

WORDS WITH THE CHEF

As the American-Chinese chef, author, TV presenter and humanitarian that has been the face of Asian cuisine for over 30 years, **Ken Hom** knows what it is like to be healthy, wealthy and successful. But he also knows what it is like to be poverty-stricken and struggling to find enough money to put food on the table, which is why he is fronting a campaign for Laila rice, which aims to give away one million servings of rice to the hungry via UK foodbanks and NGOs in India and Africa.

WORDS: SHAUN CURRAN

Born in Tucson, Arizona to Taishanese parents, Ken Hom was raised by his mother who would "earn not much more than \$75 a month, if that". It meant food had to go far, and as such the celebrity chef has first-hand experience of the pain that a lack of sustenance can cause.

"I am an ambassador for Action against Hunger - not just an ambassador for it but I give a substantial amount of money and gifts and contribution to the legacy of hunger. It fits right into what I do. And of course, rice is an important part of my life. I love basmati rice and the fact that it can feed so many people. In today's world it is scandalous that we even have hunger. We waste so much food - over 40% is wasted. That's ridiculous, don't you think? That's another passion: so anything that can contribute to combating those things I'm against, I am for."

Another reason Hom is lending his support to the campaign is his disbelief at the current increase in use of food banks in the UK.

"The fact there is hunger in the UK is shocking. It has come to this for a lot of mismanagement on the government side as well as the social side. We live in world where people are worried about



buying their next iPhone. We are not aware that not everybody can inspire to those kinds of things. What is important is that people can afford a good meal."

The chef is of the opinion that sustenance should be a main priority.

"People talk about diets, yet some people don't have enough to eat. We have become unconscious of what is going on around us. So if this campaign can bring to attention that over one million people in the UK have been to the food bank in the last 12 months, it will be a very good thing."

Displaying a keen interest in British food and culture since 1982, when he started to front the BBC show Ken Hom's Chinese Cookery, Hom has witnessed great change in Britain's culinary landscape both culturally and socially.

"If you take the UK as an example, being a legacy of the empire it has different cuisines. That is one of the positive aspects of colonialism from what I can see. It has made Britain in many ways a multicultural and a very interesting country. But it is the same for many western countries, like France, where I live. When many people come to a country, with it comes their food. I have seen these changes

over 40 years, and it means the quality and the things that you can get are really, really amazing."

Given his expertise and extensive travel, what would he class as his favourite type of food?

"As it was my childhood cuisine, it definitely has to be Chinese food because I grew up eating it. I always end up going back to it because it is comforting and reassuring. It reminds me of being young and it makes me feel happy."

So if Chinese cuisine will always cast Hom back down memory lane, what does he make of what England has to offer?

"It is not really to my taste, but there are some good aspects. Old fashioned things like steak and kidney pie are nice and hearty, with not much meat. But I think there is too much bread and potato, which I can't eat too much of."

"But..." he chuckles, "I do like fish and chips!"

Credit line (please include): Ken is proud to support Laila's Rice for Life campaign, to donate one million servings of rice to the hungry, launched this month. **L**

For further details visit:
www.lailafoods.com/riceforlife

