

Publication: The Sunday Times, p 36

Date: 18 January 2015

Headline: Symbol of good nature

[ EDITORIAL ]

# Symbol of good nature

Singapore Management University's effort to spark an urban farming movement is a modest yet telling one. Its Grow initiative is not intended to enhance Singapore's food security: If anything, it is a boutique experiment in encouraging gardening and sustainable living. A garden, which will be sown with plant varieties such as basil, spinach, papaya and guava, will be cared for by student and staff volunteers; members of the public can join in the gardening. However, it is significant

symbolically because it proclaims, from the very heart of the city, a need for all to hold green values, and to recall the agricultural self-sufficiency of pioneers.

The soil and its fruits helped to sustain Singapore through long and unpredictable cycles of time before it became an epitome of the economic and technological possibilities of the modern city-state, with its future prophesied in the towering architecture of ambitious stone. For reasons of nostalgia and its sustaining power, if nothing else, efforts such as SMU's would be welcomed.

They have a communitarian value as well. One of the inevitable consequences of high-rise living is its anonymity and the consequent loss of those tangible, face-to-face relationships that made village living socially intimate and personally reassuring. Attempts to replicate SMU's initiative on a larger and sustained scale in the Housing Board environment, with neighbours coming together to nurture vegetable garden plots communally, would help restore some of the kampung spirit that Singaporeans love to evoke even today.

Urban farmers might not feed on the fruit of their labour and choose to give it away to the deserving. That would make their efforts even more meaningful, as a farm would offer Singaporeans a new way of interacting with others. Recreating green havens, even in miniature, is a movement that all can and should get involved in.