

Food exporter? Join the club

By Marcel Lee Pereira

SINGAPORE food manufacturers are banding together to take on the world market by forming their own export club.

The club, launched last Friday by 30 members of the Singapore Food Manufacturers' Association (SFMA) hopes to make its presence felt in overseas food shows by banding together.

It will organise trade missions so that Singapore-made foodstuff like chicken rice and laksa will appear on the streets of cities like Paris.

SFMA president Allan Tan says that the club will make the sending of Singapore delegations to food expos and trade shows more efficient.

'By joining hands, we can save on logistics costs by sending our goods overseas together. When we set up a pavilion with all the Singapore signs, it also becomes more grand,' said Mr Tan, who is also the director of Kim Hing Food Industries, which makes processed Chinese delicacies such as birds' nest.

Now, 68 of the more than 260 association members export their products, but SFMA wants to get more of them to think of selling beyond Singapore's shores. Currently, some members export their products to over 30 countries.

The top three markets for local food exports are Japan, the United States and Malaysia. But the club wants to capture new markets like Turkey, India and the Middle East.

One food manufacturer, Thong Siek Food Industry, which makes the popular Dodo fishballs, says it is a good idea. Said its director Dianna Kwek: 'We get a lot of networking opportunities, as the SFMA is quite aggressive in taking members overseas for trade shows.'

'When we go under the Singapore flag, we do get a lot more attention. It's better than going in as individual companies because there are thousands of exhibitors there.'

The export club is the latest in a series of initiatives by the association to help upgrade and expand members' businesses.

For instance, a Food Development and Resource Centre is in the works. It hopes to enlist the expertise and technological know-how of polytechnics and universities here to help food makers develop new products.

And there are also seminars organised for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where speakers from successful businesses here are invited to share their experience with them.

The food manufacturing industry had a value-add of \$1.2 billion last year