



OPENING REMARKS BY DR KOH POH KOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRADE & INDUSTRY, AT THE FOOD SAFETY AWARDS NIGHT 2016 HELD ON 29 JULY 2016, 7.50 PM, AT ROSELLE-SIMPOR BALLROOM, MARINA BAY SANDS

Opening Remarks by Dr Koh Poh Koon, Minister Of State For National Development And Trade & Industry, At The Food Safety Awards Night 2016

Ms Tan Poh Hong
CEO, AVA

Distinguished guests

Friends of the food industry

Ladies and gentlemen

1. Good evening. I am pleased to join you tonight. This is the first time I am joining you for AVA's Food Safety Awards night and it is a very important occasion for the food industry. But it is also an occasion where we can all sit back, relax, mingle and more importantly, enjoy the food without fear. After all, this is a food safety dinner.

Importance of Food Safety

2. In Singapore, we often take food safety for granted. When we eat food anywhere in Singapore, food safety is usually not the top of our minds. Flavour, tastes and costs are things we think of. That is a sweet spot to begin with, as we are in a privileged position. But in other parts of the world, it is a serious matter. We

know that every year, about 1.5 billion cases of food-borne disease outbreaks occur all over the world, and amongst this, about 3 million deaths occur every year.

3. Globally, Singapore is very well developed for food safety, and it contributes to the branding of food products that come to Singapore, because there is trust in the reliability of food products that come to Singapore. Countries such as China send their officials to train, and learn from our food safety experts here, and we provide assistance in the setting up of the food safety system in the Jilin Food Zone, in China.

4. Locally, food safety is a basic but important function. We usually do not think about it, but it is something that is on the top of the minds of all our food producers.

5. If the food we consume is not safe, the impact is immediate and consequences can be severe, and we lose public confidence.

Government's Role in Food Safety

6. Because food safety is so important, the Government takes food safety very seriously, and we have dedicated several agencies to look into this. We have the Agri-food & Veterinary Authority (AVA), National Environment Agency (NEA) and Ministry of Health (MOH) working in concert to ensure the entire food chain that we are exposed to is safe.

7. There is even a snazzy name for it – our agencies call that “food safety from farm to fork”. From where the food started being grown, to the table where it is being eaten. But in practice, ensuring food safety is not as easy as ‘farm to fork’. It is a multi-step process. Not just from the farm, but from the way the meat is slaughtered, the vegetables are harvested, the way it is stored, the cold chain, the way it is prepared and cooked, and the way it is handled and served. There are many steps from the farm, before it gets to the fork. It is important that every step of the process is kept safe, so that the final product that enters your mouth is safe for eating.

8. Whenever there is a food safety incident, the agencies commences investigations immediately, to isolate the problem while treating those who are infected. It is not easy tracing the source of the problem, because the whole supply chain can be very long and complicated, and sometimes it passes through the hands of different people. Investigations will take time. Our agencies take it seriously, and their responsibility is heavy, and they are committed to act as swiftly as they can because human health and sometimes human lives are involved.

9. Tonight, as we celebrate food safety in our food industry, and celebrate the food industry efforts in excellence, it is also timely to remember all the Government agencies which are working behind the scenes to ensure that the food is safe. Let us give them a round of applause to thank them for their efforts.

Consumer Education on Food Safety

10. We must also remember that food safety is not just the Government's responsibility alone. The consumers and players in the food industry also play a very critical role, if not more important than Government agencies. Education on food safety is an important component of the food equation to stay safe. Consumers have to be discerning on where they buy and how they consume their food and how they store their food. These are things you may not think about very often in Singapore, but just imagine when you are travelling, you will be much more conscious over where you choose to consume your food, especially in certain countries where it is known that consuming food from certain sources may not be that safe.

11. AVA's Food Safety Partners have contributed to educating consumers on how to do so. When SATS conducts tours of its factory for culinary schools, it also dispenses food safety tips to its visitors. Tai Hua incorporates food safety tips into its radio advertisements, which it pays to do so by the second. Other Food Safety Partners share food safety tips on online platforms such as website and social

media, as well as on their product labels. I thank our 12 Food Safety Partners for their collaborative public education efforts with AVA.

Industry's Role in Food Safety

12. The whole industry also has a responsibility to ensure safe food practices, because food safety is not just a commercial function. From a commercial aspect, it is important. But at a lower level, it contributes to Singapore's brand. Imagine if a food industry player does not comply with the good quality, high standards for food safety. That would tarnish the name of the Singapore brand, and will affect other players in the same industry.

13. In the same way, our agencies maintain a strict and high standard, to safeguard our safety. At the same time, that high standard is known throughout the world, and also infers some brand equity for Singapore products. Our companies must continue to maintain the good name of the Singapore brand.

14. At the local level, as a country which imports 90% of the food that is being consumed, food safety is important to give our people the confidence and peace of mind when they consume food in Singapore.

15. By implementing food safety management systems such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points and ISO22000, as well as adopting Good Manufacturing and Warehousing Practices, all of you contribute to the important food safety that we know.

16. We have been talking about automation and going down the value chain in improving productivity. But we often forget that automation in the food industry also has a benefit of ensuring food safety. When you automate the process, there are fewer hands involved in handling the food product, less human intervention, and therefore less chances of contamination and transmission of diseases. In all aspects, companies play a very important role.

Conclusion

17. Today, we would like to honour members of the food industry who have set good examples for all of us, by holding themselves to the highest standards of food safety. 162 companies will be receiving the Food Safety Excellence awards tonight. This includes 1 Platinum, 8 Silver, and 9 Bronze award recipients, as well as 144 recipients of the Certificate of Commendation.

18. I was told that you need to have a good food safety record for 20 years in a row before you can get the Platinum award. This is a tremendous achievement to be consistent for such a long period of time and serves as a timely example for the rest of us.

19. In closing, let me congratulate all winners today for your strong commitment towards achieving excellence in the food industry as far as food safety is concerned. I hope you will continue to do so, and in the years to come, I hope we will see more Platinum award winners. Thank you very much.

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