



Food for thought

Two students speak to Nicola Chan about food waste after attending a talk by an organic vegetable company CEO

Edited by Nicole Moraleda

Roughly a third of the general rubbish that ends up in the city's landfills is food waste, and many green groups are worried that Hong Kong government will not hit its waste reduction targets for 2022.

On August 21, Viva Sheth and Brita Cheng, two Food Science and Technology students from Island School learned about how to combat food waste in our city from a talk given by alumni Alvin Kwong, the CEO of organic vegetable company Magic Season Organics.

After the talk, the 17-year-olds told *Young Post* about what they have learned from the talk and their new perspective on food waste.

"Even though there are a lot of food charities in Hong Kong working to combat food waste, food poverty and food inequity are issues that still need to be looked at because it's affecting a lot of people," said Viva. Brita agreed, and attributed part of it to the lack of

social acceptance towards "bad-looking" fruit and vegetables.

"For example, if a carrot is a little curved, that's essentially not allowed to be sold in the market anymore," she said. "People should be aware that nutritional value and taste are more important than the appearance of the food."

Brita added that not having a good storage method was another cause of food waste. If this could be resolved, she said that fresh food would then have a longer shelf life and supermarkets would not be as overstocked.

Nutritional value and taste are more important than the appearance of the food

The government is also responsible for keeping our city's food law and regulations up to date, Viva argued. "The [food-packaging method] and food portion size guide we're following right now are so old, and they are most likely outdated, unlike in other countries."

The girls also said they learned about organic farming during the talk, and how it differs between countries.

What surprised them the most about organic farming was the absence of a world government that regulates food. Brita pointed out that each country abides by whatever rules its government thinks are suitable. As a result,

she said, "you then have countries that require organic food to be without lead, while 0.06mg of lead is allowed in Hong Kong".

The lack of a universal definition for organic food can lead to confusion, and such labels can often mislead consumers, added Viva.

However, smart consumers should then try to find a trustworthy supplier - like Kwong's - who are happy to share the ins and outs of their business, and who are transparent about how their organic produce is processed.

Viva also said that young people should do more background research on food suppliers, and not rely only on what the labels claim.

"Investigating the food's origin is actually quite useful," said Brita. "You can then look up the country's guidelines and regulations to ensure the product you're buying is truly organic."

When asked about what students can do to reduce food waste at home, she suggested buying and cooking just enough food, rather than making enough for leftovers, and learning the proper ways to store fresh food.

Extra waste can be avoided, for instance, by storing fresh food on the right shelf inside a refrigerator, Viva said. "Also, instead of throwing

leftover food away, you could give it to people who don't have enough to eat. Share it with your neighbours, or use it as compost."

After taking part in Cheung's workshop, the two students teamed up with their schoolmates to run a pop-up in-house canteen to encourage others to encourage others to eat more organically. They say they plan to run Ted Talks to promote sustainable and healthy eating, food equity, and combating food waste.



Brita (left) and Viva have a new outlook on waste. Photo: Nicola Chan



Alumni and organic vegetable company CEO Kwong returned to Island School to talk about food waste. Photo: Island School