



Mr John Cheng, 39, founded Innovate 360, an accelerator for food start-ups which provides them with office space, kitchen and manufacturing facilities, and opportunities for networking and mentoring. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Passionate about helping local food start-ups grow

Mr John Cheng, 39, has big dreams and is not afraid of the hard work needed to achieve them.

As the chairman of Feed 9 Billion, an open innovation platform, he hopes to find sustainable solutions to feed the global population, which is expected to hit some nine billion in 2050.

"I know it's a tall order, but we start with something small," said Mr Cheng.

Since Feed 9 Billion began in 2018, its number of partners has grown, and it has been working to enable small businesses, corporates, institutions and government agencies to further promote food sustainability and innovation.

In 2019, it launched a 100-page resource kit for start-ups, which has had more than 500 downloads so far, said Mr Cheng.

This year, it has been holding monthly workshops with The Good Food Institute on how to build start-up capabilities, with an average of 50 attendees each session.

It has also started a research project looking at the gaps that prevent alternative protein start-ups from succeeding.

Mr Cheng's passion for food innovation and sustainability as well as collaboration is clear in all that he does.

He is also the founder of Innovate 360 at 9 Chin Bee Drive in Jurong. It is an accelerator for food start-ups – providing them with office space and kitchen and manufacturing facilities as well as opportunities for networking, mentoring and collaboration with other firms.

Since it began in 2018, more than 40 start-ups have joined.

Mr Cheng is keen to help these food start-ups grow and scale and, in particular, wants to help local brands take it a step further.

"My hope is that Singapore can attract global companies and start-ups and be seen as an innovation hub, and create real change and impact the world," he said.

It is his work in helping local businesses and his passion and efforts in food innovation and sustainability that have earned him a nomination for The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year 2021, which is presented by UBS.

Mr Cheng, who is also director at his family's sugar manufacturing business Cheng Yew Heng, said he enjoys working with people and creating new things.

He also shares his knowledge and skills through volunteer work with the North West Community Development Council, the philanthropic council at Singapore Management University and the Youth Business Affairs Committee at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, among others.

"People always ask me why I do all this since it doesn't earn me more money, but in the long term, it's about giving back.

"Sometimes it's just a simple phone call to make to bring two partners together – it doesn't cost much," said Mr Cheng.

Goh Yan Han

ST **SCAN TO WATCH**
His drive for innovation has helped food start-ups.
<https://str.sg/soty27a>

