

# Lucrative venture for empurau fish farmer

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The Chua family showing their empurau fish at Icaas 2017. From left are Hua Beng, Puri, Eng Chai and the couple's other son Stansfield.



Empurau fish meat used for sushi dish.



Engkabang fruit nuts are a favourite of empurau fish.

**KUCHING:** In the space of 12 years, enterprising aquaculture farmer Puri Johan of Kampung Tae, Serian has finally turned her hobby of rearing empurau fish, known now as ‘Empurau Sarawak’, into a lucrative and sustainable business for herself and her family.

Puri said she first started with tilapia fish-rearing at her aquaculture farm, but found out from the Tarat Agriculture Centre in Serian that they were breeding empurau fish and were encouraging interested farmers in the area to rear empurau and venture into that industry.

“I was told by the centre that the fish has good price in the market and that people are willing to pay a good price to have the fish on the dining plate. That spurred me to venture into rearing it,” she told The Borneo Post when met yesterday at her booth at the International Conference on Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Sarawak (Icaas) 2017, at Borneo Convention Centre Kuching.

“Initially, since my focus was still on rearing tilapia fish, I figured that I better start to rear the empurau fish as a hobby first and from there on, see how the fish can adapt in my fish pond and survive,” she added.

Finding out that the empurau fish can survive in her pond environment, Puri said she then put in some more capital to rear more of the fish species as it fetched a high price of about RM750 per kilogramme.

“This is a tough fish and it can and will survive as long as the water quality and the right food are given so that it reaches the right weight and size. I feed the fish with engkabang fruit when it is bigger and before selling. The fruit is the one that makes the fish taste better,” she said.

Her husband Chua Eng Chai chipped in, saying he had been helping his wife properly manage the pond to ensure good returns following his retirement.

“The biggest challenge was to tackle the growth rate of the fish. But we succeeded as it takes three to four years for the fish to have a marketable size of 1.5 to two kilogrammes.

“Our main focus was the habitat and the food, but it really paid off and we are able to market the fish locally, to Sabah, Peninsular Malaysia and overseas,” he enthused.

“The bottom line to be successful is marketing and we have many plans to be sustainable in the business, like setting up an anchor farm or collection centre for the fish and getting our supplies from aquaculture farmers.

“We then help them to sell the fish. In this way, the product will be in the market,” he added. He hoped to get more assistance and knowledge in rearing the fish from the government in terms of technology in order to have a sustainable supply of the fish.

“I foresee a good future in the empurau fish business and a bigger market for the fish,” he said.

Hulu Rajang MP Datuk Wilson Ugak recently initiated a company called ‘Balleh Borneo World PLT’ to promote and market the fish via the Internet and also phone application.

Its spokesperson Surai Abell, when met at the convention, said the app was the first to be used in Sarawak to boost sales of aquaculture produce worldwide.