

MAKING THE GRADE

Local food and beverage brands Sunfresh and Song Fa have received accolades for their achievements. Sunfresh has received the 10th Anniversary Special Achievement Award administered by the Singapore Packaging Agreement in recognition of its packaging waste reduction, as well as reuse and recycling efforts. Song Fa has grown from its humble one-man push-cart origins to a chain of restaurants across Singapore and overseas, and has also been honoured with a Michelin Bib Gourmand award, winning it for three consecutive years.



PHOTO: YEN MENG JIN

EXPANSION IS SONG FA'S CUP OF TEA

SONG Fa, a home-grown brand synonymous with *bak kut teh*, is a household name in Singapore – and some say Indonesia and China. Since its founding in 1969, Song Fa has established some 14 restaurants across the three countries. Thankfully for its patrons, it has no plans to stop.

Yeo Hart Pong, managing director and second-generation business owner of Song Fa,

says that a key plan for the company in the next five years is “continual expansion locally and overseas”.

In Singapore, Song Fa has some eight outlets that span the city and the heartlands while its main office is located at Mapletree’s Kampong Ampat Foodlink flatted factory. Its original outlet at 11 New Bridge Road sits on an unmissable corner in Clarke Quay. It recently opened a

branch in The Centrepoint. There is also an outlet at Northpoint City.

Elsewhere in the Asian region, Song Fa boasts four outlets in Jakarta, Indonesia (in Central Park Mall, Jayakarta Food Place, Maxx Box and Ozone Mall) and two in Shanghai, China (in Jing’an Kerry Centre and Iapm Mall).

At its restaurants, Song Fa serves a variety of Teochew-style dishes. Aside from its iconic *bak kut teh* (a pork rib dish cooked in broth), it offers local classics such as *ngoh hiang*, dough fritters, salted vegetables and braised groundnuts. Song Fa also sells traditional Kung Fu tea and provides tea-brewing counters to promote tea brewing and drinking among its customers. For customers who wish to take a little bit of Song Fa home, the company retails its proprietary *bak kut teh* spices and tea sachets at its outlets.

Mr Yeo says: “Together with our tea merchant Pek Sin Choon, we have created a unique blend of Kung Fu tea which can be brewed both hot and cold. Named the King’s Garden Tea, it is a curation of special species of chrysanthemum flowers, green tea and *oolong* tea.”

Song Fa’s origins can be traced back to a humble push cart that used to ply Johore Road, a now-defunct street in Singapore that was formerly sited between and parallel to Queen Street and Victoria Street, and bisected by Ophir Road.

Yeo Eng Song, who founded Song Fa, had learnt how to cook Teochew cuisine when he was a young boy. In 1969, he created his own recipe for *bak kut teh*, rented a push cart and started the business.

“For hours under the hot sun, he served bowl after bowl of piping hot *bak kut teh* to the tables gathered by his pushcart. An original *bak kut teh* experience: tender, fall-off-the-

bone pork ribs; hot, flavourful, spicy-peppery soup; a 1960s roadside dining ambience,” says Song Fa’s website.

Nearly 40 years later, the elderly Mr Yeo handed the business over to his sons, Yeo Hart Pong and Yeo Zhiyong. The former now manages the overall operations of Song Fa, while the latter is responsible for research and development, and trading, of the company.

It was 2007 when the second generation of Yeos took over the business. That year, they opened Song Fa’s first restaurant-style outlet at 11 New Bridge Road. The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

In 2016, Song Fa was awarded the Michelin Bib Gourmand, an award given to establishments selected by Michelin inspectors for their quality menu priced at no more than S\$45. Song Fa would go on to win this award in the next two consecutive years.

According to Song Fa’s website, the company has also over the years been listed as among the top restaurant choices on well-known food and travel platforms including Meituan-Dianping, Ctrip, TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet.

In the last 49 years since its founding, Song Fa has had to confront with various challenges, says managing director Mr Yeo. These include a labour crunch, high rental cost and overheads, as well as competition. But Song Fa is confident that it will continue to make the grade. It is banking on the company’s five core values – teamwork, diligence, integrity, excellence and heritage – to crack it.

This is why the company has marked out grand plans on top of just expansion, such as boosting innovation and building on corporate social responsibility efforts. Adds Mr Yeo: “We want to shape up our system and quality.” ■



TAKING ROOT
After Yeo Hart Pong (left) and Yeo Zhiyong (right) took over the business from their father, they opened Song Fa’s first restaurant-style outlet

PHOTO: YEN MENG JIN



JUICY PLANS FOR SUNFRESH

HOME-GROWN fruit juice manufacturer Sunfresh, founded in 1982, has juicy plans in store for the business. It wants to expand its offerings and sustainability efforts in a major way, and in doing so, continue to stick by its original mission and vision.

John Rasmussen, managing director of Sunfresh, says: “Our aim is to be one of the leading premium fruit juice manufacturers from Singapore, providing quality yet affordable products for our beloved customers.”

He says that the latter was what inspired the founding of the company 36 years ago. Since then, Sunfresh has grown tremendously – thanks to demand from the travel and tourism sector, and has increased its processing capacity by many times, Mr Rasmussen adds. “We have achieved this by catering to changing customer trends, and their preferences for premium fruit juices.”

A key challenge faced by Sunfresh is “climate change issues” such as hurricanes or floods, which will affect the volume and price of raw materials, says Mr Rasmussen. A second challenge is “finding the right price which is acceptable for our customers”, he notes. The third is meeting the required volume of fruit juice production amid the growth in travel and tourism, which can come from an increase in orders from inflight catering and new hotels, says Mr Rasmussen.

Sunfresh works with institutional and retail clients across sectors such as airline, hotel, maritime and food and beverage (F&B), in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. It has a broad offering of fruit juices ranging from freshly squeezed fruit juices to blended fruit juices, which are made in its own production facilities. The company’s facility is sited in Jurong Logistics Hub, a property of Mapletree Logistics Trust.

Mr Rasmussen says: “We also work together with companies to produce their own brand labels, and we have been providing this service for our valued partners for a remarkable number of years now.”

The company believes that its success in the fruit juice business stems from competence and excellence in production management, which begins from the sourcing of premium raw materials to the processing and distribution of the final product.

Sunfresh is also big on sustainability. In 2007, it became the first small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) to sign up for the Singapore Packaging Agreement (Spa), a joint initiative by the government and industry players to reduce packaging waste, said to constitute about a third of Singapore’s domestic waste. The agreement is voluntary, so as to provide flexibility in the industry.

Last year, Sunfresh was awarded the 10th Anniversary Special Achievement Award administered by Spa, in recognition of the company’s decade-long achievements in packaging waste reduction, as well as reuse and recycling efforts.

When asked about Sunfresh’s plans in the next five years, Mr Rasmussen says that the company wants to further improve its business sustainability in the Asia-Pacific. It will do that

by focusing on environmentally friendly campaigns such as reducing the use of packaging such as plastic.

Sunfresh will also expand its range of fruit juices to include healthier choices such as “No added sugar” and “Wellness”. The latter will be made from fresh fruits and vegetables, he says.

Finally, Sunfresh hopes to attain the ISO 22000 certification. The latter, which is developed by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), certifies that a company has a food safety management system in place. Being certified ISO 22000 reportedly leads to greater customer confidence in the company’s products.

Sunfresh’s products can be broadly categorised into chilled, ambient and cold-pressed juices. Its chilled orange juices are made from oranges grown in California, Florida, South Africa and the Mediterranean, according to the company’s website. Sunfresh says that it works with different growers, depending on the season, to ensure that the oranges are the best of the crop.

The chilled fruits are always thoroughly cleansed and carefully hand sorted before they are squeezed, says Sunfresh on its website. “What differentiates Sunfresh is that we use premium citrus juice extractors. This ensures the juice is free from any bitterness or peel-oil.”

Once the juice is squeezed, it will be further chilled to under 4 deg Celsius and bottled. The juices are then stored at 2-4 deg Celsius cold storage. Sunfresh says: “The secret of our fresh juices is controlling temperature and planning logistics.”

Its ambient products, known as Long Life Juices, are made from



fruits sourced from California, Florida, Australia, Brazil, South Africa and Egypt. Sunfresh says on its website that these juices do not contain any preservatives or added sugar products, and are long-life products ideal for export and local consumption.

Sunfresh’s latest product is cold pressed juices, a line that was started in response to a popular customer request for healthier juices. Using high-pressure processing, Sunfresh makes cold pressed juices that taste, resemble and contain as much nutrients as a freshly-squeezed juice. ■

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STAYING FRESH
Mr Rasmussen says that Sunfresh’s aim is to be one of the leading premium fruit juice manufacturers from Singapore in providing quality yet affordable products