

RECYCLING

Group spreads message as it puts 'waste' food to good use

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Every day at 3pm, 86-year-old Leung Kwan walks 10 minutes to an NGO centre in Tai Po to collect free vegetables.

Leung, who lives alone and relies on government subsidies, has been going to Food Grace for five years. Each recipient is entitled to one leaf vegetable and one non-leaf vegetable, like potatoes and tomatoes, daily.

"The food here helps me save some money, and it tastes good," she says.

Food Grace collects unsold but edible food from markets and hands it out to 300 people.

"We want to help the needy while raising public awareness of the food waste problem," project officer Sunny Wong says.

Hong Kong has a serious waste problem. In 2017, 10,733 tonnes of municipal solid waste were sent to landfills every day, according to the Environmental Protection Department. That means each person disposed of an average of 1.45kg of waste per day.

Some 3,662 tonnes of the daily figure was food waste – the largest

constituent, followed by paper and plastics.

Meanwhile, despite being a global finance hub, Hong Kong has more than 1.37 million people living in poverty, a fifth of the population, according to the Census and Statistics Department.

Supermarkets used to destroy unsold food. "We saw these problems and we wanted to help tackle them," Wong says.

As of March last year, Food Grace had collected and processed over 1,050 tonnes of food. But it has also met with doubts from the public.

"They asked if our food was edible. Many thought unsold food couldn't be good," Wong says.



Isaac So and Maggie Pok select vegetables. Photo: Jonathan Wong

"So we explain to them when handing food out."

Wong attributes the problem to the lack of public awareness of food recycling. So the group gives workshops and lectures at universities and secondary schools. They also organise trips to other cities to learn about food recycling policies and strategies.

On a visit to Taiwan they found there were more policy incentives on food recycling, and the public benefits from up-to-date education on the issue.

Primary school classmates Maggie Pok Man-yu and Isaac So Chun-yuk – both 10 – have been volunteering at the Tai Po centre during the summer holidays, helping select vegetables and handing them out to collectors.

"I have learned to cherish food. I love eating vegetables, and now I take what I can't finish back home, instead of throwing them away," So says.

With the Mid-Autumn Festival around the corner, the organisation is working on a mooncake recycling project.

"We will hand out the mooncakes ahead of the festival so those who receive them will share the joy," Wong says.