Will you clear your own food tray at the foodcourt? There’s a limit to raising productivity to lower the demand for foreign workers. It would be far more efficient – and quicker – if we Singaporeans learn to do more tasks ourselves.

What we can do to clean up our act

For foreign workers

INCE Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam announced the Government’s 2013 Budget. Singaporeans have engaged in an intense debate about productivity and our stubborn reliance on foreign workers.

Businesses have been exhorted to automate, using machines and information technology (IT) to help workers do more in the same time. Even more has been said about foreign worker quotas, dependency ratios, and levies.

However, the discussion seems to have mostly overlooked the role of Singaporeans in reducing the need for foreign workers.

One way is for Singaporeans to perform the work, such as construction and cleaning, that we supposedly refuse, but which people in Australia, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand – with no easy supply of cheap foreign workers – all do. But, I’ll leave that discussion for another day.

The other way to reduce the cost in dollars and foreign workers.

Is it really necessary to clean large areas and slopes, and plant them with grass?

Wouldn’t it be equally green and much less costly to leave areas to grow wild?