

# Malaysian firm building RM20m plant in Penang, aims to sell lab-grown meat by 2025



Cell AgriTech founder and vice-president of manufacturing Jason Ng Chin Aik speaks at Malaysia's first cultivated meat conference at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre March 16, 2023. — Picture by Shafwan Zaidon

By Keertan Ayamany

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KUALA LUMPUR, March 16 — Malaysia could soon produce its own cultivated meat locally in just two more years.

A home-based company called Cell AgriTech Sdn Bhd is setting up the country's first cultivated meat production facility in Penang worth some RM20 million.

Cell Agritech's plant will start by focusing on cultivating fish meat, especially premium meats, such as certain species of tuna and eel — and attempt to sell it at a matching price with the same type of meat sourced from slaughtered animals.

“Previously, this ice was known as artificial ice, but now we just name it as ice,” Cell AgriTech founder and vice-president of manufacturing Jason Ng Chin Aik said as he pointed to a slideshow image of ice made in a refrigerator.

Ng was speaking at Malaysia's first cultivated meat conference at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre here today, which is jointly organised by Cell AgriTech and Bioeconomy Corporation.

“Same with cultivated meat. We may name it as cultivated meat or artificial meat, but sooner or later we will just name it as meat, same as ice,” he added.

Cultivated meat is made by growing the stem cells of meat from animals in a device called a bioreactor.

Ng said that food grown in a bioreactor is not a new concept, as dairy products such as cheese are cultivated in bioreactors too.

Although regulations regarding the industry are not yet clear, Cell Agritech aims to produce and stock cultivated meat in local shelves by 2025.

Ng said that construction of his company's plant will begin construction in May this year, and is set to be completed by the end of 2024.

Deputy Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Arthur Joseph Kurup, who was also present at the conference, said that the current “research and markets” estimates the global cultivated meat market to grow from US\$176.48 million (RM791.87 million) in 2022, to US\$321.71 million (RM1.44 billion) in 2027.

Singapore was the first country to approve cultivated meat products for sale, back in 2020.

The US Food and Drug Administration and its Department of Agriculture are still evaluating the product.

Ng was also asked if the Cell AgriTech's products have received halal certification.

He said that the industry is still in the early stages yet locally and the authorities have yet to finalise how halal certification and other food-related regulations will be applied to cultivated-meat products.

“We are holding several roundtables to engage with industry players and regulatory industries on how this Halal certification process could look like,” he said.

He added that today's meat conference is to help the authorities learn more so that developments can be sped up.

Representatives from several national universities, the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia, the Health Ministry, the Agriculture and Food Security Ministry, and also the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation attended.

Ng touted cultivated meat as being safer than meat from slaughtered animals – supposedly being free of antibiotics and zoonotic diseases.

He also said that cultivated meat can cut down on food wastage, as many inedible parts of slaughtered animals are usually thrown away.

Explaining the food production process, Mihir Pershad, founder of Singapore-based Umami Meats — which is sharing its technology and expertise with Cell AgriTech — said that the stem cells in the bioreactor are fed a “Gatorade-like solution”.

“Sugars, amino acids, vitamins; the basic blocks that cells need to grow. But they’re broken down into basic components because cells don’t have a stomach.

“If you buy from a traditional pharmaceutical supplier, the amino acids are mostly coming from soy, the sugars are mostly coming from corn... big commodities,” he said.

He added that Cell Agritech is currently working on qualifying suppliers that may potentially be more environmentally friendly.

Mihir also said that the plant in question will be using “immortalised cell lines” that allows the company to perpetually cultivate meat for “decades” after sourcing cells from a single slaughtered animal source.