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Japanese food-tech startup Kinish raises $3.1 Million for rice-based dairy innovation

26 October 2026 | News

The Japanese food-tech startup will use its Series A funding to expand retail distribution in Japan and the US, while advancing molecular farming research aimed at producing casein in rice plants for future dairy alternatives



Tokyo-based food-tech startup Kinish has raised JPY490 million (approximately $3.1 million) in the first close of its Series A funding round, backing a dual-track strategy that combines commercial expansion of rice-based ice cream with research into plant-produced milk proteins.

Announced on October 20, the financing will support the growth of The Rice Creamery brand, research into molecular farming and indoor rice cultivation, and recruitment for management and business development roles in Japan and the US.

The funding round attracted INSPiRE Mutualistic Symbiosis Fund 1, Shimadzu Future Innovation Fund, Obayashi and Canada-based Love Veggies Holding. Shimadzu is also expected to collaborate with Kinish on analytical evaluation, quality control and measurement technologies for indoor cultivation.

Commercial traction meets biotechnology ambition

Kinish has established an initial retail presence for The Rice Creamery, with its products available in approximately 500 stores across Japan. The company also reported sales through retailers in Washington, DC, and at Meta's Washington office in October 2025. It has opened a New York office to support its US expansion, including production planning, distribution and brand development.

The current ice cream range uses conventional Japanese rice grown outdoors. It does not contain casein produced through Kinish's biotechnology programme, which remains under development.

This distinction is central to the company's strategy. While the existing business generates commercial traction through rice-based frozen desserts, its longer-term ambition is to develop rice plants capable of producing casein, a key milk protein used in dairy products.

Kinish has reported successfully expressing casein in rice. Its next research phase will focus on increasing protein content through improvements to the rice varieties. The company has not disclosed current casein concentrations or a commercial launch timeline for products containing the plant-produced protein.

Molecular farming targets dairy applications

Molecular farming uses plants as production systems for valuable compounds, including proteins that are traditionally sourced from animals or produced through other industrial processes. Kinish is combining this approach with indoor cultivation to develop a controlled production system for specially engineered rice.

The company is using dwarf rice plants approximately 20 centimetres tall, a format suited to cultivation across multiple vertical levels. The approach is intended to support indoor production while enabling greater control over growing conditions.

Shimadzu has identified ice cream, cheese and yoghurt as potential applications for the casein-producing rice. However, these remain development targets rather than commercially available products. The company's contribution will include analytical assessment and quality control of raw materials, finished products and cultivation environments, as well as measurement technologies for plant factories.

The partnership brings together Kinish's food-technology platform and Shimadzu's expertise in analytical measurement across food, life sciences and environmental applications. Such capabilities will be important as Kinish works to establish consistent protein production and assess the quality of ingredients intended for food use.

Global Brain, which manages the Shimadzu fund, said its investment decision reflected Kinish's combination of molecular farming and vertical farming, its emphasis on taste, and the breadth of expertise within its management team. The investor also sees potential in combining milk proteins with sweetness derived from rice starch to develop dairy alternatives with creamy textures. These possibilities remain prospective applications as the company advances its research.

Indoor rice cultivation moves towards scale-up

Kinish's indoor cultivation programme predates the latest financing. In February 2025, the company raised JPY120 million, then reported at approximately $800,000, in a seed round involving Genesia Ventures, Lifetime Ventures, Full Commit Partners and Mitsubishi UFJ Capital.

The earlier funding supported research into casein-producing rice, indoor cultivation systems and the introduction of conventional rice-based ice cream. Kinish also disclosed a collaboration with Shizuoka University to develop plant factories suited to dwarf rice cultivation.

In its latest indoor cultivation trial, the company reported harvesting 2,079.7 grams of brown rice per square metre over three months. The figure measures rice harvested, not casein output, and therefore does not establish the quantity or commercial productivity of the milk protein produced.

The next phase will focus on expanding cultivation trials, developing methods for mass production and using growing data to refine cultivation conditions. Scaling the system will require progress not only in plant growth and protein concentration but also in consistency, quality control and the economics of indoor production.

For Kinish, the Series A funding provides capital to advance both sides of its business: expanding a consumer-facing rice-based ice cream brand and developing a biotechnology platform that could eventually supply dairy proteins from plants. The commercial opportunity will depend on whether the company can translate successful research-stage protein expression into reliable, scalable production and food ingredients that meet performance and quality requirements.