

National Youth Council (NYC) x Singapore Polytechnic (SP) Webinar Series

Webinar #3 - Food for Thought: Ensuring Singapore's Food Security

8 May 2024 | Online (Zoom)

On 8 May 2024, 788 youths from Singapore Polytechnic (SP) gathered for a webinar focused on the importance of food security. The session allowed students to understand i) the importance of food security in Singapore's context; ii) the current vulnerabilities in Singapore's food supply chain and efforts to enhance its food security; and iii) ways for youths to partner with the Government and community to contribute to Singapore's food security.

This session was co-organised by SP and the National Youth Council (NYC), and involved the following the following panellists:

- Ms Joycelyn Ng, Director, Community Partnerships, Singapore Food Authority
- Mr Zac Toh, NYC INSPIRIT Member and Director, City Sprouts
- (Moderator) Mr Ramesh Kumar, NYC INSPIRIT Member and Board Director of *SCAPE SG

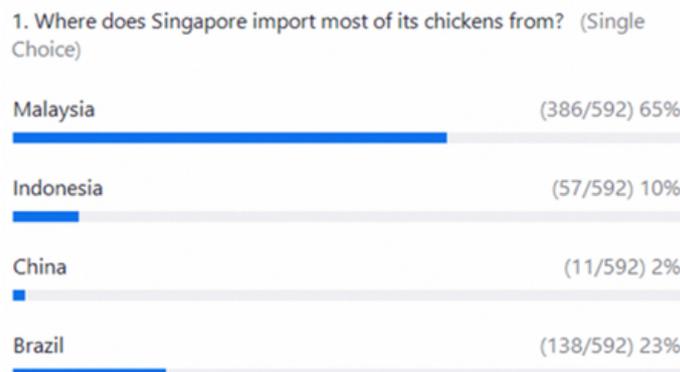


Context Setting by Singapore Food Agency (SFA)

- Ms Ng shared that the effects of climate change had impacted crop stability worldwide, consequently affecting Singapore's food security.
- Ms Ng shared SFA's multi-pronged approach for food security: (i) diversifying import sources, and (ii) increasing local food production to reduce import dependence.
- She said that everyone was responsible for ensuring Singapore's food security and shared the **Adapt, Buy, and Consume (ABCs)** approach to ensure food security: (i) adapt - to be adaptable and flexible with food options, (ii) buy - to buy and keep reasonable amounts of non-perishable food for emergencies, and (iii) consume - to consume only what is needed and consider alternatives.

(i) Importance of Food Security in Singapore

The session started with ice-breaker polls -
“Where does Singapore import most of its chicken from?”



- From the Zoom poll, most students (65%) responded that Malaysia was Singapore's main source of chicken imports. Ms Ng shared that Brazil was Singapore's main source of chicken imports, noting that Brazil produces the highest amount of poultry globally.

“Do you believe that Singapore is adequately prepared to handle food shortages or disruptions in the future?”

2. Do you believe that Singapore is adequately prepared to handle food shortages or disruptions in the future? (Single Choice)



- From the Zoom poll, the top answers from the students were “Maybe” (44%) and “Yes” (38%) with some students (18%) responding “No”. Mr Toh shared that Singapore was, at present, not adequately prepared to handle food shortages, as the local food supply ecosystem was not robust enough. He shared that more innovation in local food production would be necessary to achieve Singapore’s 30-by-30¹ targets.

1) Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar QnA) why food security was crucial to Singapore.

- Ms Ng said that food was a fundamental need for survival and as such Singaporeans must remain conscious of the country’s food security. She said that the Government continued to ensure that Singapore had diverse food supplies feed its people adequately.

2) Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar QnA) if there were international metrics used to assess a country’s level of food security.

- Ms Ng said that some of the key elements of assessing the food security of a country include (i) availability and accessibility to various food types to meet demands adequately, (ii) food quality and safety, and (iii) stability of the country. She said that Singapore ranked significantly high for food security in the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) by The Economist².

3) Participants asked (via Pre-Webinar Questionnaire) about the difference between food security and food resilience.

- Ms Ng said that food security meant ensuring consistent access to adequate and safe food under normal circumstances, while food resilience focused on the ability of the food supply chain to withstand and respond to disruptions.

(ii) Current vulnerabilities in Singapore’s food supply chain and efforts to enhance Singapore’s food security.

4) Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar QnA) about the impact of the ongoing war in the Middle East, and rising tensions between global powers on Singapore’s food security. They also asked about measures taken to protect Singapore’s food security.

- Ms Ng said that diversification was key to ensuring Singapore’s food security amidst rising global tensions. She shared that the Government was constantly seeking out new sources that met Singapore’s food safety requirements for food imports, with the aim to maintain a variety of food options for Singaporeans.
- She said that despite having food reserves, Singaporeans should still adopt the ABC framework to ensure Singapore’s food security.

¹Singapore’s goal to build up the agri-food industry’s capability and capacity to sustainably produce 30% of the local nutritional needs by 2030.

²The Economist is a British weekly newspaper published in printed magazine and digitally. It focuses on current affairs, international business, politics, technology, and culture.

5) Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar QnA) about the food imports that would be most significantly affected by external factors, such as political tensions or climate change.

- Ms Ng shared that there was a significant demand for eggs in Singapore, and the Government had secured over 10 different sources for egg imports to meet this demand. She also shared that Singapore was expanding its local egg farming industry to increase the domestic supply.
- Ms Ng said that while Singapore's food security is generally safeguarded, the Government continued to have measures in place to ensure steady supplies from diverse sources.

6) Participants asked (via Pre-Zoom Questionnaire) about farming methods that were most suitable for Singapore to ensure Singapore's food security.

- Mr Toh said that the most viable farming method was outdoor controlled greenhouses, which provided a comparative advantage over other farming methods by reducing electrical and manpower costs. He shared that local farmers used operational costs as a metric to determine the long-term viability of their businesses, and techniques like indoor farming and rooftop farming were less cost-effective.
- Mr Toh also shared that the Government encouraged local farmers to adopt outdoor controlled greenhouse farming by issuing a series of tenders and the Lim Chu Kang Masterplan³.
- Ms Ng said that it was important for local farmers to find a balance between experimentation, upscaling and openness to different approaches to ensure their long-term viability.

(iii) Ways for youths to partner with the Government and the community

7) Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar QnA) how Singaporeans could be encouraged to opt for local produce.

- Mr Toh shared that raising awareness for locally grown food was important to help Singaporeans distinguish them from imported food. He also said that farmers needed to adopt sustainable business practices such as producing in-demand foods at competitive prices.
- Ms Ng said that it was important to support local businesses to sustain Singapore's farming industry and decrease the country's dependency on imported food. She said that while local produce might be more expensive, it was also fresher, of high quality, and was more environmentally sustainable, as it incurred fewer transport miles).
- Mr Kumar shared that Singapore's food production was significantly lower due to the lack of demand. He added that local farmers could leverage science and technology to explore innovative production methods to overcome existing constraints in the local farming industry.

6) Participants asked (via Zoom Webinar QnA) how they could learn farming technology, to be involved in the local farming scene.

- Mr Toh said that youths interested in urban farming could join related communities to expand their networks and learn from experienced mentors and professionals. He also shared that there were platforms and organisations like City Sprouts, that provided support for young Singaporean farmers to experiment with innovative farming methods to grow their businesses.

³Lim Chu Kang Masterplan is a multi-staged redevelopment plan of the Lim Chu Kang area into a high-tech agri-food zone for sustainable food production, thus safeguarding Singapore's food security.