



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAPs campaign on Say No to Food Waste during Thaipusam

We Malaysians love our food and there is no shortage of restaurants and food outlets serving food to please every palate.

But we also waste a lot of food. In fact, figures from the Solid Waste Corporation Management (SWCorp) show that Malaysians generate 16,687.5 tonnes of food waste daily.

This is no small amount as it can feed 12 million individuals three times a day.

Importantly, at least 3,000 tonnes of this daily food that is thrown away is still fit for consumption.

During festival periods, such as Thaipusam, this figure increases.

It is a practice of the Hindu community to put up panthals (food and drink sheds) during Thaipusam to feed devotees. Indeed, this is a noble effort and deserves praise.

However, as more and more groups and individuals serve food, wastage is also increasing. In many places we have seen some waste bins overflowing with packets containing half-finished food.

Hinduism views food as sacred, which is why children are taught not to ever step on food. In many households, even till today, Hindus do not use a broom to sweep away rice or other food that spills on the floor. They use a piece of cloth.

The food that is offered to devotees is first blessed at the temple or at the altar placed in the panthal itself. From ordinary food, it thus becomes “prasadam”, a gift from God.

The Consumers Association of Penang urges devotees attending Thaipusam to keep this in mind and not to waste this “prasadam”.

CAP understands that many Hindu NGOs serve food because Hinduism teaches that the greatest gift you can give another is the gift of food, and therefore life.

While CAP lauds the noble attitude of those offering food, it would like to remind them to be conscious of the need to reduce food wastage.

We have some suggestions for those operating the food panthals and NGOs distributing free food during Thaipusam:

*Hand out food only to those who ask for it and not to everyone who passes the panthal;

*Give only one packet to each person, unless they are collecting for family members;

*Reduce the amount of food in each packet because, from our observation, most people do not finish all the food in the packet;

*Pack some packets with half portions for distribution to children;

*Put up signs that say: “This is prasadam, so don’t waste it”; and

*Keep a bin or two nearby for people to throw the used packets (even if the temple authorities have prepared bins).

CAP also has some suggestions for devotees:

*Take only what you need; take one packet, and if after eating you need more, come back for a second packet;

*If you cannot finish the food, take it home to eat later in the day;

*Do not collect packets from a few panthals to see what is inside before deciding to eat from one and throwing the rest away. Remember this is prasadam; and

*Educate children not to waste food by showing a good example during Thaipusam.

Thaipusam is a sacred occasion and therefore it is incumbent upon devotees to show respect for the food they consume. This is especially so because Hinduism teaches devotees to respect the food they eat by saying a prayer of thanks to God, to all those who made the food available and to the food itself.

Thaipusam is also an occasion of deep discipline as devotees fast or talk less or give up bad habits or perform other acts of discipline of their choosing. We suggest that devotees strengthen the discipline of taking only the amount of food needed to satiate their hunger and eating only the amount that will ensure good health. That will help cut down on food wastage.

CAP hopes that in 2019, more Malaysians will become aware of the need to reduce food waste, especially as there are some Malaysians who do not have enough to eat, or no food at all at certain times.

If each of us does our part to cut down on food wastage, we will be helping reduce the amount of food waste in the nation. And let’s not forget that if we reduce food wastage in our own homes, we will actually be saving money.

N V Subbarow

Pegawai Pendidikan

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