

Speech by Mr Lee Yi Shyan, Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry & Ministry of National Development at AVA's Food Safety Awards Night on 22 July 2011 at 8pm, Grand Ballroom, Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel

Mr Koh Soo Keong, Chairman, Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority

Ms Tan Poh Hong, CEO, AVA

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Good evening. I am pleased to join you tonight to celebrate the achievements of our local food industry in food safety excellence.

Ensuring Food Supply Resilience – AVA's Food Fund

2. Food security is becoming an increasingly important topic globally. Governments worldwide are grappling with food security issues such as rising food prices, food supply disruptions and food safety problems.

3. As a net food importer and price taker, Singapore is vulnerable to the global food situation. We cannot lightly dismiss global occurrences such as devastating crop failures and food safety scares. Instead, we must continue to strive to ensure that our food supply remains safe and resilient.

4. In 2009, the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (or AVA) launched the Food Fund to boost efforts in food source diversification and local production. The inaugural launch of the Food Fund attracted good response. From the 48 applications received, AVA awarded a total of nearly \$6 million to 15 projects.

5. I am pleased to note that the projects have begun to yield results. Let me now share two such projects with you.

6. Kok Fah Technology Farm, a local vegetable farm, has used the Food Fund to upgrade its capabilities by adopting packaging technology and automating the packing process. These initiatives enabled Kok Fah to improve the quality of produce for the market and raise its farm productivity.

7. MPG, a coastal fish farm, has overcome the perennial challenge of fish kills due to low oxygen levels. It received funding from the Food Fund to establish a water quality monitoring system to collect data and provide real time warning alerts on impending threats such as algal blooms. This allows the farm to implement timely measures to protect its fish stocks. In addition, the data generated is shared with AVA, and can be used to alert other fish farms.

8. I am pleased to announce that AVA will launch a second tranche of \$10 million under its Food Fund programme in August 2011. This second tranche will include two new R&D components, namely, a Challenge Call for R&D projects to tackle specific key challenges faced by the industry such as waste management and disease detection, and an Open Call for all other R&D projects to allow new ideas and innovative projects to surface. More details will be announced by AVA in due course.

Food Safety as a Shared Responsibility

9. An important component of ensuring our food security is food safety. The recent radioactive contamination of fruits and vegetables from Japan and the DEHP contamination of processed food from Taiwan have reminded us that we cannot take food safety for granted. We need to stay vigilant.

10. Food safety is a shared responsibility. At the regulatory level, AVA has, over the years, established a robust, integrated food safety system which ensures that high food safety standards are maintained.

11. To further tighten our food safety net down the food chain from “farm to fork”, AVA will be implementing a programme to register and better regulate food storage warehouses in Singapore. This will help enhance food traceability and enable AVA to promptly notify warehouses should there be a need for immediate recall of affected products in the event of a major food crisis.

12. At the industry level, I am pleased to learn that food manufacturers are committed to maintaining high food safety standards. Tonight, the Food Safety Excellence Awards will be given out to recognise your exemplary efforts and achievements in producing safe and quality food. There are an additional 14 award recipients this year.

13. I would also like to commend AVA's Food Safety Partners for making the effort to educate the public on food safety. This year, we are happy to welcome Abbott Manufacturing Singapore Private Limited and Acelink Logistics Pte Ltd as our new Food Safety partners. Our existing partners - Chop Hup Chong Food Industries, Cold Storage Singapore, KSB Distribution, NTUC Fairprice, Pfizer's Nutrition Division, Seo Eng Joo Frozen Food and Thong Siek Food Industry will all be renewing their partnerships with AVA. I hope that more companies will follow in the footsteps of these exemplary companies.

14. At the consumers' level, there is increasing awareness and willingness to adopt good food safety practices. This year, AVA's public education efforts will focus on the theme of "Food Safety in School and at Work". A series of outreach activities such as exhibitions and talks at libraries, schools, workplaces, and community events will be conducted to bring our food safety messages to the consumers.

Collaboration with Industry

15. Beyond food safety, working closely with the industry has enabled AVA to better understand industry needs and provide a pro-business environment for industry stakeholders.

16. AVA has formed two taskforces with the Singapore Food Manufacturers' Association and Singapore Manufacturers' Federation to look into facilitating the export of locally manufactured food and educating consumers on food safety. Such collaborations have yielded tangible benefits such as significant cost savings to the food industry. For example, two areas where the taskforces have reviewed include the cost structure for food export certificates for processed food products, and AVA's laboratory analytical fees for fishery products for export to EU countries.

17. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Sunny Koh of the Singapore Manufacturers' Federation, and Mr Wong Mong Hong and Mr Jimmy Soh of the Singapore Food Manufacturers' Association for co-chairing these two taskforces, as well as the rest of the taskforce members for their valuable contributions.

Conclusion

18. In conclusion, to deal with global food supply and food safety threats effectively, the Government, industry and consumers must work in unison to collectively address the challenges. It is indeed heartening to note that this tripartite partnership is working well. Let me urge all parties to continue to work together to achieve our common goals of food supply resilience and food safety for Singapore.

19. Thank you.