

Speech by Dr Mohamad Maliki Osman, Parliamentary Secretary for National Development at AVA's Food Safety Awards Night

Mr Koh Soo Keong
Chairman of AVA

Ms Tan Poh Hong
CEO of AVA

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

1 Good evening. I am delighted to join you at this evening's AVA Food Safety Awards Night.

Ensuring a resilient supply of safe food

2 As we all know, one of AVA's key missions is to ensure a resilient supply of safe food. Food supply resilience is inextricably linked to food security, which is the latest buzzword in the food industry, both locally and globally. We are very familiar with the trends which threaten global food security. These include: rising world populations, the effects of climate change, competition for scarce land use, just to name a few.

3 In Singapore, we are particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in global food supply and prices, as we import more than 90% of our food. Ensuring our food supply resilience in today's climate of increasing population and limited land space has become more challenging for all of us.

4 To this end, the Ministry of National Development (MND) and AVA have implemented several key measures. Firstly, we have and will continue to diversify our food sources. We encourage our private sector to explore upstream food production process overseas. A case in point is the Food Zone project in Jilin City where AVA is providing technical advice on establishing a Disease-Free Zone in Yongji County. The Singapore Food Industries is setting up an integrated pig farm, while Singbridge is conducting a feasibility study to develop the Food Zone, which is twice the size of Singapore.

5 Secondly, AVA is also in the midst of developing our strategic local agricultural sectors. Last year, AVA launched the \$5 million Food Fund to sponsor food R&D and industry capability development. Local farms can tap on the Food Fund to maximise farm production through automation and the implementation of new technology.

6 I am pleased to learn that response from the industry has been positive. AVA received 48 proposals when the application closed in March this year. These proposals are currently being assessed by AVA's Technical Evaluation Panel. We target to announce the successful applicants by October this year.

7 Thirdly, AVA is taking a more active approach in engaging its key stakeholders. These include our consumers, industry partners, local and overseas authorities, as well as international bodies. To reflect this change in approach, AVA's new organisational structure, which was implemented on 1 April 2010, has both a regulatory arm and an industry development arm which work closely together to further our collaboration and partnership with our local producers, food traders and tertiary & research institutes.

Maintaining High Standards of Food Safety

8 In strengthening our food supply resilience, it is also essential to maintain high standards of food safety. AVA will continue to ensure that food safety standards and import requirements are maintained, in line with international standards and best practices, even as it accredits more supply zones and establishments in other countries.

9 At the same time, I strongly encourage the industry and consumers to play their part so that food safety is a seamless continuum, that is, from farm to fork. This evening's gathering is most apt as we recognise the efforts which you have put in to achieve high standards of food safety.

Food Safety Excellence Awards

10 Let me now congratulate the 24 companies which will be receiving the Gold Food Safety Excellence Award for the first time. Maintaining 15 consecutive years of 'A' grading is no easy feat. I salute these companies which have made the effort to continually maintain and even improve on the food safety standards at their various factory premises.

11 I would also like to congratulate the other award recipients for your efforts in producing safe and quality food. I hope that you will continue to keep up the good work so that in the years to come, we will see even more companies in the Gold Award list.

Food Safety Excellence Logo

12 To mark this special occasion, I am pleased to announce that AVA will introduce a new Food Safety Excellence logo as a mark of the high food safety standards that companies have achieved. This will be used as a differentiating factor for local food companies which have maintained at least 5 consecutive years of 'A' grading.

Food Safety Partners

13 I would also like to take the opportunity to commend AVA's Food Safety Partners for their continuous efforts in promoting food safety education. This year, we are happy to welcome Nestle Singapore (Pte) Ltd as our latest Food Safety Partner, bringing the total number of partners to 11.

14 These Partners have made commendable efforts to disseminate food safety tips to consumers through their product packaging, publicity materials and events, including collaboration with AVA in its food safety public education programme. The latest effort was the launch of the Food Safety Bus, which will soon be travelling islandwide to spread the word on food safety.

15 With the addition of Nestle Singapore, we now have a total of 11 Food Safety Partners. I hope that more companies will follow in the footsteps of these role models.

16 Of course, we must not forget that all of us, as consumers, must do our part to ensure that the food safety chain remains unbroken. We can do so by adopting the recommended food handling practices being promoted by AVA and its Food Safety partners to prevent food safety problems from occurring at home. In the months to come, AVA will be working closely with its partners to educate the public on "Food Safety When Shopping".

Conclusion

17 Let me conclude by reiterating that food safety involves everybody in the food chain. The Government, the industry players and suppliers, and the consumers all have an important role to play in ensuring that Singaporeans continue to enjoy a resilient supply of safe food. By working together, we can strive for greater excellence in our food safety standards.

18 Thank you.