

Jamus Lim: Coffeeshop meals cost between \$0.20 to \$1 higher in Sengkang versus other mature estates like Ang Mo Kio

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SINGAPORE: During recent house visits, Workers' Party MP Jamus Lim (Sengkang GRC) talked to residents about a number of topics, but said that their "conversations drifted to the general topic of food."

In a Mar 14 (Tuesday) Facebook post, Assoc Prof Lim wrote that he has brought up two issues in Parliament regarding food recently: the shortage of halal food options and the high prices of coffeeshop food in Sengkang in comparison to other places.

"A bunch of volunteers and I gathered data on prices, and we've managed to confirm that equivalent meals cost between \$0.20 to \$1 higher in Sengkang (and, on average, around \$0.50 more), versus other mature estates like Ang Mo Kio (where we got the most data from)," he wrote.

Part of his post was an infographic from ***Today*** showing the average cost of three meals at kopitiams, food courts, and hawker centres, which showed that the average price at Sengkang is \$17.32, whereas, at Ang Mo Kio, it's \$16.83.

Assoc Prof Lim added that one of his suspicions regarding the discrepancy concerns the bidding process for new coffeeshops "(where the contract is awarded to the highest bidder, and costs are then simply passed on to consumers)."

"As it turns out, a much more systematic study—reported yesterday—corroborates this result, down to the discrepancy between Sengkang and Ang Mo Kio (the difference was \$0.49)," he added.

When Assoc Prof Lim suggested in Parliament that the current bidding model be reconsidered, Senior Minister of State for National Development Sim Ann said that a number of different factors are considered in determining hawker food prices, and the government deems the present approach requiring more budget options suffices.

But Assoc Prof Lim pointed out that her response does not answer the issue of consumers having to shoulder price increases due to high bids, "nor does it answer the question of why there appears to be a distinction between pricing in mature versus nonmature estates," adding that the WP MPs "will continue to push for a deeper examination on this front in the months ahead."

Ms Sim Ann's response to Assoc Prof Lim may be found here. /TISG