

SPEECH BY DR MOHAMAD MALIKI BIN OSMAN, MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DEFENCE, AT THE FOOD SAFETY AWARDS NIGHT 2015 HELD ON 30 JULY 2015, 7:50 PM, CENTRAL BALLROOM AT RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA

Mr Koh Soo Keong
Chairman, AVA

Ms Tan Poh Hong
CEO, AVA

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening

1. I am happy to join you at this year's Food Safety Awards Night to mark 20 years of food safety excellence.
2. The AVA Food Safety Excellence Scheme has achieved remarkable growth and progress since its inception in 1995, from 24 award recipients then to today's 149. I am heartened that the number of recipients receiving the Food Safety Excellence Awards has increased six-fold, showing that our companies have improved their food safety and hygiene practices through use of technology, such as automation and implementation of food safety systems.

Celebrating 20 years of Food Safety Excellence

3. The achievement of our local food establishments is significant as we celebrate Singapore's golden jubilee. Over the past five decades, food safety standards in Singapore have improved tremendously. Singapore enjoys one of the lowest incidences of food-borne disease outbreaks compared to the rest of the world. A lot of efforts have been put in to reach where we are today, including AVA's integrated food safety system to ensure that Singapore's food is safe.

4. This system would not be effective without the commitment of our food industry partners. I take this opportunity to highlight some of our outstanding pioneers in the food industry for continuing to maintain high standards and their dedicated commitment to ensure food safety.

5. Gold Kili, established in 1985 as a coffee powder manufacturer and distributor, insists on stringent food safety control at every stage of manufacturing. For this effort, it was awarded Grade 'A' certification by AVA since 2010. Gold Kili has also invested significantly in R&D development to maintain the high quality of their coffee products. Over the years, Gold Kili's quest for quality products has led them to grow from its humble beginnings to an 80-man strong coffee manufacturer supplying to 35 countries globally.

6. Another pioneer is Bengawan Solo Cake Shop, which was one of the first to operate from a central kitchen to ensure better quality and food safety control of its products. This had paved way for other bakeries and food companies to do likewise.

7. Tonight, we present the Food Safety Excellence Awards to recognise the exemplary efforts and achievements of companies in producing safe and quality food. The Food Safety Excellence Award is an established accolade that emphasises the growing need for the food industry to adopt and uphold stringent food safety standards and be responsible for the safety of the food it offers to consumers. This makes the Award highly coveted by all food companies.

8. Amongst the list of recipients this year, we will have our pioneer batch of Platinum Award recipients, comprising 25 local food establishments who have maintained high food safety standards and attained an "A" grading for the past 20 consecutive years. These companies recognise the importance of food safety, ensures that food safety is a value internalized within their respective organisations and have demonstrated their strong commitment over the past two decades. For instance, these companies have invested additional resources to develop and implement a robust food safety management system, undergo audits by certification bodies, and ensure that their workers adhere to Good Manufacturing Practices and Good Hygiene Practices. We recognise their continual efforts in ensuring high standards of food safety through this award.

9. There are also 6 Gold, 10 Silver and 16 Bronze award recipients here with us tonight, and 92 recipients who will be receiving their Certificate of Commendation. I congratulate all the award recipients for achieving this esteemed mark of success.

Singapore - A Trusted Brand for Food Safety

10. In recent years, we have witnessed a spate of high-profile global food safety incidents and worldwide upsurge in food-borne diseases. Food safety is the foundation which the industry can build on. Singapore's stringent, uncompromising standards on food safety have made us a trusted brand – one which gives us an edge over many other countries. Over the past 5 years, Singapore's F&B exports to the region have grown at a compound annual rate (CAGR) of 7.8%, reaching S\$7.1 billion in 2013. The "Made in Singapore" label has become a highly regarded one in many parts of the world, making us the preferred choice for many foreign businesses and consumers.

11. Ensuring a resilient supply of safe food is a critical element of Singapore's food security strategies. To ensure food security, it is not enough to just maintain a steady supply of food for the population. It is also crucial to ensure that the available food, whether imported, locally produced, in fresh or processed forms, is safe to eat and affordable for all. I'm pleased to share that Singapore's ranking on the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) has moved three notches up from 5th place in 2014 to 2nd this year, just behind the United States. The index, published by the Economic Intelligence Unit, covers 109 countries around the world and measures three key areas: availability, affordability, as well as quality and safety of food. This is an impressive achievement given that we are a small nation with limited agricultural land.

12. However, we must not be complacent. Singapore is vulnerable to fluctuations in food supply and prices, as well as food safety incidents abroad. We need to stay ahead of the curve by staying alert on emerging threats and issues. Over the years, AVA has developed robust food safety surveillance programmes to maintain high food safety standards. Horizon scanning supports AVA's food safety surveillance programmes by providing early alerts on incidents that impact the safety of food in Singapore. This vigilance gives us more time to respond to food safety threats and take appropriate actions to mitigate risks. For example, because of AVA's vigilance, the fake rice laced with poisonous resin which made their way to several countries early this year did not enter Singapore. AVA also suspended and recalled a few Taiwanese food products containing tainted cooking oil last year.

Working with the Industry

13. Apart from building our capabilities, AVA continues to work hand-in-hand with our local food establishments to raise the bar on food safety and hygiene practices. Over the years, AVA officers have helped many food establishments improve their food safety grading. In 2014, 14 establishments were upgraded from D to C, 39 were upgraded from C to B and 5 were upgraded from B to A. I'm delighted to see companies making the effort to improve, through upgrading their storage facilities and food processing equipment, as well as implementing quality control measures and food safety programmes such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP).

14. Food can become contaminated at any point of production and distribution, as well as during food preparation. Public education on food safety is another critical aspect of the food safety equation. On this front, AVA has been actively educating the public on food safety as well as collaborating with industry partners in reaching out to consumers.

15. AVA has been working with the industry under the Food Safety Partnership Scheme to set higher standards in food safety assurance and take a more proactive role in educating the public on food safety. Tonight, nine companies will be renewing their Food Safety partnership for another two years. They have displayed commendable food safety practices and consumer education efforts in our community. We look forward to seeing more of such role models for other members in the food industry.

16. Going forward, I encourage the food industry to adopt automation and embrace new technology to maximise resources and improve the safety and quality of food products. One of our food companies has experienced what technology can do. Tai Hua Food Industries Private Limited, a soy sauce manufacturer, complements its traditional tray-and-jar methods with the use of modern technology. Most of the processes are automated with proper monitoring controls to lower the risk of mishandling and contamination. This has also increased productivity by about 30%, and reduced manpower needed.

17. AVA will continue to ensure all locally produced and imported food products are safe for consumption, through an integrated system of checks and tests, accreditation, import control, inspection, surveillance, and laboratory testing. However, no system is foolproof without the collaboration of the industry and consumers in Singapore. Food safety is a shared responsibility. If we all play our part, I am confident we can continue to maintain the high food safety standards and tackle emerging food safety threats and challenges.

Conclusion

18. In closing, everyone can contribute to making food safe. Building a robust and reputable food chain requires concerted efforts and a cross-sectoral approach from all stakeholders. Government, industry and consumers all have a role to play in ensuring food safety from farm-to-fork.

19. Food safety is an integral part of Singapore's efforts to boost food security. We look forward to working closely with the industry on more initiatives and raising public awareness on food safety. My heartiest congratulations to all award recipients, and I wish you an enjoyable evening.

20. Thank you.
