

## Singapore Budget 2019: New aquaculture centre to work on improving Singapore's food resilience



A start-up, Allegro Aqua, is looking to bring more of St John's sea bass into the world. This fish, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said, is less susceptible to diseases, and can be bred in 30 per cent less time. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ALLEGRO AQUA/MINISTRY OF FINANCE

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SINGAPORE - More is being done to transform the food production process, and make [Singapore's food supplies more secure](#).

"In the digital age, we still need food, not just bits and bytes," Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said in his Budget speech on Monday (Jan 18), adding that the agriculture and food production sectors are transforming to meet this need.

A new Centre of Innovation in Aquaculture at Temasek Polytechnic will work on promoting aquaculture (high-tech marine farming) and will be funded to find ways to improve Singapore's food resilience, said Mr Heng.

He cited the example of St John's sea bass, a fish breed developed by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority's (AVA) Marine Aquaculture Centre and its collaboration with the Temasek Life Sciences laboratory, a beneficiary of Temasek Trust.

This fish, Mr Heng said, is less susceptible to diseases, and can be bred in 30 per cent less time. A start-up, Allegro Aqua, is looking to scale this up and bring more of this fish into the world.

Singapore imports more than 90 per cent of food consumed in the country, according to AVA numbers. In 2018, 9 per cent of all the fish eaten in Singapore was produced locally.

This foray into production of an improved sea bass breed is one of the initiatives that will advance the aquaculture industry locally.

In 2016, Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry Dr Koh Poh Koon announced that who want to kick-start a career in the aquaculture industry can sign up for an aquaculture (the breeding, rearing and harvesting of plants and animals in water) [Earn and Learn Programme](#).

The year-long work-study programme, developed by the AVA and Temasek Polytechnic with input from local fish farmers, lets candidates have first-hand work experience in aquaculture.

In 2003, the AVA set up the \$33 million Marine Aquaculture Centre on St John's Island. This was to promote the reliable supply of a variety of tropical food fish, establish benchmarks on the price and quality of fish in local markets, to help stabilise Singapore's fish supply, and to culture fish using quality and healthy fry that can grow to market size using safe farming practices with minimal antibiotics and other drugs.

The Temasek Life Sciences laboratory has also found a way to produce "Temasek Rice", a strain which produces four times as much rice per hectare, compared with regular varieties of rice.

Mr Heng added that [Enterprise Singapore's investment arm, Seeds Capital](#), has appointed seven partners to co-invest in Singapore-based agri-food start-ups.

And this, Mr Heng added, will lead to more than \$90 million worth of investments.