

NEW POLICIES

# PENANG FOLK WASTE 700,000KG OF FOOD DAILY

Customers do not finish food, contributing to the waste

BALVIN KAUR  
GEORGE TOWN  
balvinkaur@nst.com.my

FOR more than half a century, Penang relished its reputation as a food haven. With a wide variety of foods, such as char koe teow and nasi kandar, that are easily available, people are spoilt for choice. Unfortunately, they are also unappreciative.

This is evident from the high volume of food waste recorded in the state daily, estimated by the state government to be at an average of 700,000kg.

In figurative terms, 700,000kg is the weight of four empty 747 passenger aircraft or 700 Proton Saga (second-generation) models.

State Welfare, Caring Society and Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh said this

amount made up 40 per cent of the average 1,750 tonnes of solid waste going to the Pulau Burung landfill daily.

This is backed by National Solid Waste Management Department statistics, where the largest contributor of solid waste is food waste, averaging up to 3,000 tonnes daily.

This has led to groups calling for new policies and stringent measures to be put in place to prevent food wastage.

Most food wastage is believed to come from food eateries, hotels and catering businesses.

Wedding and open house caterers have also been identified to be among the biggest contributors of food waste, followed by restaurants, such as nasi kandar and ready-to-serve food outlets.

This is largely attributed to the fact that customers or clients of wedding caterers, nasi kandar or

ready-to-serve food outlets expect big portions per plate.

However, most patrons do not finish consuming the food on the plate, with many leaving a quarter of the food uneaten.

These establishments and businesses cook big amounts of food daily, some of which are thrown away at the end of the day.

Other contributors of food waste are shopping malls and vegetable sellers, who are forced to dump unsold raw meat, vegetables and fruits.

While other businesses, such as hotels and bakeries, suffer from food wastage, the volume is relatively lower.

Sahubar Ali, 59, the owner of the popular Nasi Kandar Line Clear restaurant in Jalan Penang, here, said his eatery also suffered from food wastage.

"In the nasi kandar business, we have to cook many dishes daily to cater to our customers' taste. We cannot avoid cooking some dishes as there may be customers who enjoy them.

"The only thing we can do is to cook fewer unpopular items and make fresh batches of popular items as they are finishing."

Sahubar estimated the food waste at his outlet to be between 5kg and 10kg daily.

"This does not take into account unfinished food on our customers' plates. On average, customers leave a quarter of food on their plates, especially rice.

"We try to implement portion control and charge for extra portions, but that does not deter customers from wasting food."

Sahubar said more food was wasted by being left uneaten.

Frandy Beach Bar co-owner K. Thamo said food waste from his restaurant kitchen was minimal. But, he said, food waste by cus-



Food wastage amounts to 40 per cent of the 1,750 tonnes of solid waste going to the Pulau Burung landfill daily. PIX BY MIKAIL ONG

tomers had added to the amount of food thrown from the outlet.



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**SAHUBAR ALI**  
Owner of Nasi Kandar Line Clear restaurant

A food stall owner in Kampung Melayu, Nurul Aisyah Jalani, 48, said she cooked dishes that were popular at a set portion.

"I serve a lunch crowd. So, if any dish finishes by then, I do not make a new batch.

"When customers do not finish their food, my staff will collect the

leftovers and hand them to dog shelters."

A hotelier here, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said hotels also faced food wastage from buffet lines.

"Similar to nasi kandar outlets, we have no choice but to put out a full spread of dishes for breakfast, lunch, teatime and dinner.

"We will make a small amount of everything and observe the popularity of certain dishes to tailor the amount of food made."

He said following the hotel's standard operating procedure, most of the uneaten food would be thrown away.

"However, we do segregate food waste from other solid waste for composting."

Batu Lanchang wet market vegetable seller T. Murugan, 38, said he and other sellers also suffered from food wastage as they often throw away rotten vegetables.

"Sometimes, some vegetables are rotting or overripe by the time we receive them. Customers will not buy these vegetables."

"Other times, customers squeeze or press them. As such, we will have to throw them away."

Murugan said instead of throwing away rotten vegetables, they handed them over to organic farms to be used as compost.

"Not all farms take rotten vegetables as composting takes time."

## Programmes, guidelines can take a bite out of food wastage

NEW policies and stringent measures must be carried out to prevent food wastage in Penang following a two-fold increase in food waste in recent years.

Institute of Agricultural and Food Policy Studies director Professor Dr Fatimah Mohamed Arshad said this was critical in the battle against food waste.

She said food waste was a serious problem, with statistics showing that nearly 40 per cent of solid waste was food waste.

"This figure, while not as high as in other countries, like the United States, is nevertheless alarming. There is a need for action by the federal and state governments to tackle the problem before it gets worse."

Fatimah said the government must step up its food wastage awareness campaigns, as food



**Fatimah Mohamed Arshad**

wastage was a matter of attitude and culture.

"They have to start their food wastage awareness campaigns and programmes from the nursery level, as it has been proven that instilling certain values into children can have a long-term effect.

"This is evident in Japan and Taiwan, where children in kindergartens are required to clean their classrooms to instil civic awareness on cleanliness into them.

"Policies and guidelines on how to manage food wastage need to be set for hotels, restaurants, catering businesses and grocery stores.

"This needs to be studied intensively and implemented, with officers enforcing the guidelines.

"There should be a penalty for establishments that fail to adhere to the policies and guidelines."

She said the policies and guidelines could include portion control, price hikes and such.

She cited an example of a restaurant in Chicago, the United States, which packed customers' unfinished food so they could take it back home.

While establishments and consumers might balk at these policies, guidelines and penalties, Fatimah said they would accept them eventually.

"When Singapore implemented the 'no chewing gum rule', there were many who rebelled. Eventually, people got on board when they realised that the government was serious about it."

While the results of the efforts might not be apparent in a large scale, Fatimah said it would affect at least 50 per cent of the population.

## State govt serious about food waste composting scheme

THE Penang government is intensifying its food composting initiatives and food awareness campaigns to reduce food wastage.

State Welfare, Caring Society and Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh said the state government had installed bio-regen food waste machines in several locations to convert such waste into bio-liquid soil enhancers.

"We are running a food composting pilot programme involving food stalls at Chowrasta Market, where food waste from the market is sent for composting.

"We collected 3,000kg of waste in 15 days from 28 business operators at Chowrasta Market and

Jalan Macalister." Phee said to encourage food waste composting, the state government had implemented a waste segregation policy.

"There are many places that do not implement the policy, but we will look into ways to encourage waste separation, including imposing legal sanctions on offenders."

He said there were more than 20 food wastage awareness campaigns carried out by the state government last year.

"We had awareness programmes, games, competitions, exhibitions, talks and discussions last year, which have improved public awareness of the problem."



**Phee Boon Poh**

## Sight of unfinished food gives NGO chief something to chew on

THE sight of an unfinished plate of food irks S.M. Mohamed Idris.

Idris, president of the Consumers Association of Penang, said many people did not see that as a problem or understand the effect it brought.

His concern was not baseless as the amount of food going to waste continues to rise, indicating the public's lack of awareness.

Four years ago, the association ran a survey and found about 350,000kg of food were wasted in the state daily.

The figure has doubled to an estimated 700,000kg daily.

He said the increase in numbers showed that people were unconcerned about food wastage. "People do not care, and most of the campaigns about food wastage has made no effect."

He said action must be taken as food waste emitted greenhouse gases and contributed to pest problems.

"Pests, such as rats, are everywhere because of food waste." Idris said food waste also led to

problems like clogged drains, adding that the state government needed to take measures to prevent food wastage.

"There is a need for a stringent, rather than a carrot-and-stick approach, to reduce food wastage.

"Regulations should be introduced, particularly in the food and beverage industry."

He said in Japan, the food and beverage industry was regulated under the Food Recycling Law.

"Although the law focuses on food waste, rather than food wastage, it helps reduce wastage."

He said another move that could be taken was to tax outlets with high volume of food waste.

He said awareness of the dangers of food waste should be instilled into children from a young age.

"Parents should teach their children to finish their food, and order food within a limit."

He said eateries should serve smaller portions to customers.

"The customer can order more if they want."



Most customers do not finish their food.



A restaurant worker holding a plate of prawns at the Nasi Kandar Line Clear restaurant in Jalan Penang.