

NEWS

## GK Aqua Aims To Empower B40 Community Through MUGA Initiative



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Malaysian Biotechnology company, GK Aqua Sdn Bhd (GK Aqua) has launched the Malaysian Undang Galah Aquapreneurs (MUGA), an initiative to drive employment opportunities amongst the B40 community while increasing Malaysia's standing as an export country of top-quality freshwater prawns.

MUGA will empower aspiring aquapreneurs from the B40 community by recruiting them into GK Aqua's cluster farming community, an easy-to scale business model that guarantees the aquapreneurs potential earnings of up to RM6,000 per month. The guarantees are made possible via active collaborations with anchor companies across the globe that purchase the freshwater prawn harvests from GK Aqua through imports.

As part of the business model, GK Aqua will equip aspiring aquapreneurs with fingerlings and feed to get started, aside from providing them with an immersion into the world of freshwater prawn farming through training and education on farming technology as well as advisory and technical supervision.

The aquapreneurs will also receive 3 ponds (0.3 Ha in size) each, a monthly salary along with pond layout and technology application endorsements.

Founder and CEO of GK Aqua, Giva Kuppusamy said that MUGA will bring together different players from the public and private sector to help create a thriving ecosystem that will help put Malaysia on the map as a prime producer of sustainable freshwater prawns.

"MUGA essentially creates a win-win situation- MUGA will generate employment opportunities to uplift B40 communities and simultaneously generate new economic wealth for the nation through the exporting of freshwater prawns. We hope to onboard more partners to help us realise this."

GK Aqua aims to recruit 500 aquapreneurs within the next 3 years. To date, GK Aqua has enrolled 40 farmers into MUGA. Development of GK Aqua's 50-acre farm in Taiping Perak and 50-acre farm in Johor which will both be utilised as MUGA cluster farming communities is currently underway and another 300-acre in Pahang is expected to be finalized before year-end. All of GK Aqua's farms are built on unutilised or low-productive lands, ponds and infrastructure to ensure sustainability.

Ibrahim Noor Rashid who hails from Johor Bahru said, "A lot of us aquapreneurs have become more inclined to pursue freshwater prawn farming as GK Aqua has prepared everything we need to kickstart farming. When we think of starting a job as a freshwater prawn farmer, we also begin to think of the hefty upfront costs for land, equipment, feed and fingerlings which we do not have- and this deters us from pursuing a career in freshwater prawn farming. But this has all been simplified by GK Aqua."

GK Aqua utilises cutting edge biotechnology methods to produce genetically superior postlarvae (PL).

This has resulted in the breeding of disease-resistant prawns that are 3 times larger in size weighing an estimate of 150 grams per prawn in just 6 months.

Tai Bee Kim in Negeri Sembilan shared, "GK Aqua has made harvesting more manageable as oftentimes there is a lot of uncertainty as to whether or not we will be able to sell our harvest. With GK Aqua guaranteeing the repurchasing of the farmed freshwater prawns, we know exactly how much freshwater prawns to produce and just how much revenue we can expect in return. Knowing that we will also be culturing prawns that are all of the same size and quality puts our worries at bay."

The global freshwater prawn consumption market today is valued at USD7 billion. In Malaysia, 3,000 metric tons of freshwater prawns are consumed annually with 90% imported to meet local demand.

The species, locally known as "Udang Galah", is popular in most seafood restaurants. The demand for large-sized prawns has risen to as high as RM90/kg (USD 21.50/kg).

GK Aqua will soon launch its very own nutrient-rich pellets that have been formulated to enhance growth, boost immunity and increase the reproduction of freshwater prawns.

The pellets aid in fulfilling the nutrient requirements of the postlarvae to broodstock using enriched Black Soldier Fly (BSF) meal coupled with protein and lipids derived from alternative nutrient sources.

The pellets are cost-effective and are a crop-insect based sustainable feed that produces carbon-neutral freshwater prawns.

GK Aqua hatcheries are currently located in Bukit Pelanduk, Negeri Sembilan and can produce 60 million PL per annum. GK Aqua is exporting its freshwater prawn fingerlings to Mauritius and Cairo has

thus far generated an export value of USD50,000.

In July 2017, GK Aqua was awarded the BioNexus status by the Malaysian Bioeconomy Development Corporation (Bioeconomy Corporation). GK Aqua has also played an instrumental role in developing shipping regulations for freshwater prawn PL in Malaysia.

GK Aqua is working closely with the Negeri Sembilan state government to develop the state into a recognised "prawn valley" and to create more entrepreneurship opportunities for Malaysians. GK Aqua has raised a total of RM4.6 million from Cradle, MOSTI, SME Corp, grants which were used to solidify their biotechnology research and digitising their breeding centre.

GK Aqua Sdn Bhd (GK Aqua) is currently at a pre-money valuation of RM45 million (USD10.75 million) and **looking to raise up to RM8 million** (USD1.912 million) for 15.09% equity via the Malaysian equity crowdfunding platform pitchIN.