



GROBRIX

30by30: More Than a Hashtag

By Mathew Howe, Founder, Grobrix

Unveiled in April 2019, Singapore's "30 by 30" goal aspired to have the nation produce 30 percent of its food locally by 2030. Not all of our food - that would be impossible in land-strapped Singapore - but specifically eggs, fish, and leafy vegetables. In the years following, we have all personally experienced the urgency behind this target

- having been through a global pandemic sparking concerns about Singapore's food security and witnessing numerous setbacks, restructures, and the pivoting of plans around local high-tech farms. With six years left to reach the goal, is this catchy hashtag #30by30 an unrealistic goal or can we really do it?

Education and empowerment: Why the need for locally- grown produce

One commonly referenced issue with locally grown produce is price. In such a price-sensitive economy like Singapore, there remains a fundamental lack of interest from consumers in pricier local produce. When scanning the supermarket aisles for their leafy green produce, price will be the deciding factor in what items to add to the trolley. What may cost them a few dollars extra on a weekly food shop could pave the way for future generations to benefit from a food-secure nation. What these consumers don't realise is the multifaceted benefits of such a purchase: **no preservatives, no single-use plastic, no use of conventional agriculture, reduced food miles, and more nutrient-dense produce.**

The responsibility for tackling this issue needn't fall solely on the shoulders of consumers. It needs to come from the top down. If private industry, NGOs, and governments can come together to educate and empower their communities, we can bring about genuine change.

The role of community initiatives

Take the Go Green SG movement, for example. Led by the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE), this national sustainability movement rallies and empowers the community to take collective action for a cleaner and greener Singapore. From beach clean-ups, tree planting, and food circularity programmes to workshops on different ways of farming, learning how to grow and cook microgreens, and more, these

activities are fantastic ways to influence and impact how people live more sustainably.

Another notable example is the Eco-Stewardship Programme launched by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in all schools, from primary to pre-university. This programme aims to reduce carbon emissions from schools by at least two-thirds by 2030, in line with [the government's overall Singapore Green Plan 2030](#). It includes school-based initiatives and lesson packages to teach students about environmental sustainability.

At Mee Toh School, for instance, Primary 3 students learn about food security and experience firsthand the work that goes into growing food through a farm-to-table programme. They plant vegetables hydroponically and grow mushrooms, with half the harvest sold in the school canteen and the other half donated to an old folks' home.



Inspiring change through corporate sustainability programmes

In the private sector, corporations are increasingly prioritising employee wellness in the aftermath of the pandemic. Many have since leveraged urban farming solutions to integrate employee engagement with sustainability initiatives. Edible vertical gardens not only play an important role in enhancing the quality and diversity of food available to people but have also proven to be powerful enablers of community engagement, fostering a workplace culture centred on sustainability education.

Full disclosure, I am a founder of an urban farming business called Grobrix. The past two years have seen a spate of companies like Sodexo, M Moser, LinkedIn, Standard Chartered, and KPMG partnering with us to incorporate edible vertical gardens in their offices, showcasing a commitment to promoting sustainable living.

Teams gather regularly for harvesting sessions and salad workshops, sparking conversations on sustainability and engaging employees to make positive lifestyle changes. These activities boost co-worker interaction and employee satisfaction, and the introduction of greenery in urban spaces contributes to improved employee well-being, reducing stress levels and boosting morale.

Beyond the corporate sphere, urban farming initiatives have also found homes at hotels, retail spaces, and community centres. Edible vertical gardens offer unique opportunities for businesses in the F&B and hospitality sectors, enabling restaurants and hotels to enhance their menu offerings with fresh,

locally-grown produce, thereby elevating the taste, quality, and nutritional value of their dishes. Wholefoods store Little Farms, for instance, has installed our vertical farms and uses produce on their cafe menu, as they continue to expand and seek innovative ways to deliver offerings for customers.

Singapore may not be a big island nation, but it is full of skyscrapers and tall buildings. My ultimate dream is to evolve Singapore's Garden City further into Farm City, with much more indoor greenery becoming edible. I'd love to see everyone become a farmer, if only for one or two hours a week.

With challenges come opportunities for a brighter future

challenges lie opportunities for innovation and advancement. Investing in local farms and embracing cutting-edge technologies such as automated systems and precision agriculture can play a pivotal role in developing a resilient and sustainable food system.

Grobrix has effectively demonstrated through its collaborations how a hyper-local farming approach can seamlessly integrate into existing urban structures, optimising space utilisation and reducing operational costs. The success stories of our corporate partners underscore the potential of these systems not only in improving employee well-being but also in bolstering overall corporate sustainability initiatives. Through collaborative educational initiatives and by empowering communities to embrace sustainable practices, we can create lasting change toward a more sustainable and secure food future.

Singapore's ambitious "30 by 30" goal is more than just numerical targets; it embodies a visionary journey toward a future characterised by resilience, sustainability, and food security for our future generations. Achieving this goal requires coordinated efforts across diverse sectors, and education will continue to be a crucial catalyst on this journey.

About the Author: Mathew Howe, Founder, Grobrix

Everyone needs to eat. Often, people eat meals together and sometimes prepare them together. In a different time, they would grow food together. Sadly, for most now, that time has passed.

Mathew started growing fresh greens as a hobby to build deeper relationships with his family. These warm moments involving the food he had grown left him with a deep curiosity about produce and agriculture—the farmers, their purpose, and their passion. He wanted to know more about their world; he wanted to be a part of it.

His world was different. In banking, he was a small part of a large machine with little control over his destiny or the impact he was having on the broader community and the world he lived in. Freedom to create or embark on new ideas was scarce, and every day was the same. He yearned for something else to help him grow.

The urban farm wall concept was an opportunity for him to break free and do some good. He believed he could design something that solved a real-world problem, something that had the potential to bring joy, something that might make a difference. Something that might become his legacy.

He envisaged a world where the farm and the farmers were at the fore, closer to communities and visible in our lives, educating people on the benefits of fresh, locally grown food. Where farm-to-table nutritious produce is not just a concept but a daily reality within arm's reach.

Initially, he started offering Grobrix to individuals but quickly identified a broader opportunity to advance his mission by collaborating with innovative businesses. Grobrix now proudly graces the walls of many of the world's most dynamic organisations—from KPMG, LinkedIn, and Marina Bay Sands to the W Singapore Sentosa Cove—empowering their employees to grow together, sow and share the bounty that binds us all.

Every day, Mathew is buoyed by the stories of Grobrix customer communities growing together, transforming through the simple yet entirely satisfying act of growing their own food.

