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'Dog meat' dishes raise a howl

by Fiona Low

AN EATERY in Jurong East selling 'dog meat' has raised the hackles of netizens after a photo of the menu was posted in online forums on Sunday .

The restaurant's owner Song Yu Ran, 39, who is from China, told The Straits Times that the two dishes are actually made from pig innards.

He has been selling them - to offer something unusual to customers - since the outlet opened three years ago.

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) said it was investigating and had taken samples of meat from the 70-seater eatery for testing.

The import of dog meat is illegal in Singapore and there are no licensed premises for the slaughter of dogs here. If convicted, the offender faces a fine of up to \$10,000 or 12 months' imprisonment or both, for each charge.

In an e-mail statement last night, AVA said: 'Welfare is a major consideration during the treatment and handling of live animals. In the case of slaughter, AVA accepts only internationally acceptable humane methods. There is no known humane method of slaughtering dogs for human consumption.'

The menu at the Song Hua Jiang restaurant features the two 'dog meat' dishes with photos.

The English descriptions read: braised dog meat with tofu and dry cabbage, and dog meat tripe in sauce.

The Chinese words indicate that it is not real dog meat only for the second dish. The phrase used is sai gou rou, which means something similar or comparable to dog meat.

Pictures of the menu are believed to have first popped up in the hardwarezone.com forum, garnering almost 600 comments as of yesterday evening.

In the pictures circulating online, the braised item is labelled as 'dog meat' in both languages.

Mr Song said the Chinese text for that dish had a typographical error and the English translation was inaccurate because he was not familiar with the language.

However, he stressed that he explains to any customer who orders the dish that it is not real

dog meat.

The braised dish costs \$14 and the tripe item is \$8. He said about 40 plates each are sold a week.

He added that staff had pasted stickers on the menu to block out the erroneous text some time ago but perhaps some of the stickers had dropped off.

Netizens have also posted comments on the Facebook page of animal rights group Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres), with many calling for investigations.

When The Straits Times visited the restaurant yesterday afternoon, two representative from Acres were there as well.

They had sat at a table and asked to see the menu. Mr Song promptly asked if they were there about the 'dog meat' issue. He asked them to speak to him directly and not to pretend to be customers.

A visibly aggrieved Mr Song said he has been hounded by calls, with many coming in the middle of the night.

'They can lodge a complaint against me if I have done something wrong but they should not be yelling at me if they haven't got their facts right,' he said.

He filed a complaint with the police yesterday evening regarding the calls.

Acres has since posted information on its Facebook page saying that the owner had explained that the dish was actually pork. Though The Straits Times had heard Mr Song explain to the Acres representatives why he had used the words 'dog meat', the post also said: 'The owner, however, could not properly explain why he listed it as dog meat rather than just stating it as pork.'

When asked about this later, Acres executive director Louis Ng said: 'We wrote this because we felt that if the public is told that the eatery just wanted to have an unusual item for patrons to try, it will anger more people.'

Acres later followed up with an e-mail message that stated: 'We are not saying that the owner did not explain his point to us... but... we felt this was not a proper explanation.'

Mr Ng added that Acres will be appealing to AVA to carry out further investigations.

Mr Song told The Straits Times that the eatery had been checked by AVA several times over the last three years when patrons had complained about the 'dog meat' on the menu.

He said AVA had on those occasions found that the meat was pork and told him only to block

out the text on the menu.

He added that he did not remove the items from the menu because he wanted to promote an alternative for Chinese nationals who enjoy dog meat.

'I don't encourage people to eat dog meat because I think that is cruel and inhumane. I am trying to provide an alternative for people who have a taste for the dish,' said Mr Song, who likened the items to mock meat sold in vegetarian restaurants.

His eatery, which serves north-eastern Chinese cuisine, gets a mix of Chinese-national and Singaporean customers.

Mr Song has lived here for eight years with his wife and 14-year-old daughter. They are now Singapore citizens but he said he would consider moving abroad after this incident.

'I am a law-abiding, contributing Singaporean trying to run a business here and it makes me sad that I am being attacked this way,' he added.