IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL

A Catalogue of FairPrice Group Stories

FairPrice Group 50

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It Takes a Great Deal:
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Modernise or Perish: The Labour Movement Goes into Business

The year was 1969, and delegates from the National Trades Union Congress' (NTUC) affiliated unions were gathered at the Singapore Conference Hall in Shenton Way for some serious soul-searching.

Then-Finance Minister Goh Keng Swee's solemn speech set the mood. "It has been evident for some time that the labour movement has been in a state of depression, if not of demoralisation," he began.

A landmark Employment Act had come into effect the year before, regulating labour conditions in Singapore. As a result, many workers felt that unions were no longer relevant, evident by falling membership – from 120,000 in 1965 to 90,000 in 1969.

Amid all this disenchantment, NTUC organised a four-day seminar, titled "Modernization of the Labour Movement", which would be a chance for the unions to pull themselves together and plot a new way forward.

NTUC's first Secretary-General Devan Nair believed the labour movement must modernise or perish. It should observe three principles: the capacity for self-exceeding, the power of vision and of making projections, as well as an adaptability to changing conditions and a will to realise the vision of the future.

The alternative, he added, was to end up in the rubbish heap of history.

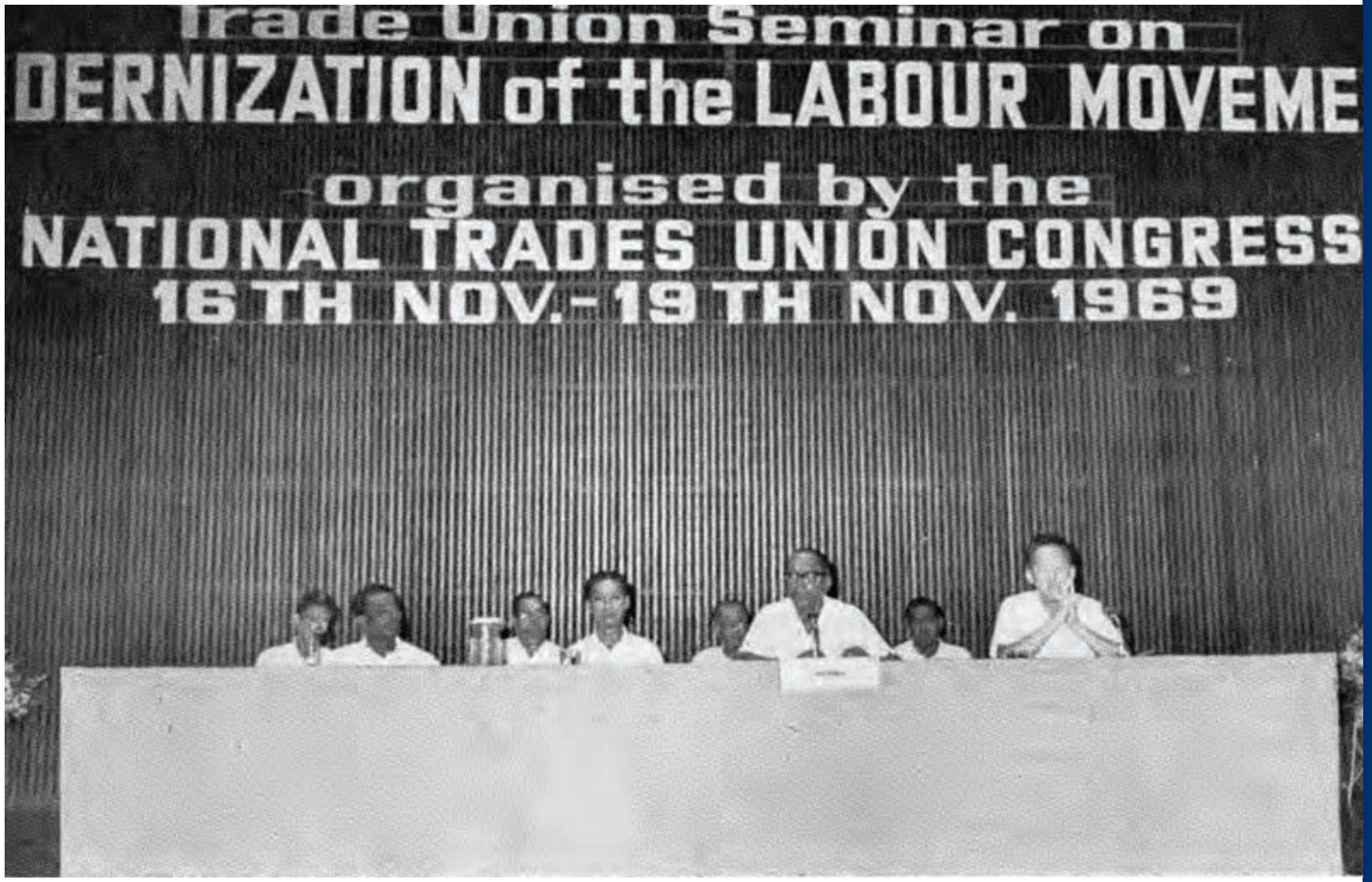

Photo: The concept of cooperatives was mooted at the NTUC 1969 Modernization Seminar.
Source: NTUC

Photo: Delegates and participants of the Seminar.
Source: NTUC

> **Together, the stories showcase how the cooperative is more than a supermarket or a food enterprise.**

Similarly, Dr Goh argued that the trade unions' "simple traditional virtues of militancy and struggle" had little relevance in newly-independent Singapore. He suggested seeking a new role by setting up cooperatives – owned by members with profits distributed among them – that cater to their different needs while ensuring services remain affordable.

The Modernization Seminar was a pivotal moment for NTUC. In the next few years, it heeded Dr Goh's advice and set up various cooperatives, from insurance to health to transport, changing the complexion of the labour movement as it went into business. But they were highly unique businesses, run with a social purpose but managed professionally and competing with commercial outfits.

Instead of perishing, NTUC sold perishables. Its cooperative supermarket made headlines as it was set up amid raging inflation with the price of rice, in particular, hitting record highs. NTUC Welcome was launched in July 1973 to combat profiteering and inflation, with a goal to moderate prices for consumers.

A decade later, Welcome merged with two other supermarket cooperatives, also founded by the unions, and became NTUC FairPrice. As the FairPrice Group celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, the multi-billion-dollar food enterprise has surmounted many challenges to get to where it is today.

The improbable success of a consumer cooperative founded by the labour movement is best captured by first labour chief Mr Nair's three principles, which have been reimagined into five sections – Dare to Dream, Dare to Grow, Dare to do Good, Dare to Innovate and Dare to do Well.

These five sections contain 50 stories of people, products and places, which look at how far FairPrice has come – from a single store in Toa Payoh, to a network of over 500 supermarkets, convenience stores, pharmacies and cooked food locations islandwide.

Together, the stories showcase how the cooperative is more than a supermarket or a food enterprise. The FairPrice Group story is about an organisation and its people rising continuously to self-exceed in the battle against crises such as SARS and COVID-19 to stabilise supplies and cost, spearhead new retail formats and strategies to cater to changing lifestyles, and ultimately, moderate the cost of living for Singapore.

What does it take to build a consumer cooperative that seeks to go beyond profits to serve a larger and crucial purpose? It takes a great deal.

VISION - DARE TO DREAM

A shield that provided protection from inflation, a spear to skewer market manipulation.
It was a store unlike any other seen in Singapore before.

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If shops are upping prices unreasonably, people must have an alternative to buy from.

Photo: Wedding guests eating by candlelight during a power failure in 1974.
Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission

Candles for Consumers, not Profiteers

Expensive by day, exorbitant by night. That was how candle prices waxed and waned in 1970s Singapore, when blackouts were frequent.

The prices of other items, from bread to rice, were equally at the mercy of merchants who could choose to raise prices – just because they could at that time. It prompted then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to intervene. “If shops are upping prices unreasonably, people must have an alternative to buy from,” he said in a speech in 1971.

“Three to four big cooperative supermarkets… can keep a check on retail prices. The NTUC can help organise this.”

That was precisely what the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) did. Experts were called in, surveys were rolled out and union members pitched in to raise funds for a new type of supermarket – one that would directly share profits with consumers through dividends and rebates, and keep prices stable and affordable.

In July 1973, two years after PM Lee’s speech, Singapore’s first cooperative supermarket opened in a quiet corner of Toa Payoh. Called NTUC Welcome, the 10,000 sq ft shop was fully air-conditioned and operated seven days a week. It sold everything, including candles.

A few months later, the world was rocked by the oil crisis that began in October 1973, pushing prices of basic necessities such as bread, rice and sugar into an upward spiral. As supply shortages and inflation squeezed consumers, profiteers again cashed in on the misery.

But this time, NTUC Welcome was ready to moderate prices.

Welcome to the First NTUC Supermarket

> "This co-op supermarket must be different. It is going to be efficiently managed just like any other commercial supermarket. If this supermarket is well-supported and well-managed, we shall know what the wholesale price is, which we already do, and we shall know what the retail price with profit can be. You will get more value for your money buying here."
>
> – Then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the opening of NTUC Welcome Supermarket in 1973.

It was a warm evening on July 22, 1973. A crowd of 1,500 was gathered in a carpark in Toa Payoh, among them then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. He was there to open Singapore's first cooperative supermarket by the labour movement – NTUC Welcome.

Walking along the aisle on the day of the launch, Mr Lee saw a small bottle of TST brandy and reached out to grab it, stuffing it into his pocket. Turning to a young official, he quipped: "There goes your profit for the day."

His message was not just a caution against theft, but also to remind Welcome to work harder to stay afloat. This modern mart was launched amid rather turbulent times, with the cost of living escalating as inflation hit a record high of over 22 per cent. Prices of essential goods hit the roof – with rice prices increasing about 42 per cent.

Riding to the rescue was the labour movement (NTUC), whose mission with the Welcome store was to moderate prices, prevent profiteering and ease the impact of inflation. The first store was in Toa Payoh, deemed a suitable location as it was a large new town with 130,000 people. Manned by a crew of 30, its shelves were stocked with consumer goods, from cooking oil to detergent – and, crucially, large quantities of reasonably priced essential items like rice and sugar.

This cooperative more than thrived. From a turnover of $9 million in its first year, it achieved over $4 billion 50 years later under FairPrice Group. It now has over 500 supermarkets, convenience stores and cooked food locations across Singapore – and the first branch at Toa Payoh Lorong 4 is still in operation.

FairPrice survived recessions, robbers and revamps – to become Singapore's staple in the food scene.

Photo: The first NTUC Welcome store was opened in Toa Payoh in 1973.
Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

VISION
DARE TO DREAM
3/7

Going Against the Grain

> Even in challenging situations like a pandemic or geopolitical conflict, FairPrice aims to rise to the occasion – or rather, ensure there is rice at every occasion.

As Singaporeans tuck into ample bowls of rice at the dinner table today, it is hard to ever imagine the staple being in short supply or unattainable. Yet, in the mid-1970s, amid volatile oil prices and unreliable grain sources, there were concerns that the everyday carbohydrate could become unaffordable for the masses.

Prices swung unpredictably from day to day – a kilogram could cost 50 cents one month and a dollar the next. Opportunistic retailers jacked up the prices, while middlemen lined their pockets with a significant share of the profits. The biggest victim was the ordinary consumer. But NTUC Welcome, the predecessor of FairPrice Group, went against the grain to keep prices stable.

To do this, a steady supply and the suppression of costs upstream were needed. It revolved around the government rice stockpile, a national system which ensured that Singapore would have sufficient rice at any time. Welcome was able to buy directly from this government stockpile at cost price, instead of from rice importers at a higher rate. This meant that the chain could sell rice at a reasonable price, passing on savings to customers. Competitors would also have no choice but to follow suit in terms of pricing, or lose out.

Welcome would later go on to become a government-licensed rice importer, giving it more levers in keeping the staple affordable for everyone.

Today, prices have not only been kept stable, but also affordable. FairPrice's May Day 2023 promotion prices saw rice prices of between $1.18 and $1.35 per kg – cheaper than or equal to 1973 prices when adjusted for inflation. Even in challenging situations like a pandemic or geopolitical conflict, FairPrice aims to rise to the occasion – or rather, ensure there is rice at every occasion.

Photo: Workers preparing for a rice sale at the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Welcome supermarket in Toa Payoh in 1973.
Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission

From Welcome to FairPrice

“

FairPrice’s first General Manager Lim Ho Seng recalled that one of the names floated was “Thrift,” a signal of its mission to be affordable. But FairPrice was chosen instead, a name inspired by Welcome’s former Chairman Baey Lian Peck.

Ten years after NTUC Welcome was launched, it underwent a major revamp – after a merger with fellow union supermarket cooperatives to reap better economies of scale. Welcome had 15 stores across Singapore, and the other supermarket chains under the Singapore Employees Cooperative (SEC) had 19 outlets. The SEC ran two grocery operations – one set up by Singapore Industrial Labour Organisation (SILO) and the other by Pioneer Industries Employees’ Union (PIEU). Both started a year after Welcome’s debut, led by Mr Phey Yew Kok, NTUC President and People’s Action Party Member of Parliament.

But Mr Phey fled Singapore on December 31, 1979, after being charged with misappropriating union funds. Mr Lim Yong Wah, a senior executive at the Development Bank of Singapore (now DBS Bank), was asked to fill the void as Chairman of SILO, PIEU and subsequently, SEC. The next step was to merge SEC with Welcome for a greater scale that would offer better prices, observed then-NTUC Secretary-General Lim Chee Onn. It was left to Mr Lim Yong Wah, who was also Chairman of Welcome, to be the matchmaker.

The marriage produced NTUC FairPrice Co-operative Limited, with 33 supermarkets that started operations on May 1, 1983. FairPrice’s first General Manager Lim Ho Seng recalled that one of the names floated was “Thrift,” a signal of its mission to be affordable. But FairPrice was chosen instead, a name inspired by Welcome’s former Chairman Baey Lian Peck.

Mr Baey had seen the name on a shop during a trip to Bangladesh, and thought it aptly summed up what the Singapore supermarket cooperative stood for. It was also the name given to the network of almost 1,000 neighbourhood shops that sold essential products by Welcome.

Photo: Minister for Communications and Labour and Secretary-General-Designate of National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Ong Teng Cheong (left) exiting NTUC FairPrice at blocks 63-66, Yung Kuang Road in Jurong after his tour of the supermarket during its inauguration in 1983.
Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The Housebrand Strategy

> As housebrand products were up to 10 per cent cheaper than branded alternatives, consumers were quick to change allegiance.

The year was 1985, and recession had hit Singapore. As retrenchment rates rose and disposable incomes shrank, FairPrice launched its housebrand to moderate the cost of living.

The concept was not new. NTUC members had been helping to pack rice into unbranded bags to sell at a lower price to combat profiteering since the 1970s. But the supermarket chain was now putting its own brand on essential products, from oil to sugar.

FairPrice's first General Manager Lim Ho Seng was confident. "Consumers are smart people," he told *The Straits Times* in a 1986 interview. "They want value for money and if they find that a product is good, they will buy it regardless of the name on the wrapper."

He was right. As housebrand products were up to 10 per cent cheaper than branded alternatives, consumers were quick to change allegiance. As of 2023, there are more than 2,000 housebrand products, including more posh offerings such as rolled oats and edamame beans.

FairPrice has also launched private labels – fresh vegetable brand Pasar, health and wellness brand Origins and sausage brand Delicato. Together, the housebrand and private labels are known as Own Brands with its own business unit, the Own Brands & Food Solutions (OBFS) division, which made close to $500 million in revenue in 2022.

"If you benchmark OBFS against fast-moving consumer goods businesses based in Singapore, we are among the top five," said Ms Grace Chua, OBFS Chief Executive Officer. "It affirms that we are on the right track." Next target for Own Brands: hit $1 billion in revenue and become Singapore's No. 1 consumer goods company.

Photo: Launched in 1985 when recession hit, FairPrice's housebrand has more than 2,000 products today.
Source: FairPrice Group

Cooperative or Company?

> “At one general meeting, after being pressed on the issue, Mr Das made his famous retort: “Over my dead body.”

It was a debate that lasted months in 1993, with FairPrice leaders split over one contentious issue: Should FairPrice become a publicly listed company? Then-FairPrice Chairman, Mr Chandra Das, was against it. He believed that its objectives would shift to profits and shareholders would fixate on its stock prices. In turn, the mission to keep costs low for Singaporeans would be lost. At one annual general meeting, after being pressed on the issue, Mr Das made his famous retort: “Over my dead body.”

He also made clear his position to then-labour chief Ong Teng Cheong, a strong proponent of corporatisation. Mr Ong was eventually dissuaded from it by Mr Das and Mr S. Dhanabalan, who was then-Chairman of the Singapore Labour Foundation and Minister for National Development.

Over the years, discussions on whether FairPrice should be listed have surfaced several times. The conclusion was always no. Today, 30 years later, Mr Das maintains his stance, but some leaders have changed their minds like former labour chief Lim Boon Heng, who succeeded Mr Ong. When the topic surfaced three decades ago, Mr Lim told then-Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew that he felt the move would make it difficult to persuade the public that FairPrice still offers the best prices possible. Mr Lee disagreed, believing that it boiled down to efficiency and productivity, instead of business structure.

Mr Lim, who is now Chairman of NTUC Enterprise, has evolved in his thinking. “If you asked me today, ‘Can the objective be met?’, I think Mr Lee Kuan Yew is right. It depends on how efficient and productive your operations are. It doesn’t depend on the cooperative framework,” he said. Mr Vipul Chawla, Group CEO of FairPrice Group, agreed: “Whether we are a co-op or a social enterprise, we need to always have the mission of increasing productivity.”

Photo: Mr Chandra Das speaking at NTUC FairPrice’s 30th anniversary celebration.
Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Lean and Mean Distribution Network

> In the early 1990s, suppliers delivered their goods to each of FairPrice's stores around the island...It was clearly an inefficient way of doing business.

In the early 1990s, suppliers delivered their goods to each of FairPrice's stores around the island. Some outlets received about 100 deliveries a day. This meant more time spent receiving stock, more retail space used for storage, and more human error and pilferage.

It was clearly an inefficient way of doing business. This changed dramatically in 1993, when FairPrice teamed up with major Australian grocery distributor Davids Holdings. They formed a joint venture called Davids Distribution, a centralised warehouse and distribution company.

Operating out of a warehouse in Joo Koon, Davids Distribution received goods in bulk from suppliers and dispatched them to FairPrice and other retailers including Cold Storage then. Things moved faster and more securely. An electronic system allowed stores to request goods digitally and have them arrive in a secure consignment in half a day.

But there was a niggling issue. Many suppliers were reluctant to put their goods with Davids Distribution as they thought it would eat into their respective wholesaling business.

As the business faltered, FairPrice decided to turn it from a wholesale company to a logistics one. In 1998, it bought over the rest of Davids Distribution for a dollar, and renamed the company Grocery Logistics of Singapore (GLS).

This resolved the problem. GLS remains a FairPrice subsidiary today, and manages more than 1.2 million sq ft of warehouse space as well as a fleet of delivery trucks.

Photo: Grocery Logistics of Singapore manages more than 1.2 million sq ft of warehouse space as well as a fleet of delivery trucks.
Source: Grocery Logistics of Singapore

AGILITY - DARE TO GROW

A nimble enterprise. Adaptability is key in the pursuit of growth, whether it is expanding to petrol stations, malls or overseas.

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FairPrice's Foreign Forays

> The joint venture with Myanmar Economic Holdings had targeted 20 stores, but political upheavals led its import licence to be cancelled soon after entering the market.

As the largest supermarket operator in Singapore, FairPrice was ready to make its first foray overseas in the 1990s – at a time when the government was also encouraging companies to create the country's "external wing." Addressing FairPrice staff at its 1994 dinner and dance, Mr Lim Boon Heng, NTUC Secretary-General then, cheered the milestone. "FairPrice has come of age," he said with pride. There were two reasons for venturing overseas. First, FairPrice's domestic market share had grown to a point where further economies of scale would be hard to achieve. It needed a regional base. Second, having global operations would diversify its procurement of food sources. But it turned out to be a trying time.

FairPrice partnered Hong Leong Group in 1994 to open seven stores in Kuala Lumpur. But the journey ended two years later, due to stiff competition and the inability to secure good locations, and FairPrice lost about $4 million. Around the same time, it also closed its only store in Yangon, Myanmar. The joint venture with Myanmar Economic Holdings had targeted 20 stores, but political upheavals led its import licence to be cancelled soon after entering the market.

FairPrice tried again in 2003, entering China with Taiwanese and Chinese partners. But the business was plagued by cash flow woes due to over-expansion by its Taiwanese partner and pilferage. It ended in 2005, after racking up nearly $80 million in debts and more than $40 million in losses. This derailed expansion efforts for close to a decade but yielded valuable lessons.

These proved handy when the first store of FairPrice's Vietnamese foray opened in May 2013. Co.opXtra in Ho Chi Minh City offered close to 50,000 types of products, including FairPrice housebrand items. As of 2023, there are four stores in Ho Chi Minh City.

Photo: In the late 1990s and early 2000s, FairPrice ventured overseas, setting up supermarkets in Malaysia, Myanmar (pictured) and China.
Source: Courtesy of Tey Lian Lee

Not the Statue, but the Supermarket of Liberty

“

Liberty soon made its way to the heartlands, with a second outlet opening in Jurong Point in 2000.

America came to FairPrice in 1998. Welcome to Liberty Market, the All-American concept store that resembled typical supermarkets found in the United States (US) like Walmart and Costco.

There was free popcorn for customers queuing to pay for their shopping, a no-questions-asked exchange and refund policy, and even a replica of the iconic Statue of Liberty overlooking rows of shelves stocked with American items such as soft drink Dr Pepper and Post Oreo Cereal.

Besides catering to the sizeable number of American expatriates living in Singapore, Liberty Market was also the answer to a local customer base whose tastes were becoming increasingly international.

The first Liberty Market, spanning over 25,000 sq ft, opened in Plaza Singapura. Built at a cost of $2 million, around 65 per cent of its goods were made in America, with the US Department of Agriculture and the US Embassy providing support when it came to procurement.

Liberty soon made its way to the heartlands, with a second outlet opening in Jurong Point in 2000. However, this US-themed grocery store did not last.

After a period of time, business was not as brisk. “There was demand, but not enough,” noted former Group Chief Executive Officer of FairPrice Group, Mr Seah Kian Peng. Both branches eventually closed their doors.

But it had left a legacy. Liberty Market would be the predecessor of today’s more upmarket supermarket, FairPrice Finest. “Version 1 of Finest,” as Mr Seah would describe it.

Photo: The first Liberty Market, spanning over 25,000 sq ft, was opened in Plaza Singapura in December 1998.
Source: FairPrice Group

From the Heartlands to Huge Malls

> Watching from its home turf of the heartlands, FairPrice felt a tinge of FOMO (fear of missing out). It wanted in, beginning a campaign to have its stores within the sprawling modern complexes.

The growth spurt of Singapore's economy in the 1980s and 1990s heralded a golden age of property development with shopping malls springing up all over the city. It was a glorious time where iconic names like Ngee Ann City and Raffles City were the new kids on the block.

Watching from its home turf of the heartlands, FairPrice felt a tinge of FOMO (fear of missing out). It wanted in, beginning a campaign to have its stores within the sprawling modern complexes. There was only one problem: no one wanted them. It was an image issue, noted former Group Chief Executive Officer Tan Kian Chew. "We came from a labour union background. In the earlier days, we were a small supermarket operator catering mainly to the lower-income groups."

Unable to convince the property developers otherwise, the retailer decided to enter the world of property development. In 1996, it opened Tampines Mall in a joint venture with DBS Land – the predecessor of CapitaLand. It was there where FairPrice launched the first of its new-generation stores – a bigger, bolder and better format that boasted fresh fish, fruits and vegetables. At 35,000 sq ft, it was more than triple the size of its first outlet in Toa Payoh.

Its "fresh" formula was a resounding success, with Mr Tan describing it as a "breakthrough." "Fresh produce is the one that gave us the sales and turnovers," he said. "From now on, every store we open will be modelled on this," announced then-Chairman Chandra Das. "All the existing ones will be upgraded to this level."

This combination of property investment and new-generation stores has helped it establish a foothold in shopping malls, with FairPrice outlets a magnet for crowds. From The Centrepoint to The Seletar Mall, the supermarket has become synonymous with shopping malls today.

Photo: In 1996, FairPrice opened Tampines Mall in a joint venture with DBS Land – the predecessor of Capitaland – where it launched the first of its new-generation stores.
Source: Samuel He

Cheers to Convenience

> A convenience store in a petrol kiosk? It was an unfamiliar concept in Singapore then.

By the mid-1990s, Singapore had transformed into a bustling city-state, complete with trendy professionals who were always on the go. FairPrice spotted a new business opportunity: convenience retail.

In 1998, the first Cheers store opened in Nanyang Polytechnic – its bright, trademark yellow interior featuring everything from international snacks to prepaid SIM cards. But growth was slow in the early years as some stores – located in fairly secluded places such as Bukit Batok and Pasir Ris then – were less successful. Then a mammoth partnership changed the game, when the world's largest petroleum company partnered Singapore's largest supermarket chain.

In 2003, ExxonMobil inked an agreement with NTUC FairPrice to set up Cheers stores at six of its Esso petrol stations. A convenience store in a petrol kiosk? It was an unfamiliar concept in Singapore then. But the novel idea proved a hit with consumers, and the scheme took off. It was a breakthrough moment for Cheers, which instantly more than doubled its network. From 2005, 77 Esso and Mobil stations across Singapore welcomed either a Cheers or FairPrice Xpress store.

FairPrice Xpress was larger than a typical convenience store, selling everything from fresh produce to health products. It was a one-stop wonder for busy Singaporeans who, on their way home from work, could stop by a petrol station to get their cars – and home supplies – refilled.

Over 170 Cheers and FairPrice Xpress stores dot the island today, with new products constantly introduced to consumers such as the popular ready-to-eat meals.

Photo: (Opposite) From 2005, 77 Esso and Mobil stations across Singapore welcomed either a Cheers or FairPrice Xpress store. (Bottom) A Cheers store at Changi Airport Terminal 3.
Source: (Bottom) Cheers, (Opposite) Samuel He

Fresh Food and the Future

> In 2024, a seven-storey Fresh Food Distribution Centre will open in Sunview Road in western Singapore.

When FairPrice launched its very first Fresh Food Distribution Centre in 2003, it showed the world it was ready for the future. The building in Upper Thomson Road came with warehouses with different temperatures: minus 20 deg C for frozen food; 4 deg C for vegetables, fruits, and dairy; and 18 deg C for confectionery and wines.

This $25 million centre was a giant leap forward for FairPrice, which previously had to rent storage and distribution facilities. Having its own centre gave it better control over inventory, delivery and cost management. Savings could also be passed on to consumers, who were increasingly health-conscious, affluent and keen on fresh food.

As FairPrice sets its sights on future growth, it will soon replace the existing distribution centre with a bigger – and better – building. In 2024, a seven-storey Fresh Food Distribution Centre will open in Sunview Road in western Singapore. Spanning 750,000 sq ft, it is more than three times the size of the current centre.

The $330 million project promises a working environment that is highly automated and more user-friendly. Staff no longer need to enter the coldest chambers to pick up frozen food – the goods will travel to them. Workers who are stacking items can also make use of elevated turntables so they do not bend their backs too much.

As FairPrice feels the heat from the manpower crunch, rising costs and geopolitical uncertainties, this new centre offers cool solutions.

Photo: (Opposite) The Fresh Food Distribution Centre at Upper Thomson Road has warehouses with different temperatures. (Bottom) Fruits like strawberries are kept at 4 deg C.
Source: Samuel He

Xtra: The More the Merrier

> Just as the supermarket chain's eight other retail formats each have a niche, Xtra offers a one-stop shopping experience that caters to families.

There's a good reason why FairPrice named its hypermarkets Xtra.

With more space and variety – think electronic appliances, clothing and assorted household goods besides the usual groceries – the upsized format of over 60,000 sq ft certainly goes the extra mile to serve shoppers here.

Just as the supermarket chain's eight other retail formats each have a niche, Xtra offers a one-stop shopping experience that caters to families. Its products are more likely to be available with bulk promotions so households can enjoy greater savings.

The first Xtra store opened on December 28, 2006, in AMK Hub and welcomed 40,000 customers on the first day. At over 77,000 sq ft, it was the largest FairPrice outlet until it was dethroned in 2019 by the branch in VivoCity, which spanned over 90,000 sq ft.

There are currently nine Xtra outlets, with three of them open 24/7 – NEX, AMK Hub and Jurong Point.

Besides extra savings and variety, it looks like the hypermarket also offers extra convenience.

Photo: There are currently nine Xtra outlets, with three of them open 24/7 – NEX, AMK Hub and Jurong Point.
Source: FairPrice Group

Taste of the Finest

> The lifestyle of our customers has changed. They are more exposed to different cultures, and their needs have evolved.

What did live oysters air-flown from Port Lincoln in Australia and Japanese square watermelons have in common? They were part of the premium selection at FairPrice Finest's first outlet, which opened at Bukit Timah Plaza in 2007. It featured spacious aisles, a temperature-controlled wine cellar and even an in-store meat counter serving fresh lamb racks and veal chops.

About 30 per cent of FairPrice Finest's products are different from the regular stores – spanning upmarket or international selections from squid ink pasta to Wagyu beef to Kyoho grapes. Shoppers are treated to a wide selection – including a choice of fruits and vegetables that are sweeter and bigger.

But it was not an easy decision to start FairPrice Finest, as some people wondered why FairPrice was catering to the affluent – seemingly straying from its mission to moderate the cost of living for Singaporeans. Explaining the move, FairPrice's then-Managing Director Seah Kian Peng said: "The lifestyle of our customers has changed. They are more exposed to different cultures, and their needs have evolved."

But contrary to perception, prices at Finest are the same as at other FairPrice stores for the same products. And Finest has helped to make the finer things in life more affordable for people, noted its General Manager Tan Huey Ling. "You can get wine for $15 now," said Ms Tan, adding that the supermarket has the scale to offer cheaper products. "Although wine is not an essential item, we wanted to make wine affordable and accessible to all. We are bringing the finer things to customers."

This concept worked. This year, Finest will have almost 40 outlets across the island – giving more Singaporeans a chance to get a taste of the finest.

Photo: As of 2023, Finest will have almost 40 outlets across the island, including at Causeway Point (pictured) – giving more Singaporeans a chance to get a taste of the finest.
Source: FairPrice Group

Robbed at Gunpoint

> It was just like the movies, except this was real life – a shocking encounter at the supermarket where theft was not rampant.

Photo To be robbed at gunpoint is almost unheard of in Singapore. But such an incident happened at FairPrice's Sun Plaza outlet in 2006.
Source: iStock.com/Jiggo_thekop

One minute she was going about her job as per normal, the next moment she was staring down the barrel of a gun.

Madam Poh was closing the 4D and Toto cashier at the FairPrice outlet in Sun Plaza when a man wearing a mask pointed a gun at her, and demanded the bag of money in her hands. "The robber had a stocking over his head. I couldn't get a good look at his face but he looked horrifying. For a second, I was completely stunned," she recalled of that fateful February day in 2006.

It was just like in the movies, except this was real life – a shocking encounter at the supermarket where theft was not rampant. To be robbed at gunpoint was even more rare. The gunman, later identified as a 59-year-old unemployed Chinese man, used that moment of surprise to snatch the bag containing $3,000 and ran. It was then that Madam Poh collected herself and screamed in Mandarin: "Robbery!"

By then, the robber was bolting into the shopping centre's carpark, with a security guard close on his heels. Noticing that the guard was catching up with him, he panicked and fired his nine millimetre Smith & Wesson semi-automatic pistol. Fortunately, he missed, hit the stairs and hurt no one.

"I could only see the flash (of the gunshot), but it only made me more angry," said the security officer, Mr Rojion Bin Shari. The commotion caught the attention of a passer-by, who joined the pursuit. Together with Mr Rojion, they managed to apprehend the armed robber and waited for the police to arrive.

It was an amazing chase that ended well – with Madam Poh retrieving the bag of money, and everyone was safe and sound. Except for the robber who faced jail time.

SHARE - DARE TO DO GOOD

A beacon during crises, a helping hand for the lower income. Even as FairPrice grew, the welfare of Singaporeans remained at the heart of its business.

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Textbook Example of Sharing is Caring

> Commemorating its 40th anniversary in 2022, the project has collected, redistributed and recycled more than 7.5 million books to help students save on textbook expenses, promote the value of thrift and encourage Singaporeans to go green.

Every November, all FairPrice outlets serve as drop-off points for people to donate their used textbooks. After being cleaned and sorted by volunteers, the books would be distributed to needy families. Any remaining books would be recycled.

This initiative was prompted by a request from former labour chief turned Singapore President Devan Nair who asked then-NTUC Welcome Chairman Lim Yong Wah if more could be done to help poor students. After a few brainstorming sessions among FairPrice management, the Used Textbook Project was born in 1983.

It was later renamed FairPrice Share-A-Textbook in 2010. Commemorating its 40th anniversary in 2022, the project has collected, redistributed and recycled more than 7.5 million books to help students save on textbook expenses, promote the value of thrift and encourage Singaporeans to go green.

At the celebration to mark the milestone, Minister for Education Chan Chun Sing said the scheme "is not just the passing on of textbooks. It is something more important – the passing on of values" such as gratefulness.

"For all of us who have the privilege to own textbooks, it is not just something for us to use and discard. We are but stewards of those textbooks, (we should) give thanks for the opportunity to use them and then to pass them on," he added.

Something to think about the next time you feel the urge to doodle on your textbook or dog-ear the pages. And don't forget to donate them at our next collection drive!

Photo: Mr Seah Kian Peng, then-Group Chief Executive Officer of FairPrice Group, at the 39th Share-A-Textbook distribution drive in 2021.
Source: FairPrice Group

Stretching Every Dollar

> The aim is to keep the prices of essential items affordable amid global uncertainties that drive up costs of supplies as well as local increases to the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Buy more with less is a mantra at FairPrice Group, as the retailer seeks to help consumers shop smarter and save more with a plethora of discount schemes over the years.

The aim is to keep the prices of essential items affordable amid global uncertainties that drive up costs of supplies as well as increases to the Goods and Services Tax (GST). When the GST was first introduced in 1994, FairPrice cushioned the impact by absorbing the tax for a year. Between 2003 and 2007, when the GST climbed from 3 to 7 per cent, it offered discounts on essential items to offset the hikes each time. It did the same when the GST rose from 7 to 8 per cent in 2023. For six months from January, FairPrice offered a 1 per cent discount on 500 essential items.

The retailer also counters cost pressures with special schemes. When inflation surged in 2022 during the pandemic and geopolitical turmoil, FairPrice brought back the "Stretch Your Dollar" programme. It was first launched in 2008 during the global financial crisis and re-emerged in 2010 to 2011 during a downturn. The latest run, from February 2022, included a 5 per cent discount every Friday on 100 staples such as eggs, rice and milk. As inflation persisted, it launched the "Greater Value Every Day" campaign in October 2022. Prices of 50 popular daily essential items were frozen every month under the "Everyday Low Price" scheme, which curates a basket of over 500 essential products that are priced low.

"We remain committed to stretching our resources and keeping prices affordable and supplies stable, despite facing increasing operational costs brought on by rising inflation," said Mr Vipul Chawla, Group Chief Executive Officer of FairPrice Group. It's not a stretch to say it remains a fine balancing act to offer greater value, every day.

Photo: The "Everyday Low Price" (EDLP) scheme curates a basket of over 500 popular essential products that are priced low.
Source: Samuel He

Enough veggies at FairPrice

YOU need not rush for vegetables and fruits at NTUC FairPrice. It has enough supply at all its outlets.

Giving the assurance that the prices of fruits and vegetables will remain unchanged, the supermarket co-operative stressed that it has sufficient stocks to meet the demand for the next few days despite the closure of the Pasir Panjang wholesale market.

The fruits and vegetable wholesale market has been ordered to close for 10 days after a stallholder had been infected with Sars. About 2,400 people are instructed to be quarantined for 10 days because they might have come into contact with the Sars victims.

FairPrice chairman Chandra Das emphasised that the co-operative has no problem with stocks availability as there is no real shortage on the market. It has already taken steps to triple its orders for leafy vegetables to meet the increased demand.

Currently, FairPrice has 600 tonnes of fruits and vegetables stored in its 130,000-square feet Fresh Food Distribution Centre located at Upper Thomson Road. Another 1,000 tonnes will arrive within the next two days. The normal consumption per day is about 200 tonnes.

"We are confident of meeting the market's demand. However, it is important for Singaporeans not to rush to buy. We would also like to assure the public that our prices have not changed despite the sudden surge in demand," said Mr Das.

FairPrice does not depend on the Pasir Panjang wholesale centre as the key source of supply for fruits and vegetables, noting that it is used only as a back-up source. With the closure of the wholesale centre, some supplies have re-routed their supplies to FairPrice's Fresh Food Distribution Centre.

With its huge storage and centralised distribution facility, the co-operative has been able to purchase in bulk and store them to meet unexpected demand. Deliveries have been increased island-wide to meet the demand.

NTUC FairPrice assures all shoppers that there will be enough vegetables and fruits.

$10 limit on veggies

SHOPPERS at NTUC FairPrice are now only allowed to buy up to $10 worth of vegetables at all outlets.

According to FairPrice Chairman Chandra Das, the restriction is put in place to discourage bulk buying that had resulted in some temporary out-of-stock situations in some outlets.

"With immediate effect and until 29 April, every shopper is allowed to purchase only up to $10 worth of vegetables and fruits. We hope to withdraw this restriction as soon as possible when the situation eases," he said.

Mr Das added that FairPrice will continue to look for new sources of supply. It has also extended assistance to the hospitals to help them get fresh supply of vegetables.

New school arms security guards with skills

By Siow Pei Ling

SECURITY guards who have yet to attain industry National Skills Recognition Systems standards will benefit from a new training institute by the Security Association Singapore (SAS).

According to SAS chief executive

IT holiday packages for children

NTUC Computer Training Centre is offering holiday packages for children of union members this coming June school holidays. The objective of these packages is to help them keep abreast with the latest IT knowledge and help them in their school work through improved projects presentation using IT

SHARE
DARE TO DO GOOD
3/11

"When shelves were swept empty, FairPrice staff worked late into the night to replenish stocks. This quick and dedicated response, seen time and again, allayed public fears.

Photo: A newspaper article in NTUC News during the SARS outbreak, assuring the public that FairPrice had sufficient stocks of vegetables.
Source: NTUC

Overcoming Crises: A Lighthouse Amid the Storms

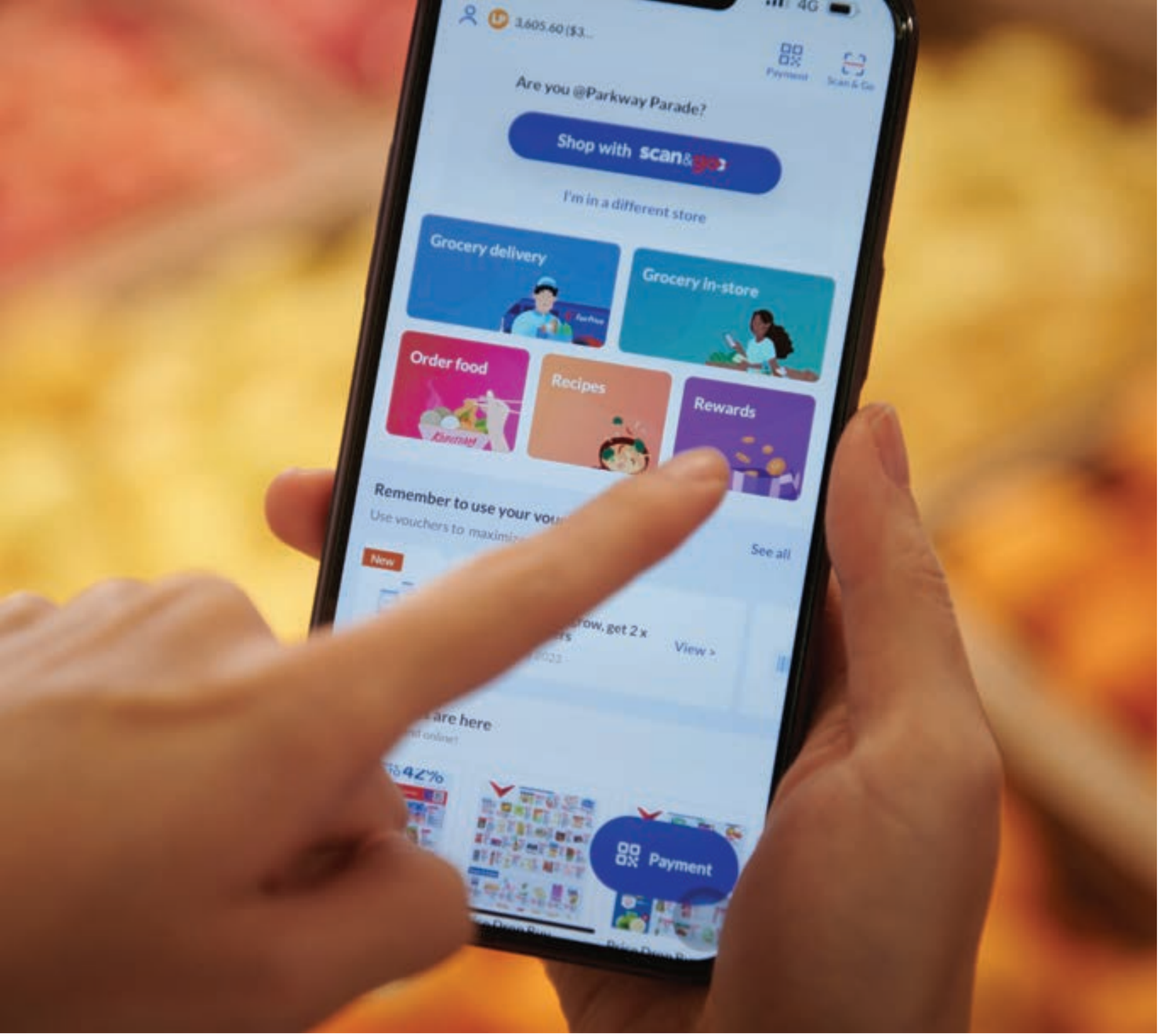
Wave upon wave of crises have hit Singapore through the decades, many of them springing from beyond these shores – from oil shocks and financial meltdowns to wars and pandemics. Through it all, FairPrice has striven to be a bulwark of stability amid uncertain times. In fact, it was birthed amid the turmoil of the 1973 global oil crisis, with a mandate to moderate prices and keep inflation and profiteering under control.

Price fluctuations have continued through the decades as international events send shockwaves around the world. When the first Iraqi shot was fired in Kuwait in January 1991, it triggered panic buying in FairPrice stores as families rushed to hoard food. When shelves were swept empty, FairPrice staff worked late into the night to replenish stocks. This quick and dedicated response, seen time and again, allayed public fears.

Health emergencies such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 have also caused anxiety. When the SARS-stricken Pasir Panjang Wholesale Market was closed for over two weeks, FairPrice brought in more vegetables to keep a lid on prices.

More challenges were to come. During the 2008 global financial crisis, FairPrice introduced a housebrand discount to tide Singaporeans over it. Amid a worldwide rice supply shortage that same year, it dropped prices as the cost of rice more than doubled overseas. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 proved especially painful. Among other measures, the chain froze prices for 100 essential housebrand items to cushion the crisis' economic impact.

Like a lighthouse, FairPrice will always serve as a beacon of hope for Singaporeans amid dark, turbulent times.



> With the refreshed Link Rewards Programme, we will continue to provide the best for our members, diversifying our offerings and providing members with reward options beyond groceries.

Photo: Shoppers can use the FairPrice app to collect Linkpoints, which can also be converted into loyalty points or miles with participating partners.
Source: Samuel He

More Savings with Linkpoints and Rebates

Save as you shop is what FairPrice Group offers with the Link Rewards Programme. Initially called Plus!, it was launched in 1998 by the labour movement as a rewards programme and renamed in April 2022.

Members sign up for free and earn Linkpoints when they shop online or in-store. These points can then be used to offset purchases. Currently one of Singapore's largest loyalty programmes, it has over 2.4 million members and more than 1,000 active partner outlets.

This is how it works: 0.5 Linkpoints are earned for every $1 spent at any FairPrice and Unity stores as well as selected Cheers outlets. For every 100 Linkpoints, members can redeem $1 during purchases.

Linkpoints can also be converted into loyalty points or miles with participating partners from payment systems Atome to Singapore Airlines or AirAsia. "With the refreshed Link Rewards Programme, we will continue to provide the best for our members, diversifying our offerings and providing members with reward options beyond groceries," said Mr Alvin Neo, Managing Director of NTUC Link, which is now part of FairPrice Group.

Another way to earn savings is through rebates. Those who register as NTUC members, for a small fee, can receive up to $240 in shopping rebates annually. Today, over 1 million NTUC members get rebates every year, with $63 million in patronage rebates distributed in 2021 – up from the $23 million in 1999.

Both these schemes help members stretch their dollar, so that they can buy more for less.

Savings for Seniors

> Altogether, FairPrice gave out more than $11.5 million in savings through these discount schemes in 2022.

Being a senior has its perks, especially at FairPrice stores where they receive special shopping discounts from Mondays to Wednesdays.

Every Monday and Wednesday, Pioneer Generation (PG) Singaporeans born before 1950 are offered a 3 per cent discount. Every Tuesday, residents above 60 years old will enjoy 2 per cent off their purchases under the Seniors Discount Scheme. And every Wednesday, Merdeka Generation (MG) Singaporeans born in the 1950s enjoy a 3 per cent discount.

Altogether, FairPrice gave out more than $11.5 million in savings through these discount schemes in 2022.

The retailer was the first among supermarket chains to offer senior shoppers such benefits, starting with the Seniors Discount scheme back in 2002. Competitors soon followed suit. The PG discount started later in 2014, and MG discount in 2019.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, PG discount benefits were extended to family members who helped their elderly relatives shop for groceries – as seniors were encouraged to stay home to minimise contact with the virus.

Then-FairPrice Group Chief Executive Officer, Mr Seah Kian Peng said this would strengthen family support for the elder generation. "Beyond helping seniors to stretch their dollar, this initiative also encourages family members to check in with their elderly parents who may be living on their own, as we recognise having strong family support is important to one's overall well-being," he said.

Photo: Seniors like those from the Merdeka Generation receive special discounts from FairPrice outlets.
Source: FairPrice Group

SHARE
DARE TO DO GOOD
6/11

A Toast to Just Wine Club

> It started with 351 members in 2012 and now has 20,000 active members.

When FairPrice spotted an uptick in wine appreciation among Singaporeans in the new millennium, it began brewing a new plan to make wine more affordable.

Just Wine Club, a fee-based membership club, was launched in July 2012 for both wine novices and connoisseurs. For an annual fee of $20, members receive perks such as an 8 per cent discount on wines purchased at FairPrice supermarkets and other retail outlets under the FairPrice umbrella.

Members are also privy to exclusive events such as wine tastings, wine pairing dinners and "cellar door" sales. Membership has grown significantly over the past decade. It started with 351 members in 2012 and now has 20,000 active members. Members can choose from a selection of over 300 different wines, and also enjoy special flash promotions like a Wine & Food set at selected outlets.

A club that makes the world of wine more accessible for all? Let's drink to that.

Photo: Just Wine Club members also get to attend exclusive events including wine tastings, wine pairing dinners and "cellar door" sales.
Source: FairPrice Group

The Foundation for a Better Singapore

> NTUC FairPrice Foundation is a milestone achievement towards our vision to be a world-class retailer with a heart.

A Singapore where fewer people struggle financially is what FairPrice has always worked towards. That is why it established the FairPrice Foundation, a registered charity fully funded by FairPrice, in March 2008. The Foundation aims to improve life for the community through helping the poor and needy, promoting community bonding and nation-building, and advancing the welfare of workers.

"As a social enterprise, our aim is to do well in order to do more good. NTUC FairPrice Foundation is a milestone achievement towards our vision to be a world-class retailer with a heart," said then-Chairman of the FairPrice Foundation, Mr Ng Ser Miang, in 2008. At its launch, FairPrice pledged $50 million in donations over 10 years. Since then, it has donated more than $178 million to the Foundation, which has earned accolades such as multiple Community Chest Awards and People's Association Community Spirit Awards for its social service efforts.

Mr Jonas Kor, former Director of Corporate Communications at FairPrice Group and current General Manager of FairPrice Foundation, recalled an event where children from disadvantaged families were taken on a supermarket shopping trip on a $50 budget.

"I volunteered with a boy who was about seven or eight and I could tell that he really wanted a toy. Instead, he borrowed my phone to call his grandmother and asked what brand of milk powder his younger sister took," he recounted. "After hanging up, he picked up the toy for one last glance, but bought the milk powder for his sister."

"I was touched and it's a reflection that we not only help make a difference, but also inculcate our youth with the values of caring and sharing," he said.

Photo: FairPrice Foundation donated $40,000 to the Yayasan Mendaki Education Trust Fund in March 2023.
Source: FairPrice Group

Will Walk for Rice

> It also motivates Singaporeans to be more active – for a good cause. The more participants walked, the more rice FairPrice will donate.

What do you walk for? Exercise or simply to get to the other side of the road. But what about walking for rice – to raise funds for the needy and offer them a staple food item on their table?

That was exactly what around 500 people did on November 3, 2022, at the launch of the 14th edition of the annual FairPrice Walk for Rice @ South East. The event at the Sports Hub also marked the physical return of the initiative since the pandemic. It was all smiles as everyone took part in the walk, spin cycling, floor curling and archery at the venue.

The initiative, first launched in 2009 by FairPrice Foundation and South East Community Development Council, aims to rally the community to help needy families residing in the South East region. It also motivates Singaporeans to be more active – for a good cause. The more participants walk, the more rice FairPrice will donate.

In 2009, more than 30,000 people participated and raised half a million bowls of rice for 5,000 needy families by clocking a total mileage of 61,583 km.

Going into 2023, participants can walk or run at their own time or pace. They just have to track their mileage online. The target is to distribute 500,000 bowls of white and brown rice, and 50,000 bowls of instant oats to 7,000 vulnerable families.

Since its launch in 2009, the initiative has clocked a total mileage of 3 million km and donated six million bowls of rice.

Photo: (Centre) Then-Mayor of South East District, Dr Mohamad Maliki Osman, and then-Group Chief Executive Officer of FairPrice Group, Mr Seah Kian Peng, with residents at Walk for Rice @ South East in 2019.
Source: FairPrice Group

50-cent Hot Coffee and Tea

> Till today, FairPrice Group continues to offer the 50-cent hot coffee and tea deal to union members every May, in celebration of Labour Day.

Buying a hot beverage for less than a dollar is almost unheard of in Singapore, let alone a mere 50 cents. But for the entire month of May in 2019, union members could sip a cuppa for that low price – in a bid to help them stretch their dollar.

Soon after NTUC Enterprise acquired the Kopitiam chain of food courts and coffeeshops in 2019, which is now under the FairPrice Group, the prices of hot coffee and tea were cut to just 50 cents.

All NTUC Union members could enjoy this discounted price at close to 100 Kopitiam and NTUC FoodFare outlets across Singapore. The promotion subsequently continued every Wednesday until June 2020 for union members and older Singaporeans who were born before 1960, called the Merdeka and Pioneer generations.

This move was to mark the 50th anniversary of the labour movement's "Modernization Seminar" in 1969 when social enterprises were first mooted. Part of the discounts included a lower price for the quintessential Singapore breakfast set – comprising a cup of hot coffee or tea, kaya toast and two soft-boiled eggs.

Till today, FairPrice Group continues to offer the 50-cent hot coffee and tea deal to union members every May, in celebration of Labour Day.

This just goes to show that bread-and-butter issues will always be close to the Group's heart.

Photo: NTUC Union members, and Merdeka and Pioneer Generation seniors were treated to 50-cent hot coffee/tea every Wednesday from May 2019 to June 2020.
Source: FairPrice Group

Keeping *Cai Png* Economical with Rice Garden

> From just one pilot store in Aljunied, Rice Garden has spread its presence in the heartlands, with 24 stalls islandwide now.

With inflation pushing prices up, even economy rice may not be as economical as before. But Rice Garden bucks the trend, offering $2.50 or under meals to seniors and the needy in 2023.

This affordable price has held steady for over 14 years, since the Rice Garden stall brand was set up in 2009 in the wake of the global economic crisis.

When the Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008, global economies plunged into recession. Amidst the chaos, the price of food soared. Caused by droughts, rising oil prices and growing demand for staples, the price of rice doubled during this period. As a result, prices of imported food spiked by 12.1 per cent on average.

To keep local fare affordable to the public, then-NTUC Foodfare launched Rice Garden promising economy rice meals or *cai png* at a bargain of under $2 – a price that has withstood the forces of inflation over the last decade.

In 2019, NTUC Foodfare acquired foodcourt operator Kopitiam, and both entities were merged with NTUC FairPrice to form FairPrice Group. Rice Garden continues to be a staple in its business.

The programme has also grown in scale. From just one pilot store in Aljunied, Rice Garden has spread its presence in the heartlands, with around 40 stalls islandwide now. In 2022, Warong Rice Garden, a halal concept, opened at Senja Hawker Centre, offering customers *nasi campur* or "mixed rice" in Malay for as little as $2.

Photo: Rice Garden stalls, including the one at Senja Hawker Centre (pictured), promises economy rice meals or *cai png* at a bargain of under $2.
Source: Samuel He

Fairmily Ties

> To relieve their workload, staff across FairPrice Group are encouraged to chip in as part of the One FPG Fairmily Programme.

"Fairmily" bonds among FairPrice Group employees are strengthened every festive holiday – or during the recent COVID-19 crisis – whenever there is a shopping frenzy at the grocery aisle. As shoppers swarm the stores to stock up for parties or a pandemic, frontline employees work double time to ensure shelves are not empty and shopping experiences are seamless. To relieve their workload, staff across FairPrice Group are encouraged to chip in as part of the One FPG Fairmily Programme.

The programme, which is usually activated during festive seasons, was eventually expanded to the entire year from June 2022 – bridging gaps between HQ and frontline employees. This means that employees from HQ can do "remote" work at the retail branches throughout the year – bagging groceries, replenishing stocks and fulfilling online orders. During festive periods, they also get to perform tasks like quality and control checks in warehouses to assist in supply chain operations.

In 2023, over 500 HQ employees volunteered 3,500 hours during the Chinese New Year period, including promoting the FairPrice app – an omnichannel experience with convenient features like online grocery orders and Scan & Go. These volunteers registered new users on the app, introducing its benefits to them.

The One FPG Fairmily Programme does not just provide much-needed support to frontline employees. By stepping into the shoes of their retail branch colleagues, office-based employees also learn about business processes at the stores and gain a greater appreciation of the work done by frontline employees. "The FairPrice Group One Fairmily spirit remains very strong, and that will anchor us as we deliver on our purpose of moderating the cost of living for our customers," said FairPrice Group Chairman Kee Teck Koon.

Photo: (Opposite) From left to right, Mrs Kee Teck Koon; Mr Kee Teck Koon, Chairman; Mr Vipul Chawla, Group Chief Executive Officer; Mr Seah Kian Peng, Deputy Chairman; with an employee during the Chinese New Year 2023 peak period. (Bottom) Staff across the Group volunteered to sell mandarin oranges during the festivities.
Source: FairPrice Group

SURPASS - DARE TO INNOVATE

FairPrice has never stood still. The cooperative constantly reinvents and transforms – to deliver greater convenience, better service and more affordable products to consumers.

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ATM: Advanced Track to Modernity

> It also set FairPrice apart from the competition, burnishing its image as a convenient one-stop shop.

Automated Teller Machines (ATM) in Singapore had clocked about 20 years of usage when FairPrice spotted a chance to elevate its service by expanding access to these cash dispensers.

In April 2001, it inked an agreement with DBS to set up "POSB Centres" in selected supermarkets all over the island. Each centre was about the size of two parking spots, and offered a suite of basic banking services, including cash deposits, withdrawals and passbook updating.

Collectively, these Centres and POSB ATMs tackled the pain point of increasingly time-starved Singaporeans in the new millennium, who could now load up their shopping carts and wallets in one go. It also set FairPrice apart from the competition, burnishing its image as a convenient one-stop shop. Consumers could shop and bank at the same time.

That same year, in 2001, FairPrice crossed the milestone of $1 billion in revenue.

Today, ATMs are fairly ubiquitous in FairPrice supermarkets. But with Singapore's drive to go cashless and the organisation's constant upgrades, perhaps these could soon be replaced by VTMs – Video Teller Machines that offer an even wider range of self-banking services.

One thing's for certain: FairPrice will continue along the track of modernisation to deliver convenience to its customers.

Photo: In 2001, FairPrice supermarket became the first to have ATMs installed within their premises.
Source: Samuel He

How SCope Saves the Day

> Behind the success of SCope is a crack team called D.O.T who work around the clock to make sure Singapore residents will always have what they need, when they need it.

Walking into the Supply Chain Operations Centre (SCope) in Joo Koon Circle is like entering a state-of-the-art command centre.

Opened in the midst of COVID-19, SCope is decked out with a dizzying spread of dashboards that monitor stock freshness and supplies across all FairPrice supermarkets in real time. It was born out of necessity as a way to forecast disruptions to supplies during the pandemic. In an age where data is the new oil, FairPrice is leaning into data analytics to give it an edge over its competitors.

SCope's mettle has been tested several times. One test came in March 2021, when the Ever Given container ship ran aground in the Suez Canal and threw global supply chains into chaos. Through its advanced monitoring system, SCope was alerted to the emergency early and sought alternative sources quickly. This helped secure FairPrice's supply chain and ensure supermarket shelves remained amply stocked.

Behind the success of SCope is a crack team called D.O.T (Data Analytics, Operations Monitoring and Technologies), who work around the clock to make sure Singapore residents will always have what they need, when they need it.

No wonder this team was dubbed by FairPrice as "real-life superheroes that keep our country's essentials abundantly stocked."

Photo: Supply Chain Operations Centre (SCope) allowed FairPrice staff to monitor stock freshness and supplies in real time during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Source: FairPrice Group

Barcode Beginnings

> By the end of 1993, the barcode system was used in all FairPrice supermarkets.

White labels sporting small numbers and black vertical lines of varying thickness might be a ubiquitous sight today. But barcodes, and the beeps that come from scanning one, were a novelty in Singapore some 30 years ago.

In 1991, FairPrice was the first supermarket to implement widespread "barcoding," which eradicated the need for manual price tagging and eased the checkout process.

Cashiers just had to scan the barcode on each item and the name and price would show up on the cash register. The system would then immediately tally up the total cost and process the data for digital stock tracking. By the end of 1993, the barcode system was used in all FairPrice supermarkets.

But it required performance testing as digital tracking of transactions was still new. This was done by the Consumers Association of Singapore, which surveyed over 1,500 transactions at three separate supermarkets. The barcode system aced the test with 100 per cent accuracy.

Following FairPrice's success, all supermarkets in Singapore adopted the barcode system.

Photo: (Both) A FairPrice cashier scanning a barcode. In 1991, FairPrice was the first supermarket to implement widespread barcoding.
Source: Samuel He

Take. Scan. Go – It's That Easy

> This hassle-free process not only gives shoppers a better in-store experience, but also boosts staff productivity.

Whether it's for communication, transport or payment, mobile phones seem to be the only thing we need when we head out.

FairPrice app's Scan & Go harnesses this convenience to make life easier. Launched in 2019, it allows consumers to shop, scan and pay without having to wait in line or interact with cashiers. This hassle-free process not only gives shoppers a better in-store experience, but also boosts staff productivity.

Just launch the application at any of the 18 stores with Scan & Go and check in via the store's QR code or by using GPS. Then scan each item with the app, which also offers the latest on deals and promotions.

At the end of the visit, shoppers simply pay in-app and scan their e-receipt at the Scan & Go kiosks to verify their purchases.

Scan & Go evolved from SCAN2GO, a handheld device introduced in 2014. The first of its kind in Singapore, it enabled consumers to scan and pack their own items as they shopped. But it still required a scanning device, and payment had to be made at the self-checkout counter.

Whatever technology brings next, you can be sure that FairPrice will scan the horizon to further improve the experience for its customers.

Photo: With Scan & Go, consumers can shop, scan and pay without having to wait in line or interact with cashiers.
Source: OuterEdit

Self-service at its Finest

> This boosted cashier productivity by over 80 per cent, and is now available in 118 FairPrice stores.

When you have just a few items on your grocery list and want to nip in and out of a store quickly, the self-checkout counter is a convenient option. Now a common sight in many supermarkets, this payment point that cuts waiting time made its debut in FairPrice stores in 2011.

It was born out of necessity and the view that the labour crunch would become a new norm. The supermarket chain knew it had to address the problem before it became too big to tackle and ensure that things could still run smoothly with less manpower.

The first self-checkout counters were unveiled at the FairPrice Finest store in Clementi Mall, where customers with single-basket purchases could scan, pack and pay for items on their own.

This boosted cashier productivity by over 80 per cent, and is now available in 118 FairPrice stores.

FairPrice upped the ante with the newest Finest outlet in Sengkang Grand Mall that was launched on March 6, 2023. Unlike those that came before it, this outlet is not only fitted with self-checkout counters that can cater to a trolley load, it is also equipped with dedicated Scan & Go counters.

As part of an integrated development plan for a neighbourhood with many young families, it is the ideal location to trial this new store concept.

Photo: (Opposite) A customer using the self-checkout counter at a FairPrice Xtra outlet. Self-checkout debuted in FairPrice stores in 2011. (Bottom) The self-check counters at Sengkang Grand's Finest are able to cater to trolley loads.
Source: (Opposite) The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission, (Bottom) FairPrice Group

Photo: A FairPrice employee picking out items to fulfil online orders.
Source: Samuel He

Fulfilling the Future of Digital Business

> Instead of retrieving items from the dark store, online deliveries are now picked and packed from supermarkets.

When FairPrice Group fully converted its Orchid Country Club physical store into the chain's first "dark store" in 2020, it was able to fulfil more online orders – 25 per cent more.

This dark store, a large distribution centre which is not open to the public but stores goods used to fulfil online orders, helped to improve delivery capacity. The move was necessary to serve a sudden spike in demand for essential items in 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, as online orders grew – jumping 44 per cent from 2019 to 2020 – FairPrice shifted from dark stores to decentralised fulfilment centres called Fulfilment from Store. Instead of retrieving items from the dark store, online deliveries are now picked and packed from supermarkets. This allows FairPrice to fulfil orders within two hours, with the same variety and options. Decentralised fulfilment centres make more economic sense as a central warehouse has to operate at an extremely high capacity to be profitable and is cost-inefficient. With this in mind, the Orchid Country Club dark store was eventually closed in March 2023.

The Fulfilment from Store approach is prized for its adaptability, having been tried and tested during the pandemic. With its cost and logistical efficiency, the strategy could serve FairPrice well for years to come for tomorrow's omnichannel future.

Just a Click Away with FairPrice Online and App

> The FairPrice mobile app, revamped in 2021, has become a one-stop solution for all grocery needs.

When FairPrice saw how quickly consumers were taking to online grocery stores, it decided to conquer this new terrain. The chain made its first foray into this sector with the introduction of its e-commerce arm in 2002, and launched the FairPrice mobile app in 2018.

Both the app and the online marketplace – which provide a wide range of goods from health and wellness products to electrical appliances to fruits and vegetables – were a lifeline for customers when COVID-19 hit. Unable to leave their homes during the pandemic, Singaporeans turned to online shopping to purchase essential items. As a result, the web traffic of FairPrice online almost tripled. To manage this sudden spike, 150 additional workers were hired and trained for picking and packing, and home delivery slots were bumped up by 25 per cent.

The FairPrice mobile app, revamped in 2021, has become a one-stop solution for all grocery needs. It combines grocery shopping, delivery, food services, a rewards system and more into a seamless omnichannel experience.

Fresh groceries can be ordered via the app, with home delivery arriving within two hours. The app includes innovative features like Scan & Go, expenditure tracking, recipe recommendations and Linkpoints, which are earned through purchases and can be redeemed for discounts.

Food services are also integrated into the app – users can get up to 10 per cent off at Kopitiam, for instance, and even redeem their Linkpoints to offset their Kopitiam purchases.

Thanks to these digital innovations, FairPrice has managed to stay on top of the game while offering shoppers convenience that's hard to beat.

Photo: The FairPrice mobile app combines grocery shopping, delivery, food services, a rewards system and more into a seamless omnichannel experience.
Source: FairPrice Group

Unity: Daily Dose of Wellness

> FairPrice's extensive presence in the retail market would allow the pharmacy to expand its services and cater to more consumers, while also enjoying the benefits of economies of scale that would help lower the costs of products.

When it comes to health, we never know what we have until it's missing. A throbbing head, stuffed sinuses or a stomach ache can upend one's plans for the day. When a minor illness strikes, a pharmacy on hand can make all the difference. This is where your nearest Unity outlet can help set your day back on track.

With the aim of moderating the cost of healthcare essentials, the social enterprise, then called NTUC Healthcare, was set up in 1992 when the price of health services started to worry families. It started with four pharmacies located within NTUC FairPrice stores. Four years later, in 1996, the name of the pharmacy was rebranded to the "Unity" we know today. In 2011, NTUC Healthcare was renamed NTUC Unity Healthcare before merging with NTUC Eldercare to form NTUC Health in 2014.

When the health and wellness market continued to grow rapidly, NTUC Enterprise in 2017 decided that the best way to serve consumers was for NTUC Health to sell its retail pharmacy arm to NTUC FairPrice. FairPrice's extensive presence in the retail market would allow the pharmacy to expand its services and cater to more consumers, while also enjoying the benefits of economies of scale that would help lower the costs of products. Now, growing to around 80 outlets – with some being standalone stores – Unity's shelves are lined with a wide range of affordable health supplements, healthcare and skincare products, medicines and first aid items.

Unity also stands ready to overcome any health threat that knocks on Singapore's doors. Just as they were there to sell N95 masks during the haze in 2015 and ART kits during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020, Unity continues to stand steadfast in its role of ensuring Singapore's health and wellness.

Photo: There are around 80 Unity outlets today selling a wide range of affordable health supplements, healthcare and skincare products, medicines and first aid items.
Source: FairPrice Group

> Through our omnichannel retail and dining network, we are well poised to deliver greater value to consumers, providing them ease and convenience.

Photo: FairPrice Group's leadership and staff convene for a townhall following its formation.
Source: FairPrice Group

FairPrice Group: A Merger for the Consumer

Singaporeans' eating habits were evolving. Time starved, home-cooked meals were becoming increasingly rare, replaced by hawker fare, takeaways and food deliveries.

While groceries and food services continued to take up a quarter of each person's expenditure, this shift meant that the proportions could change. More and more money could eventually be spent on cooked food instead of at supermarkets.

And this would inevitably dampen FairPrice's social mission to moderate the cost of living since its business focused on groceries. It was a possibility that NTUC Enterprise, the parent organisation of FairPrice, was already sensitive to in the mid-2010s.

Hence in 2019, NTUC Enterprise made a bold move to serve a larger "share of stomach" by merging four entities – NTUC FairPrice, NTUC Link, NTUC Foodfare and newly acquired food court operator Kopitiam. With this, FairPrice Group was born.

In announcing the move, Mr Seah Kian Peng, then-Group Chief Executive Officer of FairPrice Group, said: "As modern lifestyles become more complex and demanding, FairPrice Group's integrated products and services – from groceries to prepared food – will enable us to serve consumers through different life stages."

"Through our omnichannel retail and dining network, we are well poised to deliver greater value to consumers, providing them ease and convenience."

Armed with a new tagline, "Everything Food Made Easy," the Group set out to better serve the Singapore population, along with the twin goals of bringing greater value to all and being more customer-centric.

Lau Pa Sat: Good Food at Good Value

> The aim is to moderate the cost of living in Singapore through quality yet affordable cooked food.

Its octagonal shape, ornamental Victorian columns and clock tower stand out in the middle of Singapore's Central Business District. As one of Singapore's most famous food centres, it draws both locals and tourists with its historic vibe and myriad cuisine options.

Lau Pa Sat, which means old market in Hokkien, was once the home to the nation's first wet market over 150 years ago, before it was transformed into this heritage kopitiam. Over the years, it had several facelifts with the latest in 2020 by FairPrice Group, which now operates the food haven.

It was managed by food court operator Kopitiam, which was acquired by the labour movement in 2018. The integration with NTUC Foodfare into the newly set up FairPrice Group in 2019 – with the mission "Everything Food Made Easy" – makes it the largest food operator with 64 food courts, 35 coffee shops and 12 hawker centres. The aim is to moderate the cost of living in Singapore through quality yet affordable cooked food.

Today, several Kopitiam food courts have been refreshed, with *Lau Pa Sat* given a new look and concept with the addition of Food Folks that is touted to be a "purpose driven retail" space that helps local food enterprises establish their brand presence.

The 2,700 sq ft space houses four local food and beverage brands and more than 500 food-related products from 80 local brands.

Along with Food Folks, other local food favourites – chicken rice, satay and barbecue seafood – are available at *Lau Pa Sat*. Come and enjoy good food at good value, where history is given a modern twist.

Photo: FairPrice Group gave *Lau Pa Sat* a new look and concept with the addition of Food Folks that is touted to be a "purpose driven retail" space that helps local food enterprises establish their brand presence.
Source: Rajaraman Arumugam/ Shutterstock.com

From Preschoolers to Army Recruits: Serving Up Energy-boosting Meals

> "Building on its expertise in institutional catering... Foodfare has also expanded its services to nursing homes and childcare centres.

The 24km route march during National Service is a rite of passage for almost all Singaporean men, and arguably the biggest milestone of a recruit's life in the army.

To give recruits an extra boost of strength as they prepare for the arduous trek from Changi to Marina Bay, carrying a heavy field pack no less, Foodfare created a special meal in 2020 – the Strong Burger, complete with sides of french fries, blanched broccoli and fruit cocktail.

Since then, "special meals" have become occasional treats that recruits at Pulau Tekong can look forward to, especially at milestones such as Adjustment Week, or during festive occasions.

Such unique offerings followed Foodfare's integration into FairPrice Group in 2019. Foodfare was refocused as a business-to-business brand with two divisions – Institutional Catering Management and Food Manufacturing Division.

Building on its expertise in institutional catering – having supplied nutritious meals to SAF servicemen since 1997, and subsequently to the Civil Defence Academy and National Service Training Centre cookhouses – Foodfare has also expanded its services to nursing homes and childcare centres.

It is now supplying cooked food to some 100 NTUC First Campus and PAP Community Foundation preschools, serving 9,000 students, 17 nursing and destitute homes, and a community hospital.

Photo: Recruits were treated to a Strong Burger (pictured) before their 24km route march in 2020.
Source: FairPrice Group

Mask Madness

> At the time, only a few Chinese factories were authorised to export masks, so this connection was invaluable.

It was like a scene straight out of an apocalyptic movie. When Singapore raised its alert level over the coronavirus outbreak in February 2020, Singaporeans began thronging supermarkets, stripping shelves bare of toilet paper, hand sanitisers and non-perishable food items.

Masks, in particular, quickly sold out as frantic hordes spooked by rumours of a supply crunch snapped them up as their best defence against an invisible enemy – a deadly and mysterious virus.

Amid fears of a shortage, FairPrice quickly took steps to bolster supply by ordering 10 million masks from its supplier in China. These were produced specifically for FairPrice, from a factory in Hunan – one of the few approved by the Chinese government and which adhered to Singapore's Health Sciences Authority's regulations.

At the time, only a few Chinese factories were authorised to export masks, so this connection was invaluable. Logistics was also critical to get the masks here on time. On April 24, 2020, a special charter flight from Hunan delivered 7.4 million masks, weighing an estimated 60 tonnes, while the remaining 2.6 million masks were transported via sea.

FairPrice's swift decision and reliable supply network enabled Singapore to maintain its mask stockpile and kept everyone as safe as possible before vaccines were made available.

Photo: (Bottom) On April 24, 2020, a special charter flight from Hunan delivered 7.4 million masks, weighing an estimated 60 tonnes.
Source: (Opposite) iStock.com/Ja'Crispy, (Bottom) FairPrice Group

Rolling Out Toilet Rolls

> The sudden surge in demand had quickly stripped shelves bare of items such as rice, instant noodles and, strangely, toilet rolls.

Aisle after aisle, pallet upon pallet were stacked with boxes of essential supplies – in particular toilet rolls.

This was the reassuring scene that FairPrice Group's then-Group Chief Executive Officer Seah Kian Peng showed the media at its Benoi Distribution Centre, after Singaporeans went on COVID-stoked panic buying sprees in February 2020.

The sudden surge in demand had quickly stripped shelves bare of items such as rice, instant noodles and, strangely, toilet rolls. These were snapped up as soon as they were replenished, fuelling the misperception that Singapore was running out of essential supplies.

But it was the exact opposite. FairPrice was amply stocked for a crisis, with nine million rolls of toilet paper in existing inventory across its three distribution centres.

After assessing the spikes in demand, FairPrice increased the number of supermarket staff to restock shelves and even tripled the volume of essentials sent to all its supermarkets from its distribution centres. It was also a time when the strength of the OneFairmily showed, with employees from across the Group volunteering to help.

No wonder Lead Hand Logistic Assistant Yusman Ahmad declared February 2020 as the busiest period in his 26 years of working at a FairPrice distribution centre. Like him, many other staff members were on standby even on their days off to keep the shelves well-stocked.

The public soon got the message that FairPrice had sufficient stock of all essentials. But to this day, toilet paper remains an infamous icon of the pandemic – a time when people spooked by a mysterious virus flushed good sense down the drain.

Photo: Mr Seah Kian Peng, then-FairPrice Group Chief Executive Officer, at FairPrice's Benoi Distribution Centre on February 8, 2020.
Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission

Wheeling FairPrice Closer to Neighbourhoods

> FairPrice rolled out the FairPrice on Wheels initiative, which enabled seniors to buy their own groceries without having to venture too far from home and risk catching the virus.

When the Circuit Breaker was put in place in April 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19, an unfamiliar hush fell over Singapore as shops shuttered and streets emptied.

With most people confined to their homes, some elderly folks found themselves alone and lost, especially those who lacked family support. That was when FairPrice rolled out the FairPrice on Wheels initiative, which enabled seniors to buy their own groceries without having to venture too far from home and risk catching the virus.

Vans filled with essentials such as rice, bread, canned food, toiletries and vegetables would drive to several mature residential estates every day from 9am to 2pm. FairPrice picked five locations – Commonwealth Link, Telok Blangah Crescent, Telok Blangah Rise, Kampong Glam Community Club and Jalan Kukoh – where more than 30 per cent of the residents are senior citizens.

FairPrice on Wheels pulled to a stop in October 2020, as Singapore eased some of the pandemic-related restrictions. But it made a comeback one month later due to popular demand.

Instead of vans that stocked only a small selection of essential items, the relaunch had an air-conditioned truck that offered more than 200 products, including frozen and dairy products. It plied new locations like Bukit Purmei, Clementi West and West Coast.

With these mobile stores, FairPrice was serving Singaporeans at their doorsteps.

Photo: FairPrice on Wheels was initiated during the Circuit Breaker in April 2020.
Source: FairPrice Group

A Chicken and Egg Problem

> The strategy of diversification sees FairPrice Group sourcing from more than 100 countries and markets for its goods – and it is always looking out for more partners.

Challenges wrought by the pandemic, compounded by the war in Ukraine and Malaysia's subsequent poultry export ban, strained Singapore's supplies of poultry and eggs in 2022.

Still, FairPrice Group managed to keep its chicken and egg stocks steady. This was no mean feat for a country known to be one of the world's largest per capita consumer of eggs – Singapore's per capita consumption was 388 eggs in 2020. Every year, Singapore consumers eat more than 2 billion eggs.

How did Singapore and FairPrice Group facilitate a smooth supply to feed such a hearty appetite?

Quite simply, they heeded the good old proverb and put their eggs in more than one basket. The strategy of diversification sees FairPrice Group sourcing from more than 100 countries and markets for its goods – and it is always looking out for more partners.

When egg supplies were threatened during the pandemic, the Group stepped up its search for suppliers to import from countries further afield such as Spain, Ukraine and Poland. It also inks agreements with farms to "forward buy" produce at agreed prices, so consumers are insulated from price fluctuations caused by market shortages.

Malaysia's ban on chicken exports, which took effect on June 1, 2022, ruffled some feathers as Singapore imports a third of its poultry supply from its neighbour. But FairPrice Group's assurance that it had a four-month stockpile of frozen chicken from countries like Thailand quickly eased consumer concerns and prevented panic buying.

Yet again, FairPrice Group has shown it will never chicken out, no matter how dire or daunting the situation.

Photo: Then-Minister of State for Home Affairs and Sustainability and the Environment Desmond Tan holding a bag of frozen chicken during a visit to FairPrice's Fresh Food Distribution Centre on May 26, 2022.
Source: Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment

ADVANCE - DARE TO DO WELL

In-store dining. Savvy technology. Supporting homegrown enterprises.
For years, FairPrice has been keeping its finger on the local pulse, growing together with its customers.

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Going the Xtra Mile

> Realising that customers no longer saw buying groceries as a purely transactional affair, the chain has sought to make the process more experiential by transforming certain outlets into destination stores.

At first sight, it looks like any other grocery store where customers roam the aisles stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables, frozen meat, snacks and more.

But this supermarket is indeed super. Its sheer size aside, the store has also carved out dining areas where customers can enjoy sushi, freshly-grilled seafood and meats, as well as coffee and even beer and wine.

Welcome to the FairPrice Xtra outlet in VivoCity. At over 90,000 sq ft, the two-storey store is the chain's biggest to date. Opened on August 6, 2019, it also marked FairPrice's first step towards reinventing its stores to meet changing customer needs and growing competition.

Realising that customers no longer saw buying groceries as a purely transactional affair, the chain has sought to make the process more experiential by transforming certain outlets into destination stores. For instance, the VivoCity branch has services such as food preparation, luggage and bicycle repairs and a play area for the little ones.

The success of the pilot VivoCity store has prompted FairPrice to come up with fresh ideas. The Xtra outlet in Parkway Parade for example, features, among other things, a cocktail bar – the first in a supermarket here.

Who knew grocery shopping could be Xtra fun?

Photo: VivoCity's FairPrice Xtra has dining areas where customers can enjoy sushi, freshly-grilled seafood and meats, as well as coffee, beer and even wine.
Source: FairPrice Group

Raising the (Grocer) Bar

> In the months since The Grocer Bar at The Centrepoint opened, the bar proved to be so popular the number of seats expanded from just a few to more than 40.

When FairPrice Finest opened its doors at The Centrepoint in September 2022, it also unveiled a new concept – The Grocer Bar. Here, customers can unwind with a glass of wine, a cheese platter and even some freshly-shucked oysters after their grocery run. In the months since it opened, the bar proved to be so popular the number of seats expanded from just a few to more than 40.

The atmosphere is free and easy. Customers can grab bottles of wine and nibbles from the supermarket shelves, or tuck into something more substantial like grilled sausages and roast chicken from the deli section. There is also craft beer from RedDot BrewHouse's fire hydrant-like tap, and an exclusive cocktail aptly named The Centrepoint. Palatable prices sweeten the experience. House pour wines cost $8.90 a glass, and Canadian oysters shucked to order cost $19.90 for half a dozen.

Today, FairPrice Finest has three Grocer Bars. The other two can be found at Ang Mo Kio Avenue 6 and The Woodleigh Mall. Each has its distinct flavour.

The one at Ang Mo Kio has bento boxes. The Woodleigh Mall bar, meanwhile, offers more full-service food options – such as Japanese bentos, grilled skewers and a pick-and-cook seafood counter where fresh seafood is cooked just the way the customer wants it. Diners can also look forward to exclusive cocktails named The Woodleigh Club and FairPrice Smash.

Ms Tan Huey Ling, General Manager of FairPrice Finest, said plans are underway to open more Grocer Bar outlets. "We are trying to make meaningful connections with our customers by keeping abreast of lifestyle changes," she added. Talk about raising the bar.

Photo: Customers can grab wine bottles and nibbles from the supermarket shelves and enjoy them at The Grocer Bar at The Centrepoint.
Source: FairPrice Group

Unmanned Convenience

> No queue.
> No checkout.
> Just walk out.

Grabbing items and walking straight out of the store? To many, that is plain stealing. But with Cheers' unmanned stores, that is just a part of the shopping experience.

First opened in Nanyang Polytechnic in 2017, the store ran without any staff. All customers had to do was download a mobile app and enter the stores using the unique QR code generated.

Once they had selected their items, they could pay via cashless options like NETS, credit card, EZ-Link and mobile payment. The outlet was also the first convenience store in Singapore to accept NETS payment by QR code.

After opening two similar stores in the National University of Singapore, Cheers unveiled its fourth in Our Tampines Hub in 2020 that was souped up with artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities.

Shoppers first download the Cheers mobile app and select their desired payment method before using the unique QR code generated or facial recognition feature to enter the store.

Instead of making payments manually, patrons can walk right out after picking their items. The AI detects the items each customer is purchasing and automatically processes the payment as they exit.

No queue. No checkout. Just walk out.

Photo: Cheers launched its fourth unmanned store in Our Tampines Hub in 2020.
Source: Cheers

All It Takes Is Trust

> Besides providing savings on everyday expenses, Trust also simplifies banking by being transparent about its products and services.

You could open a savings account with digital bank Trust faster than it takes to cook a cup of instant noodles.

Three years in the making, Trust Bank was set up by FairPrice Group, NTUC Enterprise and Standard Chartered, and launched by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong in September 2022.

Why would the three shareholders invest $400 million in a digital bank to serve a relatively small and well-banked population here? Competition here is fierce enough as it is.

"We felt it would future-proof our ecosystem and accelerate our omnichannel strategy," said Ms Elaine Heng, FairPrice Group's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, adding that a banking function would integrate a customer's everyday financial habits into the FairPrice Group app. It would also provide more holistic insights on customers, creating a 360-degree view and an opportunity to serve customers better.

Besides providing savings on everyday expenses, Trust also simplifies banking by being transparent about its products and services. For example, there are no annual and foreign transaction fees.

One surprising fact is that seniors, who are traditionally seen as less tech-savvy consumers, form a key part of Trust's target market. Around 10 per cent of its customer base is over 65 years old.

After just seven months, the bank had secured more than half-a-million customers, with seven in 10 referred by friends and family. Having made its mark in groceries and food offerings, FairPrice Group now aims to contribute to a new chapter in Singapore's financial ecosystem.

Photo: The Trust card provides savings on everyday expenses.
Source: Samuel He

For Singapore, by Singapore

> Today, FairPrice carries over 6,000 locally made products including fresh produce, canned food and condiments. This is testament to FairPrice's commitment to support local.

As one of Singapore's most successful homegrown brands, FairPrice strives to help other local brands achieve success too – especially when it comes to food production.

The reason is clear. Singapore's heavy reliance on imported food, which formed about 90 per cent of its food supply in 2022, puts it at a disadvantage when dealing with external shocks such as supply chain disruptions. In the wake of the pandemic and conflict in Ukraine, the question of how to put food on the table is even more pertinent.

Back in 2009, FairPrice launched a scheme to help local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) cope with business challenges. Known as the SME Suppliers Support and Development Programme, the scheme eases common pain points like cash flow problems by paying suppliers earlier.

To date, FairPrice has invested over $15 million into the scheme. But that is not the only effort to boost both mindshare – and market share – of local produce.

In 2022, it launched the 11th edition of its Made in Singapore fair, which ran for about two weeks at all outlets, including its online store. The fair offered consumers discounts on local produce and put the spotlight on over 40 locally-made products, from fresh to frozen, stamped with bright red SG Fresh Produce badges.

Speaking at the launch in Our Tampines Hub's FairPrice outlet, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu said: "Today, FairPrice carries over 6,000 locally made products including fresh produce, canned food and condiments. This is testament to FairPrice's commitment to support local."

Photo: FairPrice Group supports local products by highlighting homegrown brands at its supermarkets.
Source: Samuel He

No Free Plastic Bags

> Singaporeans discarded 950,000 tonnes of plastic waste in 2018, of which only 4 per cent was recycled. Something had to be done.

When there was a charge of 12 cents per plastic bag, consumers threw a fit. That was in 1974, when NTUC Welcome, the predecessor of FairPrice, made people pay for plastic bags.

The reason for the "No Free Plastic Bags" initiative then was not so much to protect the environment, but to cut costs. It was soon scrapped due to the brickbats.

Fast forward almost five decades later, and FairPrice is once again the first among supermarkets to put a price on plastic bags. This time, it was driven by sustainability concerns to cut down plastic use.

Singaporeans discarded 950,000 tonnes of plastic waste in 2018, of which only 4 per cent was recycled. Something had to be done.

In 2019, the organisation implemented a plastic bag charge of 20 cents and 10 cents per transaction at selected FairPrice and Cheers outlets respectively.

Rather than profit from the charge, all proceeds are channelled towards supporting charities, as well as environmental initiatives.

Consumers were more supportive than before. Some 70 per cent were willing to bring their own bags. In 2022 alone, 57 million bags were saved under the initiative.

FairPrice's move to charge for plastic bags was prescient. It came ahead of an announcement that all major supermarkets would be required to charge a minimum of five cents for each disposable carrier bag from the middle of 2023.

Photo: A shopper with a trolley full of plastic bags. In 2019, FairPrice was the first to introduce a plastic bag charge at selected FairPrice and Cheers outlets.
Source: The Straits Times © SPH Media Limited. Reprinted with permission

Shark's Fin is Off the Shelves

> It marked the rise of the ethical consumer, who was not just interested in price or taste, but also how a product was sourced.

All it took was one comment to spark a sea change: "Screw the divers!"

The jibe, published on Facebook by an employee of a shark's fin supplier to FairPrice, sparked internet outrage in November 2011. The divers in question were environmental activists, who had been protesting online against the shark's fin trade.

The post subsequently went viral on social media. Netizens threw their weight behind the divers, calling for a boycott of not only the supplier, but also FairPrice.

Faced with a mounting public relations crisis, FairPrice had to think fast. When the scandal broke, Singapore was second only to Hong Kong when it came to the shark's fin trade. Exports in 2011 alone were worth almost $230 million. In January 2012, FairPrice released a statement reaffirming its commitment to being a socially responsible retailer. The upshot – it would no longer be selling shark's fin products by March that year.

Shark's fin was still popular among older customers, who placed a premium on it because of its price. But younger generations, many of whom had been observed by supermarket staff discouraging their parents from buying shark's fin, were turning the tide.

It marked the rise of the ethical consumer, who was not just interested in price or taste, but also how a product was sourced. While it began with an internet pile-on, it ended with a step forward, both for the supermarket and animal rights.

Photo: In March 2012, FairPrice ceased the sale of shark's fin products at all its stores.
Source: iStock.com/VTT Studio

Walking Down the (Grocery) Aisle

> In 2013 alone, over 30 couples chose FairPrice stores as the backdrop for their nuptial shoots.

FairPrice supermarkets are known to offer many things, but few would expect a fairy-tale ending to be among them.

When Ms Serene Tan and Mr Chia Jingwei met at FairPrice, the two future managers were waiting for a Management Trainee interview. They introduced themselves and made small talk. After they both passed the interview, the conversation continued and it was not long before they realised they had briefly met at another interview years prior.

Their serendipitous encounter led the couple to develop a deeper relationship while working together, and they soon realised that they were a good match. To commemorate the place where sparks first flew between them, the couple decided to have their wedding photography done at 100 AM's FairPrice Finest outlet in Tanjong Pagar in 2017.

"It was the place where we met and got together," said Mr Chia, 40, a Group Manager with the chain. "It is symbolic to us as working in a supermarket has been our first and only job so far."

Mr Seah Kian Peng, then-Chief Executive Officer of NTUC FairPrice, even made a surprise appearance at the photo shoot to congratulate the happy couple.

They are not the only lovebirds to pick a FairPrice supermarket as a wedding photography location. In 2013 alone, over 30 couples chose FairPrice stores as the backdrop for their nuptial shoots. The FairPrice Finest outlet at 100 AM proved the most popular in that year, hosting 15 of the sessions.

Each year, about 50 couples request to take wedding photos at one of FairPrice's stores, hoping to give new meaning to the phrase "walking down the aisle."

Photo: Ms Serene Tan and Mr Chia Jingwei, who met at FairPrice, took their wedding photos at 100 AM's FairPrice Finest outlet in Tanjong Pagar in 2017.
Source: Courtesy of Serene Tan and Chia Jingwei

Faces of FairPrice Group: The People Behind the Success

Photo: Ms Koe Wan Gek (left) and Ms Angel Ler have worked at FairPrice for 49 years and 25 years respectively as of 2023.
Source: Samuel He

> As many as one in three are long serving staff who have worked with the retailer for more than a decade – experiencing first-hand its evolution over the years.

FairPrice Group would not be what it is today without its 13,350 employees, the heart and soul of the organisation who play a vital role in its success. As many as one in three are long-serving staff who have worked with the retailer for more than a decade – experiencing first-hand its evolution over the years.

Among them is Ms Koe Wan Gek, who has been with FairPrice for 49 years as of 2023. There are only nine other employees who have worked longer than her. Ms Koe joined in 1974, when she was just 16 years old. She had to drop out of secondary school to find a job to support her family, and remains grateful for the opportunity. "The company accepts me and provides me with opportunities, rewards and incentives for my progress," shared the 65-year-old.

Her first job was with the Singapore Industrial Labour Organisation (SILO) supermarket that was merged with NTUC Welcome to form NTUC FairPrice in 1983. She started as a retail assistant and is now a senior supervisor at Thomson Plaza's FairPrice Finest.

Another long-serving employee is Ms Angel Ler, who has also literally grown up with the organisation. She joined FairPrice when she was just 16 in 1998 as a cashier. Today, the 41-year-old is a team lead in FairPrice's Fulfilment from Store operations for online orders.

Ms Ler, who made the switch from the retail to digital side of the business, enjoys the "constant new challenges and opportunities" of working at FairPrice. "My team keeps me motivated. It's not just about myself," she said. "I try to build rapport with the team. Those who can, will work with you for a long time."

Dear Singapore,

What a journey it's been these past 50 years.

From the day we were born,
our mission has been unchanging:
to safeguard our way of life
and make every day a little better.

Every day since, we've worked hard
to fulfil that promise.

Not always perfectly,
but always thoughtfully.

Not only in good times or bad,
but all of the time.

Moderating the cost of living,
sourcing far and wide for the freshest,
most important essentials.

Along the way,
we've become a familiar face.
A neighbour.

And to some,
even a friend who's been
looking out for you since 1973.

Or as the kids say these days…

"We've got your back."

Always,
FairPrice

FairPrice
FULL CREAM
FRESH
MILK
Net Vol.
1L
life
FairPrice
ENRICHED
WHITE
BREAD JUNIOR
KOPITIAM
FairPrice
SOFT WHITE
FACIAL
TISSUE
FairPrice
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PEANUT
BUTTER
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Treats