The latest dinner, held in June, was oversubscribed, with slots snapped up in just two days.

The Food Bank Singapore, a registered charity, runs a food



(Above) During the June school holidays, Junior Foodbankers and their parents helped to collect "ugly produce" for Food Bank Singapore's beneficiaries. (Left) Canapés for the Ugly Food dining experience.

PHOTOS: SMU GROW & SUSTAINABILITY, THE FOOD BANK SINGAPORE

truck programme which picks up fresh produce from Pasir Panjang Wholesale Centre at least once a week.

The programme also works with Redmart, an online grocery store, to collect excess unsold food daily.

Mr Nichol Ng, the charity's chief food officer, told TNP: "The produce is redistributed to our member beneficiaries network of about 250 charity organisations, from family service centres to homes for the elderly, soup kitchens to religious organisations."

Feeding The 5000 Singapore, a community food festival which has taken place in more

than 40 locations around the world, was held in Singapore for the first time in March this year.

Almost 5,000 meals were given out either at the event or to beneficiaries elsewhere.

The ingredients for this also come from the Pasir Panjang Wholesale Centre.

A spokesman for the Feeding the 5000 team said: "While food is being wasted, one in 10 Singaporean households are food-insecure according to a study by Food From The Heart."

"It is important that we reduce our food waste and redirect it to the people who need it most."

Tackling food waste around the world



Customers buying fruits and vegetable in the Nous grocery store in Melesse near Rennes, north-western France. PHOTO: AFP

FRANCE

In 2016, France became the first country to ban supermarket food waste. A law mandates that all grocery stores are to donate unsold food to charities and food banks or face a fine of 3,750 euros (\$5,800).

There is a grocery store in Melesse, north-western France, called Nous that is "dedicated to the reduction of food waste". It offers products "rejected by traditional distribution channels" but whose nutritional quality is "intact". It opened in early May this year.

DENMARK

WeFood sells produce at prices 30 to 50 per cent lower. The catch? All food in the store is past its official expiry date or has damaged packaging.

Sale of expired food is legal in Denmark, so long as it is clearly advertised and does not pose an immediate danger upon consumption. The surplus store, which is part of a government initiative in Denmark to reduce food waste, was so popular when it opened in 2016 that it opened a second branch just nine months later.