

# Observers laud S'pore's food, nutrition potential

But they say more must be done to turn it into an Asian hub, including building a viable pipeline of skilled talent, and food innovation ecosystem

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## Singapore

SINGAPORE has the winning recipe to become a food and nutrition hub in the region, but some key ingredients are still missing from the mix.

These include a viable pipeline of skilled talent, as well as greater collaboration among the different stakeholders to build a food innovation ecosystem, observers tell *The Business Times*.

How quickly Singapore can pull these factors together will determine

the speed at which it can reach its goal, said Michael Tan, CEO of Singapore Productivity Centre. This will require the close collaboration of government, research organisations, companies and the Food Innovation Cluster led by Spring Singapore.

Despite the hurdles, he pointed out that the country is "well-positioned" to become Asia's food and nutrition hub.

For one thing, Singapore is seen as the gateway to the region and there is a "certain stamp of quality" for products produced here, he said. Many top global food companies with R&D are already based in Singapore.

Symrise Asia Pacific, a global provider of fragrances and flavourings, is one such company that has set up its regional innovation base here.

Lionel Flutto, vice-president of Asia Symrise, told *The Business Times* that Singapore was the ideal location for a number of reasons.

The first was due to existing industry capabilities and infrastructure, which both local and foreign food companies are leveraging to develop products customised for the taste preferences of Asian consumers.

Secondly, Singapore's multicul-

tural diversity and its consumers' familiarity with the flavours of the world gave it an advantage as he observed that consumers are the most "demanding" and "highly discerning" in the region when it comes to food.

As a result, Singapore was deemed as the ideal location for sensory and consumer insights research, and Symrise's Global Centre of Excellence for Sensory and Consumer Insights was established here.

Finally, technology-based innovation in partnership with Singapore's institutes of higher learning (IHLs) is another key deciding factor.

He said: "Combined with the strict

regulations and hygiene standards for the manufacturing, sale and consumption of food, this makes Singapore the ideal choice to become Asia's food and nutrition hub."

But while Singapore is making good strides, more must be done to ensure that it can live up to its potential, say industry watchers.

Tan Jek Min, director of Nanyang Polytechnic's Asian Culinary Institute, said: "Ensuring that we have a ready talent pool of expertise in food and nutrition will be critical. This is important as to become a hub, we need to have expertise and talent to support industry as well as building

our reputation with overseas partners and countries."

He had observed a trend where more small and medium-sized enterprises are now looking to develop nutritious food products, and this is spurring a growth in this area, leading to more students being trained.

He said: "It is also important that we continue to invest in research and facilities so as to ensure that we stay on top of the game."

Looking ahead, developing specialised areas such as food and nutrition for an ageing population could be one way Singapore differentiates itself from the pack, added Mr Tan.