

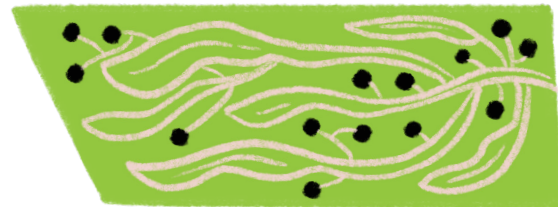
# Increasing demand for local produce in Singapore:



## It begins with our citizens

Ensuring food security in Singapore requires a whole-of-nation effort. Singapore currently has about 1% of land available for food production and imports over 90% of its domestic food consumption. Internationally, the effects of climate change continue to pose risks to Singapore’s food supply chains. Faced with similar challenges of diminishing food production capacity and meeting demands for local produce, some of Singapore’s trading partners may also resort to reducing food exports or increasing prices.

In 2019, the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) and its parent ministry, the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE), unveiled the “30-by-30” vision to safeguard against these threats and reduce dependence on food imports. This vision aims to build up our agri-food industry’s capability and capacity to sustainably produce 30% of our nutritional needs by 2030.



## Co-creating solutions with the public

In working towards the “30-by-30” vision, SFA launched initiatives to support local producers to increase supply through funding and partnerships. However, as Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment Amy Khor emphasised:

***Increasing supply is just one side of the equation. If our farmers are willing to increase supply but there is no uptake, no demand, then there is really no incentive for the farmers to increase their local production.<sup>1</sup>***

<sup>1</sup> Cara Wong, “Demand for local produce must complement supply in local food production: Amy Khor”, The Straits Times, July 18, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/demand-for-local-produce-must-complement-supply-in-local-food-production-amy>

This case study was written by Chan Jia Hao and John Emmanuel Villanueva, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, with contributions and interviews with the Singapore Food Agency. The case is sponsored by Singapore’s Ministry of Community, Culture and Youth. The case does not reflect the views of the sponsoring organization nor is it intended to suggest correct or incorrect handling of the situation depicted. The case is not intended to serve as a primary source of data and is meant solely for class discussion.

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MSE's year-long campaign "2020: Singapore Food Story" sought to raise awareness of issues surrounding Singapore's food security. SFA took the opportunity to convene a citizens' workgroup ('workgroup') on increasing demand for local produce from July to October that year. The workgroup sought to generate a range of workable recommendations and implementable projects on increasing support for local produce which would be championed by the public. Doing so could boost citizens' capacity to engage with industry partners and the wider public.

The formation of a workgroup was welcomed by the public: nearly 400 people signed up when SFA issued its public call for citizens' participation, despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a selection process based on submitted statements of interest, 50 citizens were invited to form the workgroup. These 50 citizens were selected to ensure a diverse range of skillsets, perspectives and interests in local produce. As Joycelyn Ng, Director of the Community Partnership Department at SFA, described:

*We had a chef, and then we had people (from) overseas and they (had) worked (on) a farm before, or they had some F&B (food and beverage) background...Some people were also homemakers or retirees but were interested in cooking and buying (from) local.<sup>2</sup>*



## Preparing for the citizens' workgroup

Planning and facilitating an effective workgroup posed challenges for the organising team. Unlike other traditional community engagements, the organising team had to approach the workgroup with the aim of co-creating solutions with the participants. The workgroup was tasked with ideating potential solutions that could be used to engage with local producers and general public to gauge feasibility.

SFA's role was to kickstart the workgroup's journey through facilitated discussions, and providing coordination and administrative support to table the proposals developed with the industry. SFA sought to strengthen their capabilities by reaching out to colleagues in other departments as resource persons. SFA also sent the organising team for a training course to learn about the fundamentals of a citizens' jury. These boosted their confidence in rendering support to the workgroup.



<sup>2</sup> Joycelyn Ng, interview by Chan Jia Hao, LKYSPF interview with the Singapore Food Agency, February 8, 2023

## Convening the workgroup amidst COVID-19

The workgroup engagements were initially conceptualised as four in-person sessions across consecutive weekends. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions on physical gatherings, the workgroup had to meet virtually at the start, and later transitioned to in-person sessions when restrictions were lifted. The workgroup members met over six sessions: the first four were online, the fifth was a hybrid set-up, while the sixth and last session was in-person.

The organising team defined a problem statement: How might we creatively boost the market demand for Singapore's local produce?<sup>3</sup> The organising team developed an information kit detailing past and current efforts in promoting support for local produce among consumers<sup>4</sup> to familiarise the participants with Singapore's agri-food industry and food security challenges. The virtual sessions focused on generating ideas on elevating the demand for local produce.

Initially, the sessions were scoped to:

### Sessions 1 & 2:

Define aims of the workgroup, build consensus on expectations and form sub-teams that focused on different issues

### Session 3:

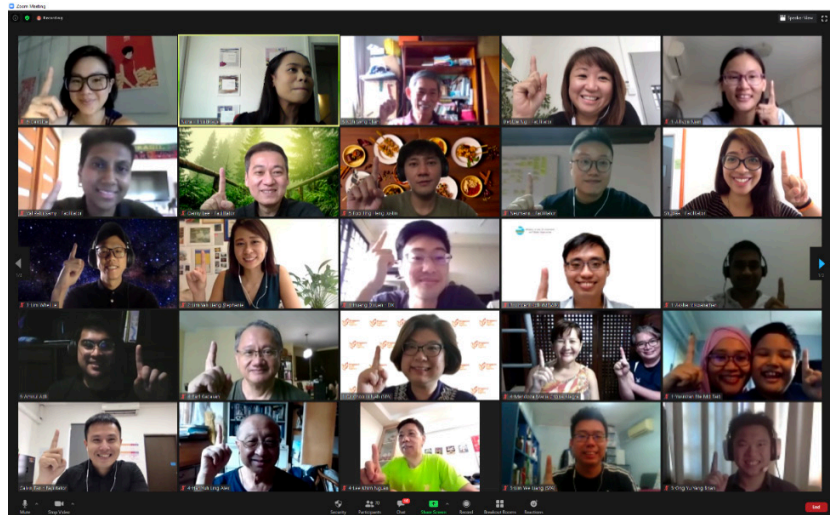
Field trip to selected farms to learn more about local produce

### Session 4:

Generate ideas and discuss potential solutions

### Session 5 and 6:

Prototype ideas



Participants attending the first session of the workgroup on Zoom

Due to COVID-19, Session 3's field trip was revised to accommodate the pandemic restrictions. Instead, SFA held a virtual panel sharing by a group of farmers to speak with the workgroup and answer the questions they had. The workgroup also leveraged digital tools: Zoom as the meeting platform; Google Drive for sharing documents and concurrent working on slides; MURAL as a collaborative platform to discuss issues and generate ideas; and Whatsapp for accessible group communication. With the easing of restrictions, the workgroup finally met in-person to prototype, consolidate and present their ideas to each other. This helped in their preparation of the final workgroup report and recommendations. The workgroup also had the opportunity to visit an urban farm during the MSE-SFA response session to the workgroup's proposal.

Throughout all sessions, participants could join one of six groups, with each group focusing on different ideas based on participants' interests. At the end of the workgroup in October 2020, the following proposals were received from the participant groups:

- 1 **LoveSGMums Meal (LSGM)**
- 2 **Instachef Smart Meal Box**
- 3 **Increase Awareness and Visibility of Local Produce @ Wet Markets**
- 4 **"Snip & Go" Harvest Your Own Produce**
- 5 **Centralized Neutral Platform**
- 6 **SG Fresh Mobile App**

<sup>3</sup> "Citizens' workgroup engagement report: Increasing demand for local produce", Singapore Food Agency (SFA), Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) and ThinkPlace

<sup>4</sup> "Response to recommendations from the citizens' workgroup on increasing demand for local produce", Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment and Singapore Food Agency, <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/mse-and-sfa-response-report9719017b3b8c4e80b043f68a8ec9e1ab.pdf>



# The workgroup and further public engagement

As the workgroup was finalising their ideas, SFA worked with them to conduct a public poll through SFA’s social media channels. The poll invited the general public to vote on the ideas, and leave feedback for the workgroup’s consideration.

The workgroup developed infographics to provide bite-sized information to the public for ease of understanding and voting. This poll served as a dipstick test on consumers’ receptiveness towards their ideas.

The campaign was well-received, with over 200,000 users reached across 6 polls and 500 votes cast. Determined to retain public interest and promote wider participation, the team livestreamed the workgroup’s final presentation session on SFA’s Facebook page.



An example of a public poll post and its infographics on SFA’s Instagram page

The citizens’ engagement did not end after the workgroup’s final presentation in October 2020. The various groups’ recommendations were studied by SFA and classified under four different themes on increasing demand for local produce: (1) education and building awareness; (2) user experience; (3) product design; and (4) demand aggregation. Two out of the six proposals were eventually identified as potentially implementable pilot projects: (1) LSGM; and (2) Increase Awareness & Visibility of Local Produce @ Wet Markets.



One of the groups pitching their idea to the rest of the workgroup audience during the final session held in October 2020 | Source: Report by members of the citizens’ workgroup

SFA’s feedback form on citizens’ workgroup ideas for the public to give feedback/suggestions on each group’s ideas.



The LSGM project under the education and building awareness theme was officially launched by Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu in March 2022.<sup>6</sup> First conceptualised as a quarterly campaign promoting the use of local produce in new mothers’ first meal after delivery, the LSGM project was fine-tuned and blossomed into a fruitful collaboration between SFA, the workgroup participants including celebrity chef Justin Foo, Thomson Medical Centre, and the Singapore Agro-Food Enterprises Federation Limited (SAFEF).

<sup>6</sup> “Pilot project to promote the use of local produce in hospital meals for new mothers takes off”, Media Release, Singapore Food Agency, March 18, 2022, <https://www.sfa.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sfa-media-release---launch-of-lovesgmums-meal.pdf>.

The LSGM incorporated local produce into specially curated menus designed by chef Justin Foo for post-partum mothers at the maternity hospital. Alongside the meals, the team also designed collaterals that provided information on nutritional benefits, the merits of local farms and retail options for local produce.



A prototype brochure designed under the LSGM pilot project for new mothers, detailing information such as the source of local produce used, nutritional values, and the team behind the creation of the meal | Source: Report by members of the citizens' workgroup

Meanwhile, the Increase Awareness & Visibility of Local Produce @ Wet Markets project aimed to increase the public's awareness of local produce by increasing local produce's visibility in wet markets. As explained by the group, "increasing local produce visibility will allow those wet market-goers who are already seeking out local produce to easily find them, while acting as a further nudge to those who are considering local produce."

## Reflections from workgroup participants

In their reflections, several participants recognised the importance of such a citizens' platform to reinforce a shared responsibility between the government and citizens for Singapore's food security, through co-developing solutions. Some participants mentioned that online communication was challenging and made it difficult to establish bonds with their team members. Others said that they learnt how to be patient when listening to others and how to be proactive in sharing their own ideas. They saw how insights from diverse stakeholders led to more fulfilling outcomes.

Nearly 90% of the workgroup indicated that they felt more confident about and had better knowledge of Singapore's efforts to increase demand for local produce. Consequently, nearly 80% of the workgroup expressed willingness to continue working on the recommendations proposed with their fellow participants, industry partners and relevant agencies. About the same proportion of the workgroup indicated that they were confident that other Singaporeans would support the workgroup's recommendation.

Finally, most participants felt that the government was serious and proactive about effectively engaging citizens, as demonstrated through the time and resources spent to gather views from the ground.



## Reflections from the organising team<sup>8</sup>



The organising team shared the following key takeaways about the citizens' workgroup:

Deliberative engagements strengthen the partnership between government and citizens. The citizens' workgroup paved the way for citizens to build collaborative relationships and co-create solutions with the government and other stakeholders.

Setting clear expectations and scoping discussions are key to deliberative engagement. The organising team conveyed clear expectations at the start: that discussions should focus on the demand for local produce, rather than supply. They scoped discussions around the problem statement and reminded participants to focus on ideas to increase demand for local produce.

Diversity and representation are critical in a citizens' workgroup. The participants, coming from diverse backgrounds, proposed a wide range of ideas, and discussed based on various perspectives, priorities and concerns.

Reflecting on their experience handling the first four sessions in a virtual setup, the organising team shared these learning points:

### Be well-prepared for virtual engagements.

For future virtual sessions, it is crucial to have an IT team on standby to provide technical support and assist less digitally savvy participants. Given the short attention span of participants on a digital platform, the duration of online engagements should be kept short (i.e. two to three hours). Virtual tools like MURAL can help in keeping participants engaged and sustaining their interest.



### Tap on social media to increase public engagement.

Soliciting feedback and comments on the six groups' ideas by sharing a series of Facebook and Instagram posts and livestreaming the last session on group presentations expanded public engagement beyond the citizens' workgroup. These virtual initiatives should be continued to allow more members of the public to be involved with co-creating solutions with the government and other stakeholders.



<sup>8</sup> "Citizens' workgroup on increasing demand for local produce", Singapore Food Agency, 12 August 2021.