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LIFESTYLE Sowing a green business

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By Gena Ng POSTED: 17 Jun 2013 00:00



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notion that the best gardens are the ones that feed you, and in his case, his patrons, while also Saving Gaia.



"Fish soup is a family business and my dad has been cooking for the past 17 years,"

Living in high-rise, urban Singapore, the very idea of gardening, let alone farming, may seem remote to most.

But that didn't stop the owner of Wang Yuan Fish Soup stalls in Tampines to embrace the

notion that the best gardens are the ones that feed you, and in his case, his patrons. The idea of using organic greens in his fish soup came to him when he asked himself:

among consumers.

That prompted some market research that revealed a growing trend of healthy eating

"I'm positioning myself towards this direction."

its competitors.

"When you do the price comparison, you're losing money. Every bowl you churn out is losing money. I [thought], this is not the way," says Ng of the impetus for his second round of research.

take him long to realise that he could take the same route for his family's fish soup

to realise the importance of natural foods after a few visits to the doctor.

eat fresh food' ... I began to understand about natural food."

Ng started to dabble in growing his own greens, which turned out to be a success in more

Apart from being healthier, there was another perk – saving on groceries.

Soon, neighbours who learnt of the 'farm' in Ng's home began knocking on the door of his

flat.

"We don't have to buy [vegetables] anymore," quips Ng.

gardens in his neighbourhood. "When I went there it was ... wild grass, not organised, very messy," Ng recalls.

Through a series of trial and error, the entrepreneur sprouted into an accomplished sustainable farmer.

sorts of vegetables," he adds with a laugh.

Fully aware that the community garden was not a licensed farm, Ng decided to go big.

Initially, Ng's crops grown in the community garden and along his corridor met the needs

"All local leafy vegetables I can grow – cai xin, kai lan, spinach, lettuce... I can grow all

Generation Green

"I leased some land and moved over to Neo Tiew [in Kranji]."

He makes it a point to walk to his fish soup stalls that are all in the eastern Tampines vicinity, and when he has to travel to the Kranji farm on the northern tip of Singapore, he

opts for the bus.

But it didn't stop there.

green business". "Our long term goal is to build an integrated farm that grows or produces food naturally," Ng adds.

"Derrick always emphasises on good quality," says the store owner who describes the

very affordable," says Chua, who adds that "customer feedback is very positive".

"This is meant for the elderly to play an active role in the society, keep them healthy," Ng

While Generation Green is a business venture for Ng, it also translates into his outlook,

Saving Gaia is a month-long campaign marked by MediaCorp every June to create

Living in high-rise, urban Singapore, the very idea of gardening, let alone farming, is remote. But that didn't stop an enterprising hawker to embrace the MORE LIFESTYLE NEWS China fishes for growth with PHOTOS

> explains Ng, who began with a personal choice to eat naturally grown vegetables, before growing it into an opportunity to turn his hawker business into a sustainable one.

"What is so unique about my fish soup?"

attention to healthcare, and their mindsets will change.

He decided that the only way for him to sustain the costs is by controlling the resource, and the resource, he discovered, would be the vegetables used in the soup. Ng was by then already growing the greens that went into his family's meal, so it didn't

"There is one doctor that I remember vividly because he kept mentioning 'Eat natural food,

than one way.

The in-house plants soon grew into a 'plot' along the corridor outside the flat, and eventually a spot on terra firma when Ng was asked to manage one of the community

Adding to his dismay was the fact that the urbanite had no idea of crop farming, until he met a resident who was a commercial farmer back in the sixties. "I learnt from him, I took his advice, and from there I evolved."

for the fish soups sold at his hawker stalls. But soon, his supplies just couldn't keep up with demand.

yet lofty aim – to "integrate the farming production and the F&B service into a sustainable

On a business level, he decided to set up a management business in 2010, with a simple,

stalls and stores, such as That Food Shop helmed by Linda Chua. quality of vegetables she gets as excellent.

In the community, the hawker-cum-farmer has taken on a neglected greenhouse at an elder-care centre.

"So I said to them that I wanted to take over. 'I'll manage for you, I'll produce veggies'."

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"As the economy evolves...people [become] more affluent, they start to pay a lot of

When Ng started helping his father at the food stall, he sourced organic produce from local suppliers. But this resulted in costs that were too high for the business to succeed against

business too.

The first seed It was baby steps, literally, that set Ng on the road of cultivating his own vegetables. "When my son was born, his health was not very good," he explains, adding that he came

Turning to organic food, however, proved too costly as a long-term solution.

"[My son's] health improved a lot. His attention, his alertness... I saw a change," says Ng, who then began adding home-grown vegetables to family meals.

Their request - to supply them with fresh, naturally grown vegetables as well.

CNA/sf

environmental awareness.

"I always tell customers not to worry...and 400 grams [of vegetables] at \$4 is

Being green is for Ng, a holistic effort.

Generation Green, as the business is called, now supplies his vegetables to organic food

states simply.

It has become a win-win situation.

reaching out to more people.

The effort produces additional supplies of greens for Ng's fish soup business, while the

elderly get a healthy past-time, plus a discount, if they drop by for a bowl of fish soup. where the hope is to grow sustainable farming by contributing to the community and