

SHOTS FIRED IN AUSTRALIA'S WAR ON FOOD WASTE

SYDNEY: Australia's first recycled supermarket is giving food destined for landfills a second chance, as the government embarks on a major push to cut down on waste costing the economy Aus\$20 billion a year. The outlet run by food rescue organization OzHarvest in Sydney takes surplus products normally thrown out by major supermarkets, airlines and other suppliers, and gives them away for free.

It is an attempt to tackle the mounting waste problem in Australia, home to 24 million people, where consumers toss out some 20 percent of food they buy with more than four million tons ending up as rubbish each year. "It is simply remarkable that in prosperous, modern-day Australia we produce enough food to feed 60 million people a year but every month more than 600,000 people—one-third of them children—seek food relief from relevant charities," Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg said in April.

The government is drawing up an ambitious plan to halve food waste by 2030 and is convening a national summit later this year involving the private sector and non-profit organizations. Globally, one-third of food produced for humans—about 1.3 billion tons costing around US\$1 trillion—is lost or wasted annually, according to the Food and

Agriculture Organization (FAO). Such wastage is particularly conspicuous in retail, where "large quantities" of food are thrown away "due to quality standards that over-emphasize appearance", the UN body added.

That's where supermarkets like OzHarvest come in, said founder Ronni Kahn, a leading voice in Australia's food rescue community, who hopes the pop-up store will raise awareness about sustainable living. Besides the needy, "there are people (at the supermarket) who want to take part in this sharing economy... taking produce and understanding why this produce was rejected, why is this here, why is this surplus", she said as she pointed to bread donated by a bakery. Long queues have formed outside the shop since it opened in late April, with the unemployed, single mothers, and students among those who leave with bulging bags of groceries.

Tip of the waste iceberg

What we eat or throw away is just the tip of the iceberg in the production process, conservation experts say, with huge amounts of resources such as fertilizers, fuel, land and water used to grow and package food. "When food's wasted, and all of those resources are wasted as



SYDNEY: This picture shows a customer putting money into a donation box at the counter after shopping at OzHarvest Market, a recycled food supermarket, in Sydney.—AFP

well, what's incumbent upon us is to make the most of the food that we produce in those instances, rather than producing more and more," said Marcus Godinho of charity FareShare.

FareShare tackles waste by cooking large quantities of food that farmers and

manufacturers struggle to offload, or which is due to expire, in a 500-square-metre kitchen in Melbourne before freezing and storing it for distribution to the disadvantaged at a later date. Also reducing waste at a wholesale level is Yume, an online platform connecting

suppliers and buyers for hard-to-sell surplus produce at significantly discounted prices, chief Katy Barfield said.

"It (the unwanted food) can be cancelled orders, it can be mislabeled, it can be brand refresh, it can be export orders that get cancelled, it can be specifications... that are not what the retailers want," Melbourne-based Barfield said. Barfield, who previously headed up food rescue charity SecondBite, wants to take the platform global as she develops it to handle millions of transactions. "Because it's a piece of technology, there are no barriers to scaling it," she said.

With Canberra stepping into the fray, waste warriors are optimistic that incentives including tax breaks could reduce excess in supply chains and encourage businesses to keep surplus food still fit for consumption away from landfills. Even public institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons could make their procurement of food more sustainable by buying surplus products through platforms like Yume, Barfield added. "It would save food going to waste, it would be good for the environment, it would be very good for the taxpayers' pockets because we would be paying less for the food, and I think it's a win, win, win," she said.—AFP



PORT-AU-PRINCE: Judith cleans used soap collected from a hotel in Port-au-Prince.—AFP

FROM LUXURY HOTELS TO SLUMS, HAITI RECYCLES USED SOAP

PORT-AU-PRINCE: A Haitian program to recycle used soap bars from luxury hotels has proven a win-win-win proposition, reducing waste, helping fight water-borne disease and giving employees like Magoiana Fremont the chance to send her kids to school and let them "eat every day." The project, simple but effective, has had a remarkable impact.

Laure Bottinelli discovered the idea of soap-recycling while spending time in Southeast Asia. Inspired to try something similar in Haiti, she and two associates in January 2016 created the Anacaona company, Haiti's first and only soap-recycling enterprise. They have already enlisted 25 hotels in the plan, in both Port-au-Prince and Jacmel, a weekend destination for many foreigners living in the capital.

'Nothing is wasted'

"In Haiti, nothing is ever wasted: Poverty is such that everything is recovered, reused in one way or another," said Mai Cardozo Stefanson, part of the management team at Montana, a luxury hotel in Port-au-Prince. "Normally, the staff saves the soap for their own use. But now they collect used bars and give them to Laure. In return, they receive clean, reconditioned soap bars." Plus, she added, "with the cholera crisis we're facing, there is the aspect of hygiene education," another part of the work done by Anacaona.

Used soap bars collected from hotel rooms are shredded and melted before being reconditioned, jobs Anacaona's three employees divide among themselves. "I didn't come back to Haiti to set up just one more NGO," said Bottinelli, a company head at the tender age of 28. While some employees do not know how to read the contracts Anacaona gives them, "we have explained to them what a work contract means, that there are rules to be respected but also rights protecting them." In a country where informality is the norm, she likes to point out that her company is properly registered with commercial and tax authorities.

Local, environmentally friendly

The new soaps are made using only natural Haitian products and are wrapped in biodegradable paper: The small company aspires to social responsibility and prefers hiring single mothers. "I can't deny it, the Good Lord brought us this job," said Magoiana Fremont, carefully wrapping a soap bar. Before, she couldn't afford to send her five kids to school, provide them food and pay the rent. And now? "Anacaona helps the country, and me, a lot: my children are in school, they eat every day. Before, I rented an apartment, but now I've started building a house," she added with a proud smile.

While the first orders for Haitian soaps were sent to french beauty label Yves Rocher, the recycling project now is able to distribute part of its own production to partner schools in Jacmel. The small company, still in the development stage, is also playing a part in reducing water-borne disease in Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas. With 72 percent of Haitians lacking indoor toilets, the cholera epidemic that started in 2010 has spread across the country, killing nearly 10,000 people. The lack of potable water has made diarrheal diseases a leading cause of infant mortality, according to the World Health Organization. Anacaona works with its partner schools to be sure they teach basic hygiene rules to their students.

And in the Cite Soleil, the Caribbean's most densely populated slum, the company pays community workers to spread that message. With questionnaires in hand, these "hygiene ambassadors" criss-cross their neighborhoods, knocking on the doors of every rusty sheet-metal shanty they encounter to first assess the inhabitants' sanitary habits and then share the essential rules of good health.

"Now, every time people see me in the neighborhood, they think about the advice I gave them," said Judeline Joseph, 25, with a laugh. "Sometimes they don't have the money to buy what you need to treat the water. But some of them simply forget to take precautions—so we are really doing something useful!"—AFP

SURROGACY REMAINS A LURE FOR CAMBODIA'S POOREST DESPITE BAN

ILLEGAL SURROGACY SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON RENTED WOMB TRADE

TAKEO, Cambodia: Peeling a mango inside her rickety wooden shack, Chhum Long explains how her daughter's decision to nurture a Western couple's baby in her womb helped her family buy two desperately needed items: A metal roof and a motorbike. Last year a broker appeared outside the 60-year-old's house in Cambodia's southern Takeo province and offered her daughter \$10,000 to be a surrogate mother for a wealthy foreign couple.

"My daughter immediately agreed with the offer because we are very poor," she said. "They took the baby away as soon as he was born, she did not even see his face." An ongoing trial in Phnom Penh of Australian nurse Tammy Davis-Charles on charges of running an illegal surrogacy business has shone a spotlight on Cambodia's role in the rented womb trade. It is a little-regulated industry that pairs wealthy foreign couples desperate for a child-paying as much as \$50,000 — with some of the world's most vulnerable women.

The enterprise has sparked a regulatory game of cat and mouse as poorer nations move to halt the trade only to see it resurface or appear across their borders. One-by-one countries that had been popular surrogacy destinations like India, Nepal and Thailand have banned the trade. Cambodia did the same in November. But interviews conducted by AFP suggest the industry remains, albeit in the shadows. Cambodia is one of Asia's poorest countries with an average annual income of just \$1,150. Nine months of surrogacy might bring in as much as nine years salary.

Keeping it quiet

The village of Puth Sar, where Chhum Long and her daughter hail from, is a typical target. Its bucolic charm-wooden houses surrounded by green paddy fields an hour south of the capital-belies an entrenched poverty. Village chief Ouk Savouen said brokers first appeared two years ago. At least 13 women have agreed to be surrogates since then, some after the ban came in.

"There are now four surrogates who are currently pregnant but they keep it quiet," he said. "They were recruited in February and March."

The village chief dislikes the trade, saying it is exploitative and rarely provides families with the kind of riches they think will free them because the payments are mostly frittered away. But he also recognizes it is hard for women to turn down the offer of such large sums. "I just want them to be fully paid and cared for," he said, sug-



CAMBODIA: This photo shows Chhum Long, whose daughter was a surrogate mother, sitting in her kitchen in the village of Puth Sar in Takeo province.—AFP

gesting careful regulation is better than an outright ban. No surrogate mother in Puth Sar was willing to speak when AFP visited.

But two recent surrogates from other Cambodian villages agreed to talk on the condition that only their nicknames were used. Both were driven by poverty but said they had broadly positive experiences. Champei got pregnant before the ban, giving birth in April to a boy for a Dutch couple. She was paid \$10,000, which was used to purchase a plot of land. "This is a lot of money for me," she said. "I want to be a surrogate mother again so I can build a home," she said, adding that other women from her village were also surrogates.

'I miss her'

Romduol, 35, makes just \$200 a month as a garment factory worker in Kampong Speu province. She heard about surrogacy through her colleagues and gave birth to a baby girl for a gay Australian couple before the ban. "The Australians were so happy with the baby," she said. "I still consider her my child. I miss her because she had been in my womb for more than nine months." She used the money to pay

off debts. "But I have not fulfilled my dream yet. If possible I want to be a surrogate mother again because I need a house," she said.

Cambodian government officials, however, say the ban was necessary. "Cambodia is still poor but we don't want to use surrogacy to reduce poverty among our people," Chou Bun Eng, who heads an anti-human trafficking committee at the Ministry of Interior, said. "Otherwise Cambodia will become a factory to produce babies for sale." The November ban came in the form of a government edict. But there has yet to be a law passed specifically outlawing the trade, leaving it in a legal grey area.

Chou Bun Eng said the government was drafting legislation but provided no timeframe. Back at Puth Sar, Chhum Long admits the money from her daughter's surrogacy has not rescued them from poverty. After burning through monthly cash installments dealt out during the pregnancy and spending much of the remaining money on paying off debts, there wasn't enough to buy the new house they had hoped for. "We are still poor," she shrugs and then grins. "But if they selected older women, I'd want to be a surrogate too."—AFP

CYPRUS STRUGGLES TO TACKLE INDUSTRIAL SONGBIRD POACHING

NICOSIA: Volunteers and police in Cyprus are struggling to tackle illegal songbird trapping operations that kill millions of birds a year and net huge profits for poaching gangs. Migrating birds, snared with nets or limesticks-glue-covered wooden perches—are served secretly at restaurants on the island as a traditional dish called ambelopoulia. Volunteer Keziah Conroy of the Bonn-based Committee Against Bird Slaughter scours scrubland near the resort of Paralimni, using a mobile phone app to locate poaching hotspots.

She climbs a tree to free a blackcap, a small grey warbler, stuck to a limestick. After it flies off she removes another 23 of the traps from nearby vegetation. "We're saving thousands and thousands of birds this way just by removing these traps," she says. Trappers can catch thousands of birds a season, selling a dozen for up to \$45 to restaurants which serve the dish for nearly twice the price. It's a tempting prospect on an island still suffering 13 percent unemployment after a 2012-13 debt crisis.

But campaign group BirdLife Cyprus calls poaching, banned under Cypriot and European Union law, an "ecological disaster". In a

study with Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), it said trappers killed 2.3 million birds in autumn 2016, up from 1.4 million in 2010. Size for size, that makes Cyprus the second-most deadly bird destination in the Mediterranean, after Malta.

"Ambelopoulia" refers to the blackcap, but the dish of the same name can include several species of songbirds that are grilled, pickled or boiled. Nets also catch dozens of

inedible species as big as owls, which trappers usually throw away, says BirdLife Cyprus campaigns coordinator Tassos Shialis. "The biggest problem is that illegal bird-trapping now has become a large-scale, illegal business," he says. "An organized trapper is making tens of thousands of euros every year, tax free."

Killing hotspot

Of the 280 bird species regularly seen in Cyprus, some 200 are



LARNACA: A picture taken shows a police-installed speaker similar to those used by trappers to mimic bird sounds to attract migrating Eurasian blackcap birds and to lure them into mist nets.—AFP

migrants, including everything from songbirds to waterfowl and raptors. Millions use the island as a stopping-off point on their spring migration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. In autumn they return, fatter and accompanied by their offspring—a trapper's dream. One poaching hotspot is Cape Pyla, a once-barren group of hills on the island's southeastern coast, a popular resting place for migrating birds.

Trappers have introduced acacia trees to attract birds seeking a safe perch for the night. The cape lies within the Dhekelia Sovereign Base Area (SBA) where former colonial power Britain retains sovereignty, a military base and responsibility for policing. The RSPB in March labeled the base area the "worst bird killing hotspot" in Cyprus. Sergeant Andy Adamou of the SBA police says that during peak trapping seasons his force uses more resources to combat wildlife crime than any other British police force. He shows AFP a confiscated 12-metre mist net strung between poles stuck in concrete-filled tyres.

Trappers play recorded birdsong to entice birds into bushes overnight, then throw gravel at them around dawn, startling them into nearby nets.—AFP

BIG SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH AT SUB-ATOMIC LEVEL PROMISES SECURE COMMS

WASHINGTON: Chinese scientists have pulled off a major feat with one of the sub-atomic world's weirdest phenomena: photons that behave like twins and experience the same things simultaneously, even over great distances. The space-based technique developed by the researchers and reported Thursday in the journal Science holds potential for revolutionizing telecommunications and perhaps someday developing a hack-proof internet.

The principle is called quantum entanglement, in which photons or neutrons are created in such a way that they are linked and behave as if they were one entity, even if they are physically separated. In a groundbreaking experiment led by Professor Jian-Wei Pan of

Hefei University in China, a laser on a satellite orbiting 300 miles above the earth produced entangled photons. They were then transmitted to two different ground-based stations 750 miles apart, without breaking the link between the photons, the researchers said.

That distance is 10 times greater than the previous record for entanglement. The experiment also marked the first time entangled photons were generated in space. Both stations are in the mountains of Tibet, at a height that reduced the amount of air the fragile photons had to traverse. "It's a huge, major achievement," Thomas Jennewein, physicist at the University of Waterloo in Canada, told Science. "They started with this bold idea and managed to do it."—AFP