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# ViAqua Therapeutics secures funding for RNA-based aquaculture disease management

6 September 2023

By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## ViAqua expects to bring its first product to market in 2024

ViAqua Therapeutics, a biotechnology company and developer of an orally administered RNA-particle platform to promote and improve animal health in aquaculture, has completed a U.S. \$8.25 million round led by S2G Ventures with participation from Rabo Ventures, The Trendlines Group Ltd., Agriline Limited, Nutreco, I-Lab Angels and Circle Investments LLC.

Disease management is currently the biggest issue facing the aquaculture industry, resulting in more than \$8.5 billion in economic impact for the shrimp industry alone, according to an analysis from Kontali.

To address this problem, ViAqua has developed a biotechnology-based oral delivery platform for the targeted administration of RNA-based solutions to improve disease resistance in aquaculture. In particular, shrimp are very susceptible to disease due to their lack of adaptive immune systems, and there are currently no products available that address shrimp disease today.



A funding round of \$8.25 million will enable ViAqua to scale RNA-based solutions in aquaculture and invest in R&D for future products. Photo courtesy of ViAqua Therapeutics.

“Oral delivery is the holy grail of aquaculture health development due to both the impossibility of vaccinating individual shrimp and its ability to substantially bring down the operational costs of disease management while improving outcomes,” said Shai Ufaz, chief executive officer of ViAqua. “We are excited to bring this technology to market to address the need for affordable disease solutions in aquaculture.”

A banner for Best Seafood Practices. On the left, there is a small image of a scientist in a yellow lab coat and mask working with a tray of orange shrimp. Next to it is a small image of a fishing boat on the ocean. The main part of the banner is dark blue with white text. It says "A comprehensive solution for the wild seafood supply chain." followed by three checkmarks: "Crew rights", "Food safety", and "Environmental responsibility". On the right, there is the Best Seafood Practices logo, which is a stylized eye shape, and a button that says "LEARN MORE" with a right-pointing arrow.

(<https://bspcertification.org/>).

The company’s first product is a feed supplement to enhance resistance to viral infections in shrimp, with the initial application targeting White Spot Virus (WSSV). It’s anticipated that this solution will provide much-needed production stability for farmers while also creating the opportunity to increase production per farm without increasing disease risk.

“Aquaculture is critical for the sustainable supply of marine protein,” said Kate Danaher, managing director of S2G Ventures’ Ocean and Seafood fund. “ViAqua’s platform technology will enable the company to move beyond WSSV to address numerous other diseases in aquaculture while similar technologies are still years away from reaching the market.”



## Nanobubbles, aquaculture and a world of possibility

Nanobubble technology can boost aquaculture water quality and fish growth while cutting energy costs. Growers and investors are seeing the potential.



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ViAqua produces its capsule products using commercial and industrial processes and is scaling production to take its first product to market. With plans to begin production in India at the beginning of 2024, the company has established a commercial partnership through a joint development and marketing agreement with feed company Skretting to bring the product to the market. While ViAqua is focused on shrimp production, the technology has numerous applications in aquaculture and beyond.

“We are truly excited by the potential of ViAqua’s technology because of the value it unlocks for the planet and the farmers. Diseases cause mortality rates of up to 50 percent, which result in 25 to 30 percent of shrimp farms failing annually. This is tremendously unproductive and hurts a lot of livelihoods,” said Shishir Sinha, investment director at Rabo Ventures. “Our bank’s aquaculture specialists Gorjan Nikolik and Novel Sharma were impressed by the game-changing impact potential of having a solution for an issue that has plagued the sector for decades and can make a meaningful difference in the lives of the smallholder farmers, who represent 80 percent of supply.”

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