

Workgroup on Sustaining the Hawker Trade Report

Submitted to the National Environment Agency on 24 Nov 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1. INTRODUCTION: Sustaining the Hawker Trade.....	7
2. ENGAGEMENT: Bringing the Hawker Community and its Stakeholders Together	9
2.1 First Meeting: Brainstorming Ideas for the Workgroup’s Agenda	9
2.2 Engaging the Hawkers Around Us.....	10
2.3 Focus Groups with Stakeholders	10
2.4 Inaugural Hawkers’ Seminar	10
3. FINDINGS: Identifying Key Challenges for Different Stakeholders.....	12
3.1 Negative Public Perception of Hawker Trade	12
3.2 While Barriers to Entry for New Entrants are Low, it is Not Easy to Sustain	12
3.3 Challenges in the Transmission of Food Culinary Skills from One Generation to the Next	12
3.4 Business Challenges for the Hawker Trade	13
3.5 Limited Support for Stall-level Productivity Equipment	14
4. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	15
4.1 Refresh Narrative on Hawker Trade to Attract New Entrants.....	15
4.1.1 Use Digital Media to Change the Public’s Perception of the Hawker Profession	15
4.1.2 Provide Resources and Platforms to Encourage the Public to Create Online Content to Celebrate and Share our Hawker Culture and Profile their Favourite Hawkers	15
4.2 Support New and Existing Hawkers Through Relevant Training Programmes	16
4.2.1 Hawkers’ Development Programme (HDP) Comprising Training, Apprenticeship and Incubation.....	16
4.2.2 Early Exposure of Hawker Culture to the Youths	18
4.3 Alleviate Manpower Challenges through Productivity Initiatives and Policy Review	19
4.3.1 Encourage Hawkers to use Automation	19
4.3.2 Review Manpower Policy for Hawker Assistants	19
4.4 Celebrate Hawker Culture and Honour Hawker Legends	20
4.4.1 Hawker Awards to Recognise Hawkers’ Efforts and Achievements	20
4.4.2 Prestigious “Hawker Legend” Award	20
4.5 Build Up Industry Platforms to Facilitate Networking and Cross-learning Among Hawkers ..	20
4.5.1 Regular Platforms to Facilitate Hawker-to-Hawker Sharing and Learning	20
4.5.2 Online Guided Journey for Aspiring and New Hawkers, with Hawkers’ Best Practices and Advice from Veteran and Experienced Hawkers.....	20

5. CONCLUSION	21
ANNEX A	22
Composition and Profile of Members	22

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Workgroup on Sustaining the Hawker Trade would like to thank the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) and the National Environment Agency (NEA) for the support and opportunity for us to provide our views on what can be done to sustain the hawker trade. We are pleased to contribute ideas that can help expand the range of skills of both new and existing hawkers, enhance the sustainability of the hawker trade, as well as elevate the image of hawkers into a potential profession of choice for the future generations. While this report focuses on the sustainability of our hawker food and the trade itself, the Workgroup acknowledges the importance of our markets which sell fresh produce and understands that MSE/NEA is separately looking into this area.

We would like to express our gratitude to the following organisations for their inputs and contributions to the Workgroup:

- The Federation of Merchants' Associations, Singapore (FMAS)
- SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG)
- Enterprise Singapore (ESG)
- Institute of Technical Education College (West)

We would also like to express our appreciation to all our fellow hawkers who have so kindly provided their feedback and suggestions in one way or the other. Your comments have helped to shape our recommendations, and we would like to thank you for being a part of our precious national heritage. Amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic, our hawkers have been working tirelessly to provide Singaporeans with our beloved hawker food and essential market produce. We are appreciative of your hard work during this challenging period and believe that we can make our hawker trade even more sustainable and resilient after this.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hawkers are the heart and soul of our hawker centres.

Our hawker centres have transformed over the years from being simple functional spaces built to re-settle street hawkers, to community dining rooms where family and friends gather to bond over a meal. The hawkers themselves, many of whom had humble beginnings, embody the very spirit of resilience and adaptability that is distinctively Singaporean. It is thus imperative for us to work together to sustain the hawker trade, and safeguard our hawker culture.

The Workgroup comprises hawkers, stall assistants, academia, MSE/NEA representatives and various hawker food advocates. With multiple stakeholders forming the Workgroup, we came together to discuss challenges faced by the hawkers and brainstormed possible solutions that could potentially address these challenges. Workgroup members who are hawkers themselves have helped to engage their fellow hawkers and gathered further ideas that were then discussed at the Workgroup.

Over the past months, the Workgroup came up with a series of recommendations which we have shared with MSE/NEA, including programmes which were readily adopted early in the process. The full set of the Workgroup's recommendations is as follows:

Five Key Areas of Recommendation by the Workgroup on Sustaining the Hawker Trade

A) Refresh the Narrative on Hawker Trade to Attract New Entrants

- 1) Use digital media to change the public's perception of the hawker profession.
- 2) Provide resources and platforms to encourage the public to create online content to celebrate and share our hawker culture, and profile their favourite hawkers.

B) Support New and Existing Hawkers with Relevant Training Programmes

- 3) Implement a Hawkers' Development Programme (HDP), comprising training, apprenticeship and incubation, to facilitate new hawkers' entry into the hawker trade as well as expand existing hawkers' skillsets.
- 4) Collaborate with tertiary and/or culinary institutions to expose the younger generation to hawker culture, through codifying hawker food recipes and organising sharing sessions by experienced hawkers, with the intention to facilitate attachment and/or internship opportunities at selected hawker stalls.

C) Alleviate Manpower Challenges through Productivity Initiatives and Policy Review

5) Broaden the funding scope under NEA's current Hawkers' Productivity Grant (HPG) to include tools beyond kitchen automation, and extend the HPG beyond 2020 so that more hawkers can benefit from it.

6) Look into expanding the pool of potential hawker assistants to better support the hawker trade, while taking into account what hawker centres and hawker culture mean to Singaporeans.

D) Celebrate Hawker Culture and Honour Hawker Legends

7) Establish a series of hawker awards to recognise hawkers' efforts and celebrate achievements in various areas for both new and experienced hawkers.

8) Have a prestigious "Hawker Legend" award, which represents the highest accolade for hawkers, to be given to exceptional hawkers who have dedicated many years and/or contributed significantly to the hawker trade.

E) Foster a Strong Hawkers Network and Facilitate Peer-learning among Hawkers

9) Hold regular platforms to facilitate hawker-to-hawker sharing and learning.

10) Develop an online guided journey for aspiring and new hawkers, including videos and/or guides on becoming a hawker, best practices and know-how from

1. INTRODUCTION: Sustaining the Hawker Trade

Hawker culture, which includes hawker centres as social and community spaces, hawkers, who are bearers of hawker culinary practices, and multicultural hawker food, is an essential part of our Singapore identity. Over the years, hawker centres have become a central fixture of the Singaporean way of life, serving as community dining rooms where people of different races, religions and diverse backgrounds come together and bond over their love of good hawker food.

With hawker culture being an integral part of our Singapore identity, the Government had submitted its nomination in early 2019 to inscribe our hawker culture on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

With changes in consumer trends and operating environment, it was necessary to look into ways to improve our hawker centres and sustain the hawker trade. Efforts have been made to improve our hawker centres to provide a more conducive environment for hawkers to operate in, as well as enhance the dining experience of patrons. Various policies have also been put in place to help hawkers, such as keeping rentals affordable and providing incentives to improve productivity.



In January 2016, the then-Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MEWR) formed the Hawker Centre 3.0 (HC 3.0) Committee, chaired by Senior Minister of State (Environment and Water Resources) Dr Amy Khor, to review and make recommendations to the Government on the management of hawker centres and the sustainability of the hawker trade.

In November 2018, then-MEWR and NEA organised a dialogue session on Sustaining Hawker Trade and Safeguarding Hawker Culture to seek feedback and suggestions from various stakeholders, including the HC 3.0 Committee Members and selected hawkers. During the session, the participants suggested to form ground-up workgroups to look at issues related to the hawker trade and culture.

In April 2019, the Workgroup on Sustaining the Hawker Trade was formed. Co-chaired by Mr Edward Chia (Managing Director of Timbre Group) and Mr Lim Gek Meng (a veteran hawker, Vice-President of the FMAS, and Chairman of the Chinatown Complex Hawkers' Association), the Workgroup comprised hawkers, stall assistants, academia, MEWR/NEA representatives and various hawker food advocates. The Workgroup met regularly over a one-year period to discuss challenges faced by hawkers as well as possible solutions, including how to attract and

train new hawkers, ways to support the existing and new hawkers, and to change the public's perception of the hawker trade.

In recent months, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted our economy, as countries imposed tight border restrictions in an attempt to control the spread of the virus. In Singapore, the food and beverage (F&B) industry was affected when dining-in in food establishments was disallowed during the Circuit Breaker period, with takeaways and food delivery becoming the only means for businesses in the F&B industry to continue their operations. Likewise, many hawkers had to jump-start their journey into adopting digital services and adjust to the 'new normal' during the COVID 19 pandemic. This crisis has clearly accentuated the importance for hawkers to be adaptable and to stay relevant by adopting technology and digital services.

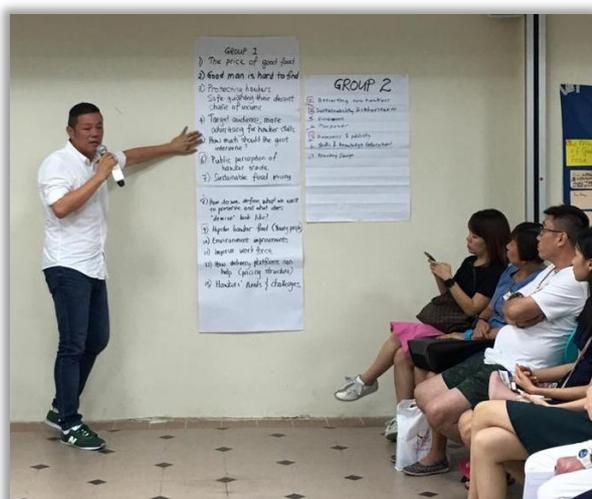
2. ENGAGEMENT: Bringing the Hawker Community and its Stakeholders Together

2.1 First Meeting: Brainstorming Ideas for the Workgroup's Agenda

The first Workgroup meeting was conducted in April 2019 as a workshop, to solicit the Workgroup members' views on the challenges faced by hawkers and preliminary ideas on ways to sustain the hawker trade. The views and suggestions helped to formulate the agenda and set the roadmap for the subsequent meetings.



The Workgroup was split into two smaller discussion groups. The participants discussed the key challenges for hawkers and potential ideas to address these challenges.



Mr Joe Sng, Group General Manager, Fei Siong Group of companies, also a member of the Workgroup, sharing his group's thoughts about the session and the points that had been discussed within their groups.

Potential issues discussed by the Workgroup included the public's perception of a hawker's working environment being harsh, as well as the viability of the hawker trade in the face of a highly competitive F&B scene. The Workgroup then shared some possible ideas to address these challenges which will improve the attractiveness of the hawker trade as a profession.

2.2 Engaging the Hawkers Around Us

As hawkers themselves, several Workgroup members shared their personal experiences in response to issues and suggestions raised during the Workgroup meetings. The Workgroup also reached out to other hawkers who were not in the Workgroup and solicited their ideas for further discussion.

2.3 Focus Groups with Stakeholders

In the lead up to the nomination of Hawker Culture for the UNESCO ICH Representative List, the National Heritage Board (NHB) and NEA jointly conducted a series of focus group discussions between January 2019 and March 2019 to consult and seek views from hawkers, academia, educators and bloggers. The salient perspectives on the hawker trade as articulated by the focus groups were shared with the Workgroup to serve as additional points of reference.

At the focus group discussions, the hawkers shared that manual work, long hours, limited financial resources, and having to adapt to changes in their operating environment were some of the challenges they faced. On the other hand, they also shared that they derived job satisfaction from building relationships with their customers, creating and improving upon their recipes, offering the community affordable food options, and bonding with fellow hawkers, amongst others.

2.4 Inaugural Hawkers' Seminar

Bringing together hawkers from hawker centres across Singapore, The Federation of Merchants' Associations, Singapore (FMAS) organised the inaugural Hawkers' Seminar with support from NEA on 30 September 2019. During the first few Workgroup meetings, the Workgroup suggested organising such an event to recognise hawkers who have made significant contributions to the hawker trade. It would also provide a platform for hawkers to come together to share their experiences and views on sustaining the trade.

The event was aptly themed "Hawker Trade Moving With The Times", and was attended by more than 300 hawkers and relevant stakeholders. Various hawker awards such as the Hawker Mentors Appreciation Awards, Promising New Hawker Awards and Productive Hawker Centre Appreciation Awards were given to 27 hawkers to celebrate the achievements and contributions of these hawkers. Five hawkers also shared their business and operational experiences, such as efforts to move with the times by incorporating innovative technology into their trade, and using social media to expand the reach of their businesses. Our co-chairs, Mr Edward Chia and Mr Lim Gek Meng, were the moderators of the dialogue session. Mr Lim Gek Meng shared the importance of being open to change and being adaptable in incorporating technology in the trade.



(From left top to right bottom): Photos showing the inaugural Hawkers' Seminar held on 30 Sep 2019. 1) Hawker speakers sharing during the dialogue session; 2) NEA CEO Mr Tan Meng Dui and President of FMAS Mr Yeo Hiang Meng, with the hawker speakers; 3) SMS Dr Amy Khor with some award recipients; and 4) A hawker from the pool of attendees asking a question during the dialogue session.



"I encourage all hawkers to be open to change and be adaptable in incorporating technology in their trade", urged Mr Lim Gek Meng, co-chairperson of the Workgroup and one of the moderators of the dialogue session held during the Hawkers' Seminar.

3. FINDINGS: Identifying Key Challenges for Different Stakeholders

Through the sharing of personal experiences by both young hawkers and veterans of the Workgroup, the Workgroup identified several challenges.

3.1 Negative Public Perception of Hawker Trade

The Workgroup agreed that the hawker trade was currently not well-regarded by the public as a profession or a livelihood. Given the rising career aspirations of young Singaporeans, the hawker trade is commonly regarded as less appealing as compared to other office-bound professions. Similar findings were also captured in NEA's Perception Survey of Hawker Centre Patrons in 2019, where 87.3% of the respondents would not want to be a hawker, citing "no interest" and "long working hours" as the top two reasons. While there were also hawkers who had done well and successfully expanded their businesses beyond hawker centres and even overseas, the Workgroup felt that such success stories were not well-publicised or shared widely.

Our pool of hawkers has aged over time, with the median age of hawkers at 59 years old. Based on NEA's data, the median age of new hawkers since 2013 stands at around 46 years old. The Workgroup therefore felt that it was critical to dedicate more effort and resources to attract the younger generation into the hawker trade.

3.2 While Barriers to Entry for New Entrants are Low, it is Not Easy to Sustain

Besides attracting new entrants, the Workgroup also felt that it was equally important to ensure that they have the necessary know-how to quickly build up and sustain their hawker business. Through the feedback received from the hawkers, the Workgroup identified some challenges faced by new entrants:

- i. Lack of access to information on the know-hows of the hawker trade
- ii. Lack of guidance from a mentor (experienced hawker) before a new entrant embarks on his own trade and sets up his own hawker stall
- iii. Lack of skills in producing good and consistent quality of food
- iv. Public's misconception that younger hawkers are unable to cook as well as older hawkers

3.3 Challenges in the Transmission of Food Culinary Skills from One Generation to the Next

Apart from the skills needed to manage a hawker business, it is no secret that one of the key factors for success lies in food quality and taste. Many veteran hawkers who have been selling hawker food since the 1970s and 1980s have taken years to establish their brands and businesses. However, as they are now approaching retirement age, one area of concern is that many of them may retire without passing down their recipes, due to different reasons such as the inability to find a successor or difficulty in transferring their current stalls to non-family members or relatives.

3.4 Business Challenges for the Hawker Trade

The Workgroup identified a prevailing concern among hawkers over the long-term profitability of the hawker trade. While hawker food prices have largely remained affordable over the years, the costs of raw materials and other business costs have outpaced hawker food prices. Thus, the profit margins for many hawkers have declined and are typically lower than other F&B establishments. According to an episode of CNA's 'Talking Point' in 2018, many of the patrons interviewed were unaware of the profit margin of hawker dishes and grossly overstated the profit margin per dish to be \$1.50, when it was generally \$0.20 to \$0.30. Some hawkers have adapted by upselling their premium dishes while maintaining affordable food options for different segments of the population. However, this business model may not be applicable across all types of hawker food.

Another concern raised by hawkers was the difficulty in hiring hawker assistants, since most Singaporeans or Permanent Residents will not consider being a hawker assistant as a long-term career option. The Workgroup also received feedback that some hawkers even had to terminate their hawker stall tenancies since they were unable to cope with the demands of running the stalls on their own.



"I struggled with business when I first took over my parent's stall when my father passed away. I used social media (Facebook and Instagram) to advertise my stall and business picked up within a year! Social media is very important and can help to reach out to both the locals and foreigners", shared Mr Melvin Chew, member of the Workgroup who is a second-generation hawker. He manages his own Facebook and Instagram accounts for his hawker stall and currently has more than 5,000 likes on his Facebook page.

The Workgroup also noted that there are increasingly more F&B outlets in Singapore, thus creating more competition to hawkers. In this increasingly crowded space, small-scale businesses such as hawkers may find it challenging to sustain their business volume unless they are already well-established and have loyal customers. Some hawkers, especially the younger ones, have managed to establish their reputation through social media, features in local or international food blogs and magazines, or awards and accolades such as the Michelin Bib Gourmand award or Singapore Food Web awards. However, these are exceptions rather than the norm as many hawkers lack the knowledge or motivation to profile themselves well, and hence find it challenging to stand out from the existing F&B competition and expand their customer base.

However, with the recent COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in the closure of dine-in areas for F&B establishments for a significant period of time, the Workgroup observed that more hawkers started to leverage technology and adopt digital services as a matter of necessity to sustain their sales. Many also benefitted from ground up initiatives to help hawkers advertise their businesses on social media platforms and open up new revenue streams via e-ordering and delivery.

3.5 Limited Support for Stall-level Productivity Equipment

The Workgroup received feedback that many ageing hawkers found it increasingly physically demanding to sustain the manual processes that their businesses required. While cooked food hawkers can currently tap on NEA's Hawkers' Productivity Grant (HPG) and claim 80% of the cost of suitable kitchen automation equipment up to a total of S\$5,000 over 3 years, the Workgroup pointed out that the current pre-approved list of kitchen automation equipment could be more comprehensive. For example, the HPG could be extended to fund solutions to improve hawkers' daily operations and encourage service innovation. More could be also done to engage and educate hawkers about the grant.

HAWKERS' PRODUCTIVITY GRANT

ABOUT HAWKERS' PRODUCTIVITY GRANT
The Hawkers' Productivity Grant provides cooked food stallholders funding support for the purchase of kitchen automation equipment which can help them achieve higher productivity.

FUNDING SUPPORT

- Eligible cooked food stallholders can claim **80%** of the equipment unit cost (excluding GST) on a **reimbursement** basis, **capped at S\$5,000**
- Equipment that has been funded by other grant schemes will not be supported

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
The applicant must satisfy the following conditions:

- Is a registered cooked food stallholder with a valid hawker licence issued by NEA
- Has a valid Tenancy Agreement with NEA or NEA-appointed operators, with balance tenancy term of at least 1 year
- Complies with any terms and conditions as imposed by NEA

EQUIPMENT TO BE PURCHASED

- Please select from the pre-approved list of equipment (refer to www.nea.gov.sg/hawker-management)

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

In formulating its recommendations, the Workgroup has considered the issues and challenges raised during Workgroup meetings, as well as the feedback and suggestions received during the Hawkers' Seminar.

4.1 Refresh Narrative on Hawker Trade to Attract New Entrants

4.1.1 Use Digital Media to Change the Public's Perception of the Hawker Profession

In response to feedback on the need to improve the image and raise the profile of hawkers, the Workgroup agrees that more could be done to improve the public's perception of the hawker profession and inspire new entrants.

The Workgroup recommends the use of digital media – working with online platforms and social media influencers, and using social media platforms – to profile the success stories and inspire a new generation of hawkers.

Another suggestion is to capture and share an aspiring hawker's journey in getting a hawker stall and learning to become a hawker, through a documentary series which can be instructional, educational and entertaining at the same time. This could help the public understand the hawker profession better and hopefully, inspire them to be more appreciative of our hawkers, or even be part of the trade.

During the Circuit Breaker earlier this year, more hawkers started using digital media to raise their online presence, advertise their businesses and offer online ordering or food delivery options to their customers. This was particularly useful in helping our hawkers sustain their businesses amidst disruptions to hawker centre operations, such as when dine-in was disallowed. The Workgroup recommends building on the current momentum to further support and encourage more hawkers to leverage digital media and solutions to transform the hawker profession.

4.1.2 Provide Resources and Platforms to Encourage the Public to Create Online Content to Celebrate and Share our Hawker Culture and Profile their Favourite Hawkers

The Workgroup recognises the importance of involving the public in safeguarding and celebrating our hawker culture. As hawker culture forms an important part of our daily life experiences, the public could play a more active role in showcasing their appreciation for our hawker culture and hawker trade.

To facilitate this, the Government can consider providing seed funding for the public to tap on to create and share online content – such as videos, photos on our hawker culture and profile their favourite hawkers.

The government can also consider organising competitions in the constituency level to support their favourite hawkers in the community. During the Circuit Breaker period, there was also increased awareness of one's hawkers in the neighbourhood.

4.2 Support New and Existing Hawkers Through Relevant Training Programmes

4.2.1 Hawkers' Development Programme (HDP) Comprising Training, Apprenticeship and Incubation

While NEA has previously introduced a few hawker training programmes, such as the Hawker Fare series, "Introduction to Managing a Hawker Business" course, and the Incubation Stall Programme, one gap identified was the lack of opportunities for aspiring hawkers to learn directly from veteran or experienced hawkers who are willing to teach and pass on their skills and recipes. Hence, the Workgroup recognises that it would be useful having an apprenticeship programme to pair aspiring hawkers with veteran or experienced hawkers.

To this end, the Workgroup has worked with NEA and SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) to launch the Hawkers' Development Programme (HDP) on 20 January 2020. The programme which comprises training, apprenticeship and incubation components, aims to facilitate new hawkers' entry into the hawker trade as well as expand the existing hawkers' skillsets.

Hawkers' Development Programme

On 30 September 2019, at the inaugural Hawkers' Seminar, NEA announced that one of the Workgroup's recommendations was to develop a Hawkers' Development Programme (HDP). Available to both existing and aspiring hawkers, the HDP was officially launched on 20 January 2020, by Mr Ong Ye Kung, then-Minister for Education, and Dr Amy Khor, then-Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources.

Jointly developed by NEA and SSG, the programme comprises three stages:

- (a) **Stage 1: Training** – Participants will be coached by certified trainers on four core modules, which will focus on areas such as the basics of food safety and hygiene, fundamental skills in cooking techniques and preparation methods, as well as tools needed to conceptualise and execute a business plan, apply marketing techniques to reach out to patrons and establish a presence on social media platforms and food delivery mobile applications.
- (b) **Stage 2: Apprenticeship** – After completing the training stage, aspiring hawkers can progress to the apprenticeship stage where they will learn the ropes of the trade from experienced hawkers at their hawker stalls.
- (c) **Stage 3: Incubation** – At this stage, aspiring hawkers will undergo an immersive and experiential process of testing the feasibility of their business plans and cooking skills, either through the NEA Incubation Stall Programme or available stalls released during NEA's monthly public tender. For the first three months of this stage, experienced hawkers will continue to provide support and advice to aspiring hawkers on implementing their business plans.



Stage 1 of the Hawkers' Development Programme was conducted by the Continuing Education and Training Centre, Nanyang Polytechnic's Asian Culinary Institute (NYP-ACI) in July 2020.



"Figuring out how to operate a business with no experience was one of the biggest challenges, so I would really like to help others ease into the stage of setting up", shared Mr Lee Syafiq, one of the mentors under the Hawkers' Development Programme.

He is a member of the Workgroup who co-founded Burgs by Project Warung (burger joint at Golden Mile Food Centre) in 2017 but has since left the company to start his own business with a different brand, Ashes Burnnit.

4.2.2 Early Exposure of Hawker Culture to the Youths

In the area of education relevant to the hawker trade, there are currently only a handful of short courses available on managing a hawker business or learning hawker culinary skills. The Workgroup assessed that more can be done to allow our younger generation to have the opportunity to learn and possibly experience the hawker profession early, prior to them graduating from their educational institutions. This would help our younger generation better appreciate and even consider the hawker profession as a possible career path.

Hence, the Workgroup recommends incorporating hawker cuisine as a part of the curriculum of educational institutions offering culinary courses. For a start, interested educational institutions can consider working with NEA to identify hawkers who are willing to share their hawker food recipes, which could be documented and taught to their students.

Experienced hawkers can also be invited to share their experiences or conduct cooking classes to inspire the students and provide them a glimpse of what it takes to be a successful hawker. Interested students could be given attachment or internship opportunities at hawker stalls (subject to the hawkers' agreement), in order to learn the culinary skills and the know-how of managing a hawker business directly from the experienced hawkers in a hawker centre

setting. By incorporating our hawker culture into mainstream education, the Workgroup hopes that this can help reduce any stigma associated with the hawker trade, as well as profile the hawker profession as a viable career option for our younger generation of culinary students.

4.3 Alleviate Manpower Challenges through Productivity Initiatives and Policy Review

4.3.1 Encourage Hawkers to use Automation

The Workgroup agrees that it would be useful for hawkers to tap on the HPG to automate some manual processes. This could help to reduce the food preparation time or even aid in the automation of certain physically demanding tasks.

In addition, in response to feedback from various hawkers that the current list of supported kitchen automation equipment could be more comprehensive, the Workgroup recommends expanding the funding scope to include other tools beyond kitchen automation, such as a queue management system to improve service productivity and relieve manual labour. Taking into account that the HPG is expected to end in October 2020, the Workgroup had recommended to NEA to consider extending the funding period so that hawkers can have more time to consider productivity solutions and benefit from the grant.

On 4 March 2020, Dr Amy Khor, then-Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources, announced during the Committee of Supply Debate 2020 that the HPG would be expanded to market stalls, and the scope of supported items broadened beyond kitchen automation to include service innovation, such as queue management systems. The HPG, which would have ended in October 2020, was also extended to March 2023.

4.3.2 Review Manpower Policy for Hawker Assistants

Currently, only Singaporeans and Permanent Residents (PRs) are allowed to be hawker assistants. Over the years, these local hawker assistants, together with our hawkers, have helped to establish our hawker culture as an important component of Singapore's identity and cultural heritage. However, similar to the challenge of attracting new hawkers, the Workgroup recognised that our hawkers find it difficult to hire suitable local hawker assistants and thus face manpower shortages. Although the various productivity measures have helped to lighten hawkers' workloads, the Workgroup found that some hawkers still need to hire hawker assistants to help them with tasks such as taking orders and handling transactions. Should this lack of manpower continue, our hawker trade may not be sustainable in the long run.

The Workgroup calls upon the Government to alleviate the manpower constraints that hawkers are facing, in particular, looking into the supply of hawker assistants who carry out important tasks which cannot be replaced by automation. The Workgroup suggests that the Government can consider expanding the pool of potential hawker assistants to better support our hawkers, while taking into account what hawker centres and hawker culture mean to Singaporeans.

4.4 Celebrate Hawker Culture and Honour Hawker Legends

4.4.1 Hawker Awards to Recognise Hawkers' Efforts and Achievements

The Workgroup sees the importance of recognising the efforts and achievements of hawkers, which could also help to inspire their fellow hawkers to strive towards the same heights. The awards can be given to both new and experienced hawkers who have achieved promising results in various areas such as culinary skills, innovation, and service standards, amongst others. The Workgroup is of the view that the FMAS would be a suitable party to drive the nomination and presentation of these hawker awards.

4.4.2 Prestigious "Hawker Legend" Award

In addition to the various hawker awards to recognise the achievements of our hawkers, the Workgroup recommends establishing a more prestigious "Hawker Legend" award, which represents the highest accolade for hawkers. This could be awarded to exceptional hawkers who have dedicated many years and/or contributed significantly to the hawker trade. Similar to the Singapore Youth Award, the "Hawker Legend" award could be given out annually by senior political appointment holders, which could help imbue a sense of pride in hawkers and their families, as well as raise the profile of our hawker trade.

4.5 Build Up Industry Platforms to Facilitate Networking and Cross-learning Among Hawkers

4.5.1 Regular Platforms to Facilitate Hawker-to-Hawker Sharing and Learning

The Workgroup believes that having regular events or platforms to facilitate hawker-to-hawker sharing and learning will be useful to help raise the standards of our hawker trade. Dr Amy Khor had also announced during the Committee of Supply Debate 2020 that the Government will support the FMAS to organise the Hawkers' Seminar as an annual event. At this platform, the FMAS and Hawkers' Associations can work together as key facilitators and invite fellow hawkers to share their success stories and know-how. This will help to establish a stronger hawkers' network in Singapore.

4.5.2 Online Guided Journey for Aspiring and New Hawkers, with Hawkers' Best Practices and Advice from Veteran and Experienced Hawkers

The Workgroup is of the view that there should be a one-stop portal and an online guided journey to assist aspiring hawkers on how to become a hawker and the necessary licences or approvals needed from the Government. This guided journey can be similar to Enterprise Singapore's (ESG) one-stop portal for businesses (<http://www.gobusiness.gov.sg/licences>).

In this one-stop portal, useful best practices, practical tips and know-how from veteran or experienced hawkers could be made available in the form of short videos, infographics or simple guidelines that can be easily understood.

5. CONCLUSION

Hawker centres are our community dining rooms, with an ecosystem consisting of different stakeholders: the hawkers, who are the familiar faces we see behind each stall, the patrons who support our hawkers, and the hawker culture advocates who are passionate about the hawker trade and do their part to raise the profile of our hawkers. Given the importance of the hawker trade and hawker culture to Singaporeans, everyone must play a part to sustain it.

The Workgroup is heartened to have the hawkers and stakeholders coming together as a team, to understand the situation on the ground and propose recommendations to help safeguard the hawker culture in Singapore. We believe that the Government will give due consideration to the recommendations presented in this report.

Moving forward, the Workgroup hopes to see a rejuvenation of our hawker centres, starting from where it matters most – the hearts of Singaporeans.

ANNEX A

Composition and Profile of Members

Member	Detail
Co-chairs	
Mr Lim Gek Meng	Chairman, Chinatown Complex Hawkers' Association, and Former Vice-President, FMAS Mr Lim is also an experienced veteran hawker who sold fishball noodles at Ming Fa Fishball Noodles at Chinatown Market at Block 335 Smith Street.
Mr Edward Chia	Managing Director, Timbre Group Timbre+ Hawkers, a subsidiary under Timbre Group, is also an NEA-appointed operator of Yishun Park Hawker Centre.
Operator	
Mr Joe Sng	Group General Manager, Fei Siong Group of companies
Hawker Culture Advocates	
Dr Leslie Tay	Food Blogger of eatishootipost.sg
Ms Maureen Ow	Food Blogger of MissTamChiak.com
Mr Martino Tan	Deputy Managing Director and Managing Editor of Mothership.sg
Dr Leong Ching	Co-Director (Institute of Water Policy), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
Dr Goh Mong Song	Former Principal of Institute of Technical Education (ITE) College West Dr Goh is currently Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Lifelong Learning & Digital Services), ITE Headquarters.
Hawkers	
Mohamed Ishak Bin Oli	Young hawker who sells Vadai at Geylang Serai Market
Lee Syafiq Bin Mohammad Ridzuan	Young hawker who sells halal burgers at Ashes Burnnit (formally Burgs by Project Warung) at Golden Mile Food Centre
Ms Joanne Heng and Ms Chan Kheng Yee	Young hawkers who used to sell prawn noodles at Prawn Village at Block 20 Ghim Moh Ms Heng and Ms Chan are currently pursuing other roles in different fields.
Mr Calvin Ho and Mr Ewan Tang	Hawkers who sell desserts at Jin Jin Dessert stall at Block 6 Bukit Merah Central
Ms Chan Kar Wei Connie	Hawker who used to sell <i>bak kut teh</i> at Happies Bak Ku Teh at Block 335 Smith Street Ms Chan is currently selling chicken rice at Happies Chicken Rice at Block 335 Smith Street.

Ms Tan Puay Puay	Hawker who sells kuehs at Kueh Ho Jiak at Block 6 Tanjong Pagar Plaza
Mr Royce Ow	Hawker who sells carrot cake at Xiong Kee Carrot Cake at Block 137 Tampines Street 11
Mr Melvin Chew	Hawker who sells braised duck and <i>kway chap</i> at Jin Ji Teochew Braised Duck & Kway Chap at Block 335 Smith Street
MSE/NEA Representatives	
Mr Ng Chun Pin	Former Director of Environmental Policy Division, MSE Mr Ng is currently Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Planning, Corporate & Technology), NEA.
Ms Ivy Ong	Former Director of Hawker Centres Division, NEA Ms Ong is currently Group Director (Strategic Planning & Policy Group), NEA.