

Ikan datang: Singapore-developed breed of sea bass to make a splash

By ALFRED CHUA



(Left to right) Mr Peter Chia, CEO of Allegro Aqua and Mr Koh Soo Keong, Chairman of Allegro Aqua

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SINGAPORE — A premium breed of sea bass could soon make its way to the table at homes and in eateries with the help of local aquaculture start-up Allegro Aqua.

Unlike other fish in the market, the St John's sea bass can be bred in 30 per cent less time and is less susceptible to diseases.

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The firm has started supplying the St John's sea bass fry and fingerlings to farmers in Singapore and around the region, and is looking for a local partner to work with to grow its business.

The start-up was cited by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in his Budget speech on Monday (Feb 18) as an example of how the agriculture and food production sector is transforming itself.

Announcing a **\$S1 billion war chest** to help companies here transform and become more competitive, the Government is also looking to transform the food production process and make Singapore's food supplies more secure.

As such, a new Centre of Innovation in Aquaculture will be set up at Temasek Polytechnic to support the growth and internationalisation of local aquaculture companies.

The move was welcomed by Allegro Aqua chief executive Peter Chia, who said that such a centre would go some way in "developing interest and creating awareness... especially among the younger generation".

In order to raise the profile of aquaculture here, "a confluence of things need to come together" in an "inclusive organisation", said Mr Chia. These factors include: Venture capital funding, entrepreneurs and mentors, as well as support from other industries.

Attracting talent is a critical step, as well as a key challenge, in aquaculture, he added.

"It is important to get people who are passionate about the field... (who are) willing to invest the time and energy," said Mr Chia, who added that the 10-strong firm needs more people to scale up its operations.

The company is also looking into how to leverage on technology to alleviate its manpower issues, while looking at how to grow its existing partner pool of those from other sectors

Allegro Aqua is now in talks with local industry players to cultivate the seabass before looking at retailing the fish in the future.

“What motivated us from the beginning was the recognition that aquaculture was going to be an important part of the supply of food for Asia,” said Mr Chia.

He also welcomed the Government’s “strong internationalisation push” and measures to help local start-ups grow and scale their businesses.

His wish list includes more measures to help develop talent in the sector and a sandbox for innovation within the aquaculture community.