

# HEALTH STARTS FROM THE STOMACH

With a new emphasis on healthy living and the boom in the organic food industry, many new companies are seeking to enter this burgeoning market, but Malaysia's Zenxin Agri-Organic Food still stands as one of the trusted names when it comes to high quality organic food products.

words > Melvin Chye

Over the past few years, the organic food industry has grown from strength to strength and organic food is currently one of the most sought after products in the world's modern cities.

As the world sees a rise in the demand for various physical activities such as yoga, spin classes, and other innovative interval training sessions, many are becoming tired of the usual diet that consists of bacon fat, sausages, and sugary soda, and more people are turning to healthier alternatives. As a matter of fact, in 2012, in the United

States alone, sales for organic produce reached a high of US\$31 billion.

This is expected to stay on for the next few years, as more people are slowly moving towards a healthier lifestyle. Not only is it that people are turning towards maintaining their physical health through physical workout, many are also adopting a healthier diet to gain holistic health.

Perhaps more people are starting to live by the age-old adage of "healthy mind in a healthy body", where the

belief is that one's health will directly benefit from having an active lifestyle and a healthy body.

Since 2001, Malaysian-based company Zenxin Agri-Organic Food has been providing their many customers with healthier food choices.

Founded by Mr Tai Kok Kong, the company's main guiding principle lies in providing their clients with high quality organic food produce.

agriculture movement and represents close to 800 affiliates in 117 countries around the world. The mission at IFOAM is to "lead, unite and assist the organic movement in its full diversity".

It is also this mission that drives Zenxin Agri-Organic Food to continue their excellence in this specialised field. According to the company's Executive Director Mr Tai Seng Yee, the company aims to be a "curator of food" by producing the most highest quality



The company currently offers a wide array of organic food produce and supply these produce to over 70 supermarkets and 100 dealers in both their hometown of Malaysia and nearby Singapore.

Zenxin Agri-Organic Food is not only Malaysia's leading producer, distributor, and retailer of organic food produce, they are certified organic under the standards set down by Scheme Organic Malaysia (SOM), an accreditation they received from Malaysia's Department of Agriculture. In addition, they are also a member of the International Federation of Organic Farm Movements (IFOAM). The IFOAM is an umbrella organisation that stands behind the organic

organic food for its consumers.

One of the interesting things that sets the company apart is their pledge to produce the best organic products, in fact, they are so meticulous in their farms that their tropical crops are grown exclusively in Malaysia and Thailand, while seasonal temperate crops are sourced from the northern and southern hemispheres.

The company opened their Zenxin Organic Park in Kluang in 2006. This marks a huge milestone for the young company, as the park is the largest and the first open-to-public organic farm in Malaysia. Moreover, in order to provide people with a fun and

educational learning session about the organic lifestyle, the farm also features an organic restaurant, organic shop, flower nursery, and provides recreational activities for all to take part in.

The main reason for them opening the farm is to offer their visitors a rare and valuable insight into the techniques and benefits of organic farming to the public in an interactive, fun, and educational way. Visitors can get to see how farmers grow good produce without the use of any chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

2009 saw the company take on another venture when they launched their house brand, Simply Natural. Simply Natural is set up by the company to offer their consumers a healthier food choice without having to buy foodstuff that is filled with artificial additives and preservatives. To ensure that their products pass the mark, they have even engaged the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) to certify their products.

Three years ago, the company established the Zenxin Organic Grower Group. According to Mr Tai Seng Yee, this one-of-a-kind group is to ensure that stakeholders, farmers, and consumers will be able to benefit. He explained that the group was set up to ensure a high level of quality control in their organic produce. In order to achieve that, Zenxin Agri-Organic Food worked with the NASAA to gain certifications for all of their farms, organic fertilisers, and wholesale area.

Additionally, this group's other intention is to give back to the farmers who work and toil long hours on the fields. Mr Tai Seng Yee said that the company works only with farmers who do the actual farming in their own fields. Secondly, their aim is to help farmers gain a better life, as they guarantee to their farmers that they place blanket orders and pay fixed prices.

Looking ahead to the future, Zenxin Agri-Organic Food is planning to move more of their operations into China. As a matter of fact, they have already started up a sister company there six years ago, and Mr Tai Seng Yee believes that it is only a matter of time before they move into the Chinese market.

Zenxin Agri-Organic Food's success shows that one can succeed even in a niche market. The most important thing in business is to have a philosophy and moral integrity, those two traits will not only endear the company to the public, but also ensure that there are perennial guiding principles in the company's practices.



"The company aims to be a 'curator of food' by producing the highest quality organic food for its consumers."

Executive Director, Mr. Tai Seng Yee



MR TAI SENG YEE

The boom in the organic food industry is a welcomed change for Mr Tai Seng Yee. He is one of the early advocates of organic food, and mentions that his visits to the doctors drastically decreased after he adopted a healthy diet.

Not only that, the company's belief in providing their clients with NASAA certified farms, products, and wholesale areas is what sets them apart in this burgeoning industry.

Here Mr Tai shares his approach to business and some of the creative ways he uses to bring Zenxin Agri-Organic Food to the next breakthrough.



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**In running a business, on top of the day-to-day operations, man-management is also very important. Could you talk about how your approach to this area?**

We promote accountability among our staff. We have very self-motivated colleagues and we don't believe in telling people what to do.

**What qualities do you look for in your staff?**

I think members of the staff have to have a high level of self-discipline. They must also be honest and hardworking at the same time.

**This is a rather niche and specialised industry, so what do you like most about your job?**

I see myself as a generator of ideas. I like to bring new ideas and new things into the company, and I am very lucky that I have dedicated colleagues to help me out at work.

**A crisis can happen anytime at work. Are you always prepared for one?**

I always prepare for a crisis. I believe that no matter what, prevention is always better than finding a cure.

**How do you stay active and implement new ideas at work?**

I read a lot of magazines. I like to research new ideas in marketing and operations.

**On top of eating healthy food, how else do you keep yourself fit?**

Yes I do exercise, I like playing basketball and futsal.

**You travel a lot for work, so when you want to search for ideas, what do you look out for when you are in another country.**

I like to go into supermarkets and look around at their food. I think that farming is a fascinating subject in itself.

**What is your personal motto in life?**

To be proactive in my life. This is because you only live once, so never look back.