

Replies

Local farms • Funding schemes available to boost yield and raise productivity

We thank Mr Tio Boey for his suggestions on supporting local farms, “Small local farmers need more support to survive” (Dec 23).

Singapore is a city state with limited space.

Since August 2017, the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) has been tendering new farmland to enable farmers affected by redevelopment plans to continue their businesses by bidding for new plots.

To ensure that limited farmland is optimised, the farmland plots are released through tenders with an emphasis on productivity and technology.

At the same time, there is a masterplan to turn the Lim Chu Kang area into a high-tech agri-food zone with infrastructure to support productive farming and enable better optimisation of land use to increase food production in a sustainable and resource-efficient manner.

As innovative farms can

produce up to 10 to 15 times more food product per hectare as compared with traditional farms, the adoption of agri-tech will enable our farmers to improve productivity in a sustainable and climate-resilient way, and contribute to Singapore’s 30 by 30 goal.

That is, to enhance the resilience of Singapore’s food supply and meet 30 per cent of nutritional needs locally by 2030.

The Government has also introduced various funding schemes, including SFA’s Agri-food Cluster Transformation (ACT) Fund which was launched earlier this year to support local farmers in their efforts to expand production capability, boost yield, raise productivity, sustainability and improve the circularity of resource use.

The ACT Fund is available for application by our local farms until Dec 31, 2025.

Besides the ACT Fund,

SFA also embarked on several initiatives to promote and raise consumer demand for local produce.

We launched a campaign on the SG Fresh Produce logo in August last year, and partnered industry players, such as retailers (physical stores and online), to promote local produce via in-store promotions and point-of-sale materials.

We also collaborated with industry associations on farmers’ market events organised by the Singapore Agro-Food Enterprises Federation and Kranji Countryside Association.

SFA will continue to support and work closely with local farms to ramp up production, and we hope that consumers can also join us in this endeavour by supporting our local produce and our farmers.

Alvin Yeo (Dr)

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Small local farmers need more support to survive

It is critical to give local smaller-scale farmers and start-ups a fair chance without being priced out by larger foreign players who may have much more capital to bid for land parcels and construct infrastructure, and bring with them existing technologies.

To reflect this fundamental difference and to level the playing field between conglomerates and individual or family-run farms, the land bidding assessment criteria should be calibrated.

The bidding assessment should not only consider the farmer's past and existing efforts to innovate and boost his productivity, but also take into account existing constraints in

his working capital.

For example, any comparison of farms on the basis of their extent of automation must be calibrated based on their differences in working capital.

The days may be numbered for small-scale farmers in their current locations in Lim Chu Kang, but their fighting spirit to bolster our nation's food security is still strong.



Given Singapore's land constraints, going vertical should be the norm for many farms.

Perhaps the Singapore Food Agency could collaborate with JTC Corporation to launch vertical farming complexes equipped with drip irrigation, solar panels and utilities infrastructure, so that these farmers do not need to bid for whole land parcels but just for spaces within the complexes.

This would ease the burden on local farmers as they would not have to fork out additional capital to construct the complexes, irrigation and utility pipelines required for their operations. They can then focus on investing in equipment, machinery and

research and development.

The authorities and the farmers' associations could also initiate more crowdfunding campaigns and organise more frequent islandwide farmers' markets to further support local farmers to make the transition to high-productivity farming.

The days may be numbered for small-scale farmers in their current locations in Lim Chu Kang, but their fighting spirit to bolster our nation's food security is still strong. I am sure many of them would press on if they are given a fair chance to survive. Right now, for quite a number of them, the odds are stacked against them.

Tio Boey