

**OPENING REMARKS BY MS TAN POH HONG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
AGRI-FOOD AND VETERINARY AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE, AT AVA'S FOOD  
SAFETY AWARDS NIGHT ON 19 JULY 2013**

Our Guest-of-Honour

Mr Lee Yi Shyan

Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of National  
Development,

Mr Koh Soo Keong

Chairman, Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

1 Good evening. I am delighted to see many industry partners who are here tonight to celebrate the achievements of our local food industry in food safety excellence.

2 Let me first acknowledge the efforts by every company in the food industry in ensuring that we continue to uphold our high food safety standards. This evening, 132 companies will be receiving food safety excellence awards, and 12 companies for food safety partners awards. On behalf of the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA), I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all the award winners. It is a fitting recognition of your commitment to food safety and partnership with AVA.

3 Our Guest-of-Honour, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of National Development, Mr Lee Yi Shyan, will be presenting the awards to all our recipients.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the SMS for taking time off his very busy schedule to grace tonight's event and celebrate this occasion with us. Your presence has reaffirmed the government's support in everyone's efforts to food safety.

### **Challenges Faced in Ensuring Food Safety**

4 Even as we continue to push ahead and build on our efforts to keep food safe for the nation, our heavy dependence on food imports means that we have to contend with constant challenges from outbreaks of animal diseases and food scares overseas. The emergence of unconventional contaminants in recent years has further amplified the threat that unsafe food could be easily introduced into the country.

5 A case in point is the intentional addition of substances which are not meant to be used in food products such as the recent maleic acid issue in starch-based food products – maleic acid is a raw material for industrial use and should not be added to food.

6 This case is not the first. And neither will it be the last. It is therefore, of paramount importance for AVA to stay ever vigilant and keep abreast of such challenges to ensure that our food supply remain safe. We will continue to actively scan the horizon to anticipate such issues as well as strengthen our testing capabilities to detect uncommon or unanticipated contaminants.

7        However, it should not be left to the Government alone to ensure food safety. The food industry plays a very important part in upholding food safety standards and must be responsible for the safety of the food it offers to consumers.

8        Responsible food industry players can raise public confidence in their products by incorporating food safety assurance programmes and practices in their operations. We thus actively encourage the food industry to adopt good agricultural and manufacturing practices, and food safety assurance programmes such as the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). Getting certified in this internationally recognised food safety system is an indication of your commitment in ensuring food safety.

9        I commend our award winners and A-graders present here today for upholding food safety for Singapore and I urge you and the rest of the food industry to continue to do so. Not only will you be held in high regard by consumers here, but the confidence consumers place in your products will also make it easier for you to export them overseas.

10       Recently, the food industry has taken the lead in forming the ASEAN Food and Beverage Alliance (or AFBA for short) to stimulate the growth of the food industry in the region by harmonising food standards and removing technical trade barriers. It would be to AFBA's advantage to adopt high food safety standards in their efforts as it will increase the global competitiveness of the region's food products. And I call on the industry players here to support the Alliance in its work.

## **Fostering Close Collaboration between Government and Industry**

11 It is important for both the Government and industry to work together to address challenges and move the industry forward. We have been engaging the food industry on specific issues such as import and export related matters, and food labelling through various taskforces. To bring the collaboration a step further, a new engagement platform in the form of the Food Manufacturers Business Cluster will replace these taskforces.

12 This Business Cluster is a platform for the Government and industry to work together in charting the directions for the food industry, in creating new initiatives, and in helping the SMEs in the food manufacturing sector to drive productivity, innovation and capability upgrading. Unlike many of you here who are A-graders, there are many more establishments out there who are B and C-graders and there is a need for us to bring the whole industry up. The Business Cluster can thus look at building capability and capacity in SMEs, by tapping into various financial assistance and import & export schemes, leveraging on technology and looking into skills development. For example, linking companies with various government agencies such as SPRING Singapore to tap on the range of funding available.

13 Such efforts will help industry to not only better tackle challenges such as manpower crunch, but also provide more value to consumers.

## **Reducing Food Waste**

14 As you may have read in the papers recently, an unprecedented amount of food waste was generated in Singapore last year, 703,200 tonnes to be precise. The National Environment Agency found that food wastage occurs in homes, food manufacturing and catering industries, and F&B outlets – basically throughout the food chain.

15 It is timely for the food industry to take a closer look at the situation and tackle the problem. As food manufacturers, there is much scope on what you can do in examining the food waste generated and think of new ways to reduce, recycle or re-use these items.

16 As mentioned in a recent blog by Minister Khaw, we have, through our R&D efforts, developed an innovative vegetarian version of pork floss from Okara, a Japanese word for soy bean pulp. A by-product from soy milk production, Okara is either disposed of as food waste or used as an animal feed.

17 I've tried the Okara floss and I find it a delicious alternative to meat floss. But don't take my word for it. Sample it yourself! We've included a packet of Okara floss in the goody bags that every guest will receive tonight.

18 Okara is just an example of how food waste can be recycled into food products. I therefore urge our food companies to look for innovative and creative ways to do your part to reduce food waste. And with your imagination and resourcefulness, we can look forward to unique products recycled from food waste!

## **Consumers Have a Role to Play in Food Safety**

19 Last but not least, all the efforts AVA and the industry put in will be fruitless if consumers do not play their part in ensuring their food is safe as contamination can happen anywhere along the food chain.

20 Our food safety public education thus aims to create consumer awareness on shared responsibility in food safety and educate consumers on how to keep food safe. Our food safety campaign theme for this year is Food Safety for All Occasions. In Singapore, when we celebrate, it usually revolves around food, be it at parties, barbeques, steamboats or even picnics. Through various outreach activities and media campaigns, we will share food safety tips consumers can adopt during these happy occasions.

21 As we celebrate, we should also be mindful not to over-cater and contribute to the food wastage problem. Leftovers, if any, should be stored and handled properly so that it will not go to waste.

## **Conclusion**

22 In closing, I am glad that everyone here has a common interest of ensuring that safe food is available to all Singaporeans. I would like to congratulate and applaud all the award recipients once again, for your efforts, and I hope that you will continue to keep up the good work.

23 On that note, I wish you all the very best and an enjoyable evening.

24 Thank you.