

By **NICOLE CHEW**

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IT'S closing time at a local cafe. Employees are gathering up unsold baked goods, savoury dishes and fresh bottled beverages from the day.

The food, despite being perfectly good for consumption, cannot be served the following day. As a result, it is thrown away, creating waste and added costs for the business.

It is a far too common reality for food and beverage (F&B) establishments everywhere, and one which food surplus apps have emerged to help solve. These online platforms allow restaurants, cafes and bakeries to list their unsold items, offering them at a discounted rate to customers.

The concept of food surplus apps emerged about 10 years ago in Europe, and has since spawned versions globally, including in Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. Malaysia, however, has been comparatively slow on the uptake.

"Even though it has gained traction in neighbouring countries, a culture shift is needed among vendors locally," says Falah Hamidi, co-founder of ReMeal.

"The amount of food waste we produce makes headlines every year, especially around Ramadan – a month where we should be consuming less," he adds. "This is worrying, especially for a country like Malaysia where food security is a big issue."

Homegrown startup ReMeal hopes to change this. Drawing from established food surplus apps abroad, the business' platform aims to help F&B vendors convert their food waste into revenue and prevent excess food from being sent to the landfill.

Through the ReMeal app, users can browse options for pastries, desserts, meals and beverages from participating restaurants, cafes, bakeries and grocery stores. Purchases and payments are made on the app and orders are picked up by customers at the selected outlet.

For businesses, the platform offers a risk-free solution that is easy to join, simple to use and requires little more than a few minutes a day to update their inventory of available surplus food.

"There are no subscription fees, no upfront costs and we do not tie any vendors into a fixed term contract," Falah explains. Instead, ReMeal takes a small commission for each sale.

"If the vendor does not have anything to list on any given day, there is no charge. We intentionally priced it this way to ensure they do not feel pressured to 'create waste'," he says.

Today, users will find brands like *Gula Cakery*, *Huckleberry*, *Doty's* and *Celsius Coffee* on ReMeal. Hotels are also able to utilise the platform to sell excess food from their buffets.

According to Falah, the prospect of recouping losses from food waste through ReMeal serves as a significant draw, particularly for smaller independent businesses.

"For larger brands, in addition to the monetary aspect, they also find that partnering with ReMeal aligns with their sustainability

App-etising solution to food waste



ReMeal facilitates the sale of surplus food at a discount. Photos: ReMeal



Marketing strategist Mira Filzah (centre) with ReMeal co-founders (from left) Falah, Wan Emir Astar, Anis Suffian and Nur Syafiah Ab Rahim.

goals," he shares. "The exposure of aligning with a green initiative is a powerful statement."

At the moment, the business' key challenge is bringing on more F&B vendors to deliver sufficient variety for users.

"We are currently at the awkward stage where we have to attract vendors and users at the same time," he says.

"ReMeal is essentially a digital marketplace. And marketplaces

are notoriously hard to succeed with due to what is essentially a chicken-and-egg problem."

Few vendors will see the appeal of joining a platform without a large user base. At the same time, few users will be compelled to check the app if there aren't enough vendors.

Because food surplus apps remain a relatively new concept in Malaysia, attracting businesses to the platform continues to be



The platform aims to tackle food waste in the F&B industry.

■ A local online platform is helping dining establishments to sell their excess food items

■ Food surplus apps enable businesses to reduce waste, recover costs and meet sustainability goals

■ ReMeal's transaction-based, risk-free model ensures vendors do not feel pressured to produce surplus food

an obstacle, despite it being a zero-risk option requiring minimal effort.

Nevertheless, Falah is confident that the business model's proven success abroad can be replicated locally.

"It is only a matter of time that it becomes a mainstream concept in Malaysia," he adds.

For now, ReMeal is focused on building greater awareness for the business through strategic collaborations and events.

For instance, the business is partnering with the government for the MYSaveFood initiative, which saves surplus food from Ramadan bazaars and redistributes it to those in need.

Also in the pipeline is ReMeal Direct, an extension of its platform which will enable suppliers and manufacturers to sell their surplus food to businesses and individuals.

"Operating within the F&B industry, we identified this opportunity further up the food supply chain," Falah says.

"There is a sizeable amount of food waste occurring at the supplier and manufacturer level, and it's happening at a larger scale than on the retail level."

These may include stock that cannot be sold at stores because they are too close to expiry, seasonal foods like mooncakes and *kuih raya* which are prone to over-manufacture, or food products with minor defects that cannot be sold at full price.

In addition to launching ReMeal Direct, the team's plans for this year will revolve around driving continued business growth.

"If our Ramadan campaign with MYSaveFood is a success, we will be seeking to extend the concept to include night markets all year round," Falah says.

"Beyond this, it will be all about trying to reach a level of virality, and building on that momentum to scale nationwide."