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Power from food waste

The Government has introduced a mechanism to convert food scrap into biogas to generate electricity. This is being carried out in a pilot project at food courts in Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya, Dengkil, Sepang, Port Dickson and Melaka. > 2&3

By GRACE CHEN
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BIODEGRADABLE packaging, bins for separate trash, and a waste management system designed to recycle discarded food scraps are paving the way for greener and cleaner food courts run by local councils.

The latest effort sees Energy, Green Technology and Water Ministry (KeTTHA) and Sirim Bhd introducing a system to turn food scrap into biogas to generate electricity.

It also presents Sirim's new line of biodegradable packaging as a solution to the no-plastic bag policy.

The KeTTHA-Sirim campaign encompasses four food courts with the help of local councils starting with Port Dickson, Negri Sembilan (July), followed by Melaka, and USJ7, Subang Jaya, and Petaling Jaya in Selangor (September).

The latest addition in Selangor is the Dengkil Food Court under the Sepang Municipal Council (MPSepang).

Providing a progress report during a meet-and-greet session with 32 hawkers from the Dengkil Food Court, Sirim Bhd president and group chief executive Prof Ahmad Fadzil Mohamad Hani described the response as encouraging.

"In Port Dickson and Melaka, up to 200kg of food scrap from nearby hotels are processed at the Medan Ikan Bakar Kampung Gelam waste management facility that uses anaerobic digestion system. We anticipate the facility in Port Dickson to operate at full capacity of 500kg daily by the end of the year. In Subang Jaya, the system is already up and running," said Prof Ahmad Fadzil.

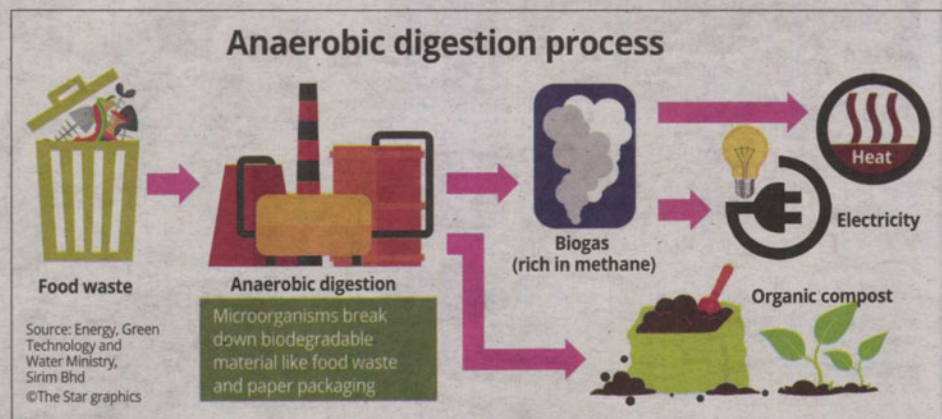
In Dengkil, a test run conducted 21 days before the launch date was reported to have produced enough methane gas to juice up a 15 horsepower generator, enough to light 20 fluorescent tubes for two nights.

Appointed by the ministry as implementing agency for the project, the industrial research and technology organisation said 65 food stalls registered as active participants and will receive consultancy services before coming under an audit process conducted by its certification, inspection and testing body by next year.

Ministry's green technology sector undersecretary Asdirhyme

Food courts tested on green technology

Local councils in three states aggressively promoting waste management system that also generates power



Abdul Rasib, who was present at the meet-and-greet session, anticipated that councils would save up to RM4.7mil in food waste disposal costs at landfills and cut back on the emission of some 9,000 tonnes of greenhouse gasses through its anaerobic waste digesters within the span of 10 years.

While food operators in USJ7 (Subang Jaya), SS2 (Petaling Jaya) and Putrajaya have been exposed to green waste management practices since 2009, the 32 operators at the Dengkil Food Court have just learned the concept.

"We have yet to understand how the anaerobic waste digesting system facility is going to work. Our main worry is whether the stench from the rubbish is going to affect the food court and drive our customers away," said economy rice seller Tiew Ng Ngu, 65.

Sirim senior assistant engineer Ahmad Rhairulnizam Abdul Rahman, 36, who is the appointed project leader for the Dengkil facili-

ty gave his assurance that there would be no stench.

"The goal of this facility is to create a cleaner environment at the food court," said Ahmad.

He said the process was designed to take place within the system's enclosed tanks.

As for the end product of wastewater, it will flow into a closed pit and be sucked up daily by MPSepang trucks to water its landscape plants. Extra overflow would go into the perimeter drains and directly into the sewerage pipes.

Ahmad added that the council also provided each stall with new bins so they can dispose of their food waste with ease.

Biodegradable packaging

To complement its waste management system, Sirim has produced its own line of biodegradable packaging. It is in the process of distributing two million samples to traders at the four food premises

involved in the project.

On complaints from hawkers on the failure of the packaging design to hold liquids, gravy, and hot food, Prof Ahmad Fadzil said there was high possibility they may have opted for packaging that did not meet their food type specifications.

"Our Sirim brand of Green Blue packaging can hold liquids, hot ones up to 100°C, for four days and is microwaveable," replied Prof Ahmad Fadzil.

He further hinted that these can be considered as labour saving options. Instead of plates traders can use them to serve food. The used boxes could also be thrown in together with food waste into the anaerobic digestion facility.

Present cost per piece ranged from 25 sen to 40 sen depending on the size and design.

Its packaging and security centre general manager Noor Hayati Mokhtar also said they would look into production of cost effective solutions for soups and advised

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Noor Hayati testing a polyethylene-coated box to show that it can hold liquid.

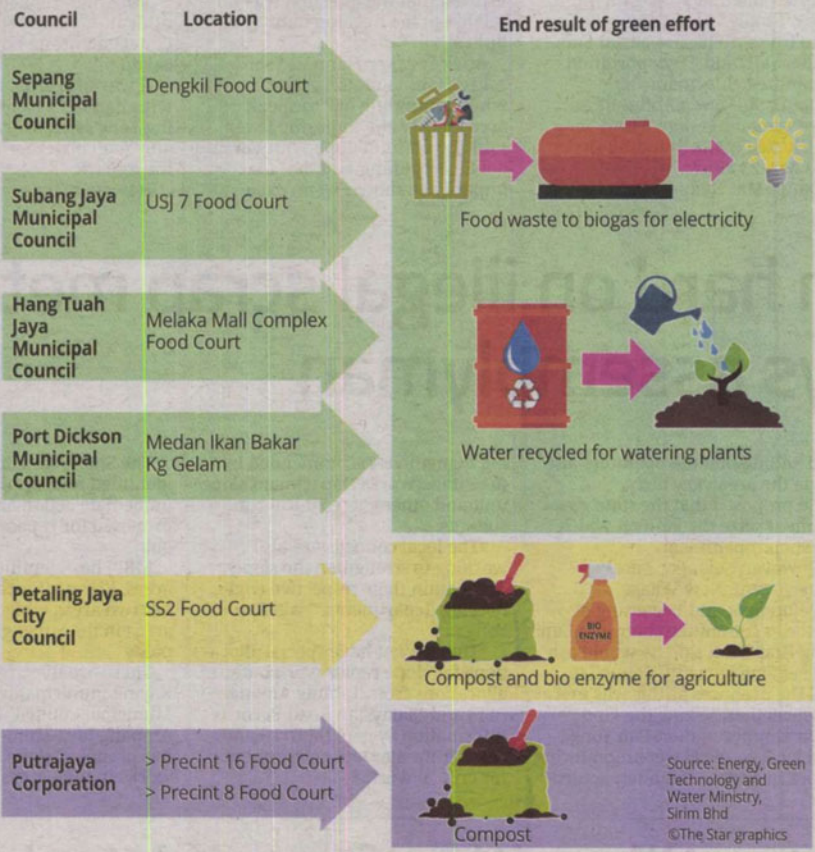


(From left) Prof Ahmad, Puasa, and Asdirhyme presenting food traders operating at the Dengkil Food Court with Sirim's brand of biodegradable packaging at the launch of the green food premises pilot project in Dengkil



Yap Chee Weng, who has been selling economy rice at the Dengkil Food Court for 12 years, is eager to see how the food waste to biogas system is going to work.

Green food premises at a glance



food operators under the category to opt for packaging with polyethylene coating.

Though the no-plastic bag policy was enforced in Sepang since the beginning of the year, it had yet to be practised by traders on a full scale. But the authorities believed that this could be improved once the public is more environmentally

conscious.

The introduction of biodegradable packaging is estimated to reduce the use of polystyrene containers by 30% in big cities by 2020.

Hopes for the future

On the success of the green food court concept, MPSepang presi-

dent Datuk Puasa Md Taib hoped other local councils would adopt the programme.

"Not only will it contribute towards a rubbish free environment but the biogas produced can also one generate enough electricity to power the food court itself," he said optimistically.

MPSepang is no stranger when

it came to recycling practices at food courts.

In 2012, it launched a buy-back programme with food courts, stalls and restaurants for cooking oil.

A tie-up with Forest Research Institute Malaysia saw it being recycled into fuel for fogging machines in anti-dengue operations.

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The anaerobic digester system installed beside the Dengkil Food Court