Local barramundi farm scales up with S$2m nursery extension

Fish farm expects to increase its fish production threefold to almost 1.8m fish per year

The new extension to Barramundi Asia's nursery was unveiled by Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Masagos Zulkifli (left) on Wednesday; also pictured here is Andrew Kwan, chairman of Barramundi Asia. BT PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Singapore

LOCAL barramundi farm Barramundi Asia has scaled up its operations with a new S$2 million extension to its nursery.

With this extension, the farm expects to increase its fish production threefold, to almost 1.8 million fish per year.

That will bring the farm's expected yield to 6,000 tonnes of fish yearly, which is more than what Singapore's 120 fish farms produced in 2018.

The nursery, located in the south of Singapore on Pulau Semakau, now has 1,200 sq m more space and the addition of eight giant 50 cubic metre tanks.

This extra space for rearing fingerlings, or juvenile fish, will raise the farm's production capacity to 150,000 fish a month, up from its previous capacity of 50,000 fish monthly.

Singapore imports more than 90 per cent of food consumed in the country, according to figures from the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA). Last year, only 9 per cent of all the fish eaten in Singapore was produced locally.

The farm hopes that its extension will produce more barramundi, which is called *jin mu lu* in Chinese or *ikan siakap* in Malay and is a popular fish on the menu in seafood restaurants.

The new extension to the fish farm's nursery was unveiled by Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Masagos Zulkifli on Wednesday. "As a city state that imports more than 90 per cent of our food, Singapore is vulnerable to external shocks and developments that impact food supply," he said at the official opening on Pulau Semakau.

He added that to enhance Singapore's domestic food security, three strategies should be pursued: diversify import sources, grow local and grow overseas. "Growing local will help us reduce our dependence on imports," he said, adding that local farms can harness the latest technologies to overcome resource constraints.

He also said that farms can tap into the AVA's Agriculture Productivity Fund to co-fund technology that could boost farm productivity. Barramundi Asia is one such beneficiary, where bits and bytes are very much part of the production chain.

Along with the new extension, the farm is equipped with the largest commercially-run Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS). In this system, water from the fish tanks will be treated and then re-circulated. Compared to simple filtration systems, this not only saves water but allows for tighter control over its quality.

Other machines on the farm include a semi-automated fish grading machine which sorts fish according to their size. This process previously done completely by hand.

There is also an expanded hatchery which will allow the farm to be fully self-sufficient from production to distribution.

By hatching its own fry, the company – which is Singapore's largest producer of sustainable, fresh barramundi – will be able to control the fish's entire life cycle from egg to farm and finally to fork.

As part of this production chain, a barramundi at the farm will be born at the hatchery, grow in the nursery, and be transported to the sea cage farm where it can grow to full size. It will then be processed, and marketed under the company's brand, Kuhlbarra.

Joep Klein Staarman, co-founder and managing director of Barramundi Asia, said: "The extension of the nursery and implementation of new technologies bring us closer than ever to achieving Barramundi Asia's vision of becoming the world's largest supplier of sustainable barramundi.

"Additionally, the increase in scale achieved with the extra fingerlings going to the sea allows us to use automation to achieve cost reduction and economy of scale."

The company intends to have a semi-automated vaccination machine at the nursery in two months' time and a fully-automated feeding system for the fish at sea in three months.