NTU to offer food science course with Dutch uni

Programme aimed at producing graduates for growing industry

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NANYANG Technological University (NTU) is joining forces with one of the world's leading research universities in food science and technology to launch a course aimed at producing graduates for the growing food processing industry here.

The course will be taught by NTU and Holland's Wageningen University professors who will conduct lectures through video-conferencing. But the professors will fly to Singapore for the laboratory-based lessons.

The course will be available from this August as a second major to 30 chemical engineering, chemistry and biology students.

Students will be selected in their second year of study, but NTU will pick only academically strong students because of the demands of studying a second major.

Upon graduation, students will receive a certificate in food science and technology bearing the names of the two universities, in addition to their degree conferred by NTU.

Although Singapore is not an agricultural country, it has the potential to become a significant food processing centre just like Holland, said NTU provost Freddy Boey.

According to Ministry of Trade and Industry figures, the food industry employs 127,000 workers, accounting for about 4.4 per cent of Singapore's total employment.

"Holland, despite being a small country in Europe, is the largest food producer. It imports the food, processes it and then sells it and makes a lot of money and creates many jobs," said Professor Boey. "Similarly, Singapore, despite being small, is surrounded by food-producing countries and it can leverage on its reputation for safety and quality."

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LEVERAGE ON REPUTATION

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He added that food security and safety is a growing global issue. "Science and technology can provide vital solutions for critical issues in the area of food processing, security and safety. NTU believes it can play a key role in this regard."

The university is also looking into launching a master's programme for those in the food industry to upgrade themselves.

He said NTU will also set up a professorship in the field with a gift of $2.5 million it received from 16 firms and individuals, including Mr Michael Farn, who served as chairman of Fraser & Neave for more than 20 years.

Wageningen vice-president Martin Kropp, who agreed that food security and safety is a growing issue, said: "Global food security issues require international cooperation between top scientists and top universities."

Wageningen, which has been running its food technology courses up to PhD level for more than 50 years, is highly regarded in the field. Its courses in food science range from the more technical such as process engineering and chemistry to fields with a more economic or sociological focus such as marketing and gastronomy.

Dr Ardy van Helvoort, who heads research and development in Asia for Danone, the world's biggest yogurt maker, said Singapore can develop itself into a significant food producer, leveraging on its reputation for safety and quality.

He welcomed the news of NTU launching courses in food science, noting that it is difficult to find local graduates for the research centre that was set up here three years ago. "We do interest researcher worldwide and in Singapore and we need well-trained, innovative people. I believe this programme, which brings together two very innovative universities, should produce the kind of people we want," he said.

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