

Japanese plan to brew 'space beer'

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A Japanese brewery Tuesday said it was planning the first "space beer," using offspring of barley once stored at the International Space Station.

Researchers said the project was part of efforts to prepare for a future in which humans spend extended periods of time in space -- and might like a cold beer after a space walk.

Japanese brewery Sapporo Holdings said it would make beer using the third generation of barley grains that had spent five months on the International Space Station in 2006.

"We want to finish the beer by November. It will be the first space beer," Sapporo executive Junichi Ichikawa told reporters.

The company will have enough space grain to produce about 100 bottles of beer but has no immediate plan to make it a commercial venture, Sapporo officials said.

The company teamed up on the project with Okayama University biologist Manabu Sugimoto, who has been part of a Russian space project to explore ways to grow edible plants in space.

Barley can grow in relatively tough environments, such as high and low temperatures, and is rich in fibre and nutrients, making it ideal for space agriculture, the associate professor said.

"In the future, we may reach a point where humans will spend an

extended period of time in space and must grow food to sustain ourselves," Sugimoto said.

As of now, scientists have not detected any differences between Earth-grown and space barley, said Sugimoto, who will present DNA analysis of his findings before a conference in Canada in July.

"In the long run, we hope our space research will be not just about producing food, but about enjoying food and relaxing," Sugimoto said.

It was the latest space experiment with food.

South Korea's first astronaut, Yi So-Yeon, brought kimchi into space last month, while Japan has previously sent noodles into orbit.

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