



SATS president and chief executive Kerry Mok (far left) and Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory chief executive Peter Chia at the signing event of the partnership agreement on June 24. The media was given a taste of possible dishes, including tomato and bocconcini (cheese) salad and *ikan asam pedas* using jade perch. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

High-nutrition S'pore tomatoes and fish could soon be on airline menus and in schools

Chin Hui Shan

A two-year partnership between in-flight caterer SATS and Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory (TLL) will explore how locally developed crops can be used in large-scale production.

The hope is that the tie-up will help strengthen Singapore's food security by reducing reliance on food imports, while also diversifying food supply sources here, said SATS.

Research institute TLL has developed a range of super food and crops such as sweeter, antioxidant-rich tomatoes and disease-resistant rice.

SATS aims to explore how the ingredients can be transformed into tasty, nutritious meals for airlines, schools and even NSmen, among others.

The media was given a taste of possible dishes on June 24 when both parties signed an agreement. These included chicken rice using TLL's Temasek Rice, tomato and bocconcini (cheese) salad, and *ikan asam pedas* (sour and spicy fish) using jade perch, a type of freshwater fish.

The verdict: The dishes tasted similar to the conventional ones, although the rice had a noticeably starchier texture.

TLL's locally produced jade perch is one of the items which could appear in different cuisines

or in products like ready-to-eat meals, said SATS' head of innovation and product development Jean Sin.

"This is where SATS' market expertise in areas such as product development, food safety, packaging, and large-scale food manufacturing and distribution could complement the specialised know-how that TLL researchers have amassed over the years," said SATS.

SATS develops, prepares and distributes food to airlines and other institutions including healthcare, defence, corporate companies and retail in Singapore.

"(We are) working closely with our culinary chefs... looking to see what we can create to put out to the wider market... hopefully on supermarket shelves, on the tables of our in-flight passengers, or even our institutional customers as well," said Sin.

Asked about the timeframe for rolling out recipes, SATS' president and chief executive Kerry Mok said that they can be tested and introduced "straight away", but this depends on the amount of produce available.

The success of the partnership hinges on how many of its customers are willing to take up these products, and how many distribution channels it can offer them to, he added.

A TLL spokesperson noted that the main challenge is turning its innovations into scalable and commercially viable products. Beyond

scientific innovation, practical challenges like scaling production consistently and ensuring the final products meet the industry quality and cost standards are critical.

"Working with SATS, including accessing their kitchen facilities for rapid prototyping, allows us to stress-test our innovations in a real production environment and move more quickly from research to viable product."

TLL's chief executive Peter Chia said that working with partners like SATS allows the lab to receive feedback quickly, adjust and scale.

The jade perch, which is rich in Omega-3, is farmed in Singapore's first container-based urban fish farm in Tampines. The farm can rear up to 560kg of jade perch per harvest, without occupying much space in land-scarce Singapore.

Besides the freshwater fish, the other two items the partnership is looking into are the Temasek Rice and high-nutrition tomatoes.

The Temasek Rice by TLL is a

hardy and climate-resistant grain variety developed using advanced plant-breeding techniques. It can withstand floods, can thrive for two weeks without water and is resistant to crop diseases like bacterial blight.

The rice is currently being grown with partners in Indonesia as part of TLL's efforts to support broader deployment in South-east Asia.

The tomatoes – which are grown at TLL's research facilities here – are said to be sweeter, look more appealing and have significantly higher levels of antioxidants. They are not yet commercially available.

SATS said that scaling production could also help to bring about economies of scale and in turn bring prices down.

"If we can introduce these to more Singaporeans, then the scale will come and that will allow us to commercially bring down the price and hopefully one that can match the existing protein that we are sourcing from outside of Singapore," said Mok, pointing out that sourcing local produce bolsters food security.

TLL's R&D expertise will also benefit SATS' food technology team that designs and produces meals not only at scale but also of high nutritional value, which is critical especially for their clients like the Singapore Armed Forces, said Sin.

Under the memorandum of understanding, SATS and TLL will conduct facility visits, exchange knowledge and discuss potential business models to bring TLL's food innovations to consumers.

SATS had also signed a partnership with global general trading and investment company Mitsui in 2024 that could take pre-packaged Singaporean fare like laksa to Japan to expand its presence there.

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