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Japanese foodmaker prepares to place a \$10M gamble in West Sacramento (slideshow)

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A Japanese company is about to find out if a \$10 million gamble will pay off in West Sacramento.

Shinmei Co. Ltd. is finishing construction of an automated factory that will produce rice buns for consumption in the United States. One risk: The company doesn't know for sure there is a market here.

"It is still unknown," said [Tomoyo Vergara](#), assistant plant manager.

Rice buns are thin, dense patties of cooked rice. They can be used as a snack, side dish or even as a bun for hamburgers. They come in many flavors.

Shinmei officials believe rice buns — which currently have limited availability in the U.S. — will appeal to consumers attracted by the product's healthy attributes. Most rice buns are organic, non-GMO, vegan and gluten-free.

Construction crews are now completing the West Sacramento building and its systems; the plant is scheduled to ramp up to full production in September. The plant is highly automated, but at least 100 employees will be necessary to operate it, as well as for administration and sales.

Construction [began in May of 2014](#). Shinmei chose West Sacramento to be in the heart of California's rice-growing region. The Kobe, Japan-based company's plant will start with a single production line with capacity to make 6,000 buns per hour, or 40 million buns per year.

The building was designed with capacity to add a second production line. And the company has additional space and land in the business park to add two more lines to this facility, said [Tim Taylor](#), president of **Potter Taylor & Co.**, the Sacramento company that developed the plant.

Shinmei is not the first Japanese food company to open a plant in West Sacramento. Japan's Nippon Shokken opened a plant in Southport four years ago to make sauces for the global market. One of the flavors Shinmei is testing is Teriyaki flavor, using Nippon sauces.

Planning for the Shinmei plant began in 2012, the company [announced its plans](#) in the fall of 2013.

Mark Anderson covers technology, agriculture, banking and finance, venture capital, energy, mining and hospitality for the Sacramento Business Journal.