Full Refined Vision

HK2050+: A Networked Food System for Community Resilience

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In this document, we will use three imaginative cases to illustrate our vision for a regenerative and nourishing food future for Hong Kong by 2050.

By 2050, we at the Policy for Sustainability Lab (PSL) of the Centre for Civil Society and Governance at The University of Hong Kong will have already been building capacity of local communities through incubating socio-economic models fostering rural-urban symbiosis for some 35 years. We will have established a full array of best practices in community-based eco-agriculture and food production through our HSBC Rural Sustainability Programme, and promoted these best practices and knowledge we have generated to the wider community. Our work and collaborative efforts with other like-minded individuals and organisations will have instilled in Hong Kong society a good knowledge-based understanding of the value and importance of a sustainable food system; a solid consensus will have been formed to support a collaborative and holistic approach to enhancing food security, revitalising food culture, and rehabilitating habitats. We will have transformed the 2020 food supply chain into a value-based circular model; the renewed food value chain will have helped materialise many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and Paris Agreement’s obligations by 2050. Individual citizens and stakeholders in Hong Kong will have developed an appreciation of their various roles in the food system; they will be actively engaged in collective actions in food production, education, conservation, recreation and waste-reduction.

Future Case 1: Farming in an Urban Housing Estate

Urban farms can be found in every district in the city. As a regular practice if not habit, citizens grow their own food in or near where they live, work or study. Using appropriate technologies and farming methods, they are happy part-time, small-scale organic farmers.

Ming Fai Estate is a typical public housing estate in Hong Kong. Farming spaces are provided on the rooftop and podiums of buildings where residents can grow their crops. The residents are growing a diversity of fruits, vegetables, and herbs in different planters. They enjoy such farming activities very much; not only can they grow food for themselves, but also have the opportunities to get relaxed and connect with nature and their neighbours.

The residents often discuss and plan about how they can grow and share different crops so as to diversify what they eat. For example, in preparing for the Chinese New Year, the residents want to grow radishes, peanuts and water chestnuts as ingredients for making traditional meals.
and snacks for the festival. So they plan with each other about what to grow by whom and who can help with the regular farm chores. Upon discussion, the division of labour is as follows:

- Mrs Lam (aged 29), a banker, will grow radishes because she learnt how to grow it in her secondary school.
- Mr Ho (aged 47), a photographer, will grow water chestnuts because he learnt how to do it when he worked as a farming volunteer for a local green group.
- Mrs Tang (aged 66), a retired civil servant, will grow peanuts because she learnt it from her mother who used to live in an indigenous village in her childhood.
- Miss Sarah Ho (aged 15), daughter of Mr Ho, will water the crops on Mondays, Wednesday, Thursdays and Fridays after school.
- Mr Adrian Tang (aged 33), a YouTuber, son of Mrs Tang, will help with watering the crops on Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

They sometimes add composts to the soil to enrich nutrients. The composts are made of their own kitchen leftovers and food waste which have been processed by the government-sponsored composting machines provided in the estate. Like the good old village days, everyone participates and harvests the crops together.

**Future Case 2: A Network of Community Farms and Kitchens in a Neighbourhood**

Ming Fai Estate is located in a neighbourhood of residential housings; a youth NGO has long been working in the area to promote the well-being of teenagers in the vicinity and to help the under-privileged.

After the harvest, a farming group works with some teenagers from the youth centre to make radish cakes and glutinous rice balls with locally grown ingredients. They chat happily about the techniques of making the traditional foods. Mrs Tang’s YouTuber son took videos of her demonstrating techniques of making the traditional foods and shared the videos in the social media. Many people have watched the videos and learned from it the recipes and techniques. The owner of a local Chinese tea restaurant watched the videos and was impressed with the traditional foods. He has approached the group for bulk purchase of the radish cakes, which have subsequently become a popular item in the restaurant’s Chinese New Year Menu. The group has shared the profits with the youth centre, which has used the resource to support a food allowance scheme for lower income families living in the area.

Seeing the benefits of collaboration and also the possibility of getting additional resources from the mini-circular economy model, the NGO starts to collaborate with a number of other organisations in nearby housing estates to form a network of community farms. The NGO also engages organisations in the network in a variety of community activities with a view to strengthening the bond of the neighbourhood. The network not only provides opportunities for effective youth engagement and inter-generational exchange, but also creates a number of job opportunities along the value supply chain.
A social venture which has received support from the Policy for Sustainability Lab conducted an in-depth analysis on the networked model, and proposed to establish a community kitchen which provides a shared space for residents in the community to cook together and to share meals with interested members of the community. Some residents of Ming Fai Estate and its neighbourhood, especially the housewives and the retired young-olds, have started to bring their farm harvests for cooking at the community kitchen and to have meals together there. They have become very skilful in cooking and co-designed many innovative recipes. Some of them have started operations of simple food processing using their farm produce, and established their own brands. The social venture manages to sustain its business by renting the cooking space for special events as well as taking a share of the profits generated by the brands they have incubated.

Some of the core users of the community kitchen organise cooking workshops on a regular basis to teach interested members of the community how to make nutritious meals with sustainable ingredients. They also prepare healthy meals for the elderly living alone and vulnerable groups in the neighbourhood. Many residents find this service very meaningful and volunteer to donate their produce, help with cooking, deliver the meals to the needy, and become carers for the less fortunate.

With the support from the social venture and a local school, the community farm network organises a farmers’ market every month at the playground of the school. The residents sell or exchange their farm products and offer tasting of some home-made organic snacks. Some students of the school also set up a booth to sell the crops harvested from the school’s rooftop farm. The rural production farms which supply organic vegetables to the school’s catering company are invited to sell their crops at the farmers’ market too. The market attracts a large number of residents and tourists, and helps promote a sustainable food culture. Perhaps more importantly, the market has become a local hub nurturing a sense of community among producers and customers.

Apart from the farmers’ market, the social venture has also facilitated the establishment of a co-op shop by the community farm network. The co-op shop carries a variety of local crops and locally processed food, as well as some imported food products which are sustainably produced.

**Future Case 3: A Mayor of a City in Arabia Visiting Hong Kong**

A mayor of a city in Arabia visited Hong Kong for an international food show promoting the food culture of Arabia. Upon arrival, he stayed at a hotel in the city centre and had lunch at a vegetarian restaurant in the hotel. He tried some Chinese and Western dishes and was pleasantly surprised to find that both dishes contained fresh ingredients harvested from local farms in Hong Kong. Some herbs and edible flowers were harvested directly from the organic farm in the hotel, some other vegetables such as wax gourd and sweet potatoes were sourced from an organic farm in rural Hong Kong. The waiter, who has minor physical disabilities, introduced to the mayor about the characteristics of each dish—where the ingredients were from; how the chef
smartly integrated innovative ideas in cooking traditional dishes; and what is the best way to enjoy the cuisine. As the mayor was enjoying the delicious meals, he watched how the chefs prepared the dishes in the open kitchen. He admired their superb cooking skills which were very different from his country’s culture. He had a conversation with the waiter and found that the hotel also collected kitchen waste and food waste to make composts for its own farm. The waiter also told him that the hotel was collaborating with food recovering organisations to ensure that its surplus food would be channelled to the needy.

After lunch, the mayor took a walk in the district. When he walked on a network of footbridges, he found that many small-scale farms were set up on the podiums of commercial and residential buildings; there were also community farms in the urban parks. He was happy to see that people were enjoying farming and were bonded with each other in the process.

After walking for a while, he felt thirsty so he went to a supermarket to buy a bottle of drinks. He found a good variety of sustainably produced goods on the shelves, carrying various kinds of green labels. A corner was designated for selling fresh local food products. When he picked up a product, he found that useful information about that product was displayed on a panel above the shelf. The information included the sources of ingredients, the entire journey that the product had come through the food supply chain, and the nutritious value of the product. He noticed that some of the highly processed food products and snacks carried a distinctive warning label saying that the products contain too much salt, sugar or fat. He thought these were good ideas to help consumers make informed decisions on their food choices. He also noticed that some short-dated food products were sold at discounts; and attracted many customers. He bought a bottle of locally produced Chinese herbal tea, and appreciated that it was made of locally grown herbs and that the bottle was biodegradable.

On the next day in the morning, the mayor visited a local factory which used modern technologies to convert meat waste into animal feed and biogas. The factory was jointly operated by the government and a private company. It collected meat waste from hotels, restaurants, schools, and housing estates. The animal feed produced was used for local aquaculture, and the pig and poultry sectors; the biogas, on the other hand, was used to generate electricity for the city. The factory owner told the mayor that the circular economy for food in Hong Kong had been developing rapidly in recent decades because many people were interested in agriculture; many of those who had abandoned rural farmlands were now actively engaged in farming.

In the afternoon, the mayor attended the international food show. When he delivered his speech, he told the participants that he really appreciated that Hong Kong people were making good use of the limited space in the city to feed themselves and were embracing sustainable agriculture and a circular economy. He praised the innovative and delicious local cuisines and was very glad that Hong Kongers were serious about food safety, food education and also the protection of food right of its people. He concluded that he would definitely share with his citizens about Hong Kong’s food culture and how Hong Kong enhanced its resilience through a networked food system.
This is a simplified representation of the complex food system we envision for Hong Kong in 2050. Among the many stakeholders who will contribute to enhancing the sustainability of the city’s local food system, the six core groups shown in the diagram have the most important roles to play. A networked system will be developed to address many of today’s interwoven challenges. Food, as a common living heritage, will bond the society together for a resilient, inclusive and sustainable future.