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St John's sea bass bred in 30% less time, resilient to diseases

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Producers of a home-grown breed of fish are looking to take it global. St John's sea bass, developed by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) in collaboration with Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory, was cited by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat as an example of how aquaculture is being transformed in Singapore.

The breed is less susceptible to diseases and can be bred in 30 per cent less time. A start-up, Allegro Aqua, was set up when scientists from Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory, working with various farms, demonstrated that they could scale up the production of St John's sea bass and that the fish could have better growth and survival rates.

Dr Jiang Junhui, head of AVA's Marine Aquaculture Centre, said AVA has been working with Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory on a selective breeding programme for Asian sea bass since 2003. "We contributed our expertise in breeding and brood stock facilities for the project," he added.

St John's sea bass was named after the place where research on it was done - at the Marine Aquaculture Centre on St John's Island.

This research, Allegro Aqua said, is the culmination of more than 15 years of advanced research efforts in genetic selection and mass cross-breeding done through dedicated and careful natural selection.

"Allegro's St John's sea bass is naturally cultured through a selective breeding programme that leverages molecular markers to precisely select superior brood stocks with specific desirable traits," added its CEO Peter Chia.

"From there, we can produce elite offspring through natural crossing which have better feed conversion ratio, fast growth qualities and a stouter physical structure resulting in higher fillet yield," he said. "This is in line with our commitment towards environmental stewardship and responsible farming to deliver safe, healthy and superior quality food fish for today, and our future generations.



St John's sea bass is naturally cultured through a selective breeding programme, said Allegro Aqua CEO Peter Chia. PHOTO: ALLEGRO AQUA