

Life Multicultural harmony D1



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Workers at Barramundi Asia's sea cage farm harvesting barramundi. With the \$2 million extension to its nursery on Pulau Semakau, the farm expects its fish production to rise threefold, bringing its expected yield to 6,000 tonnes of fish yearly – more than what was produced by Singapore's 120 fish farms last year. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

S'pore barramundi farm eyes bumper catch with \$2m nursery extension

Cheryl Teh

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

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

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 m tanks.

This extra space for rearing fingerlings 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 the food consumed in the country, according to figures from the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA).

But last year, only 9 per cent of all the fish eaten in Singapore was produced locally.

The farm hopes that this 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 yesterday. "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 farms can tap 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.

The new extension sees the farm

having the largest commercially run recirculating aquaculture system.

With this system, water from the fish tanks will be treated and then recirculated. Compared with simple filtration systems, this not only saves water, but also 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, a 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, grown in the nurs-

Innovative farming

Barramundi Asia has an all-new semi-automated fish grading machine, a process that was previously done by hand.

The fingerlings, which are between 20g and 40g, are sorted into different freshwater tanks based on their width by sending them through flexible steel bars to measure their widths.

Though size does not affect the quality or health of the fish in the farm, fingerlings are not mixed in case the bigger fish eat the smaller ones, said Mr Ben Tong Beng Hua, 27, vaccination manager of Barramundi Asia.

The fingerlings spend three months in the nursery. At the six-month mark, they are then transferred to 10m-deep sea cages, where they are left to grow to full size.

Two years on, the full-fledged 4kg to 5kg barramundi fish are scaled and filleted before they are packed for consumers. The cost is based on the quantity purchased, rather than the size of the fish.

During a tasting, this reporter found the fish succulent and mild-tasting, with soft, white, flaky flesh.

Shabana Begum

ery 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.

Mr 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 and a fully automated feeding system for the fish at sea in three months.

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