INTERVIEWS | INTERVIEW

"India offers great potential for the application of amino acids in dairy production"

Rooted in a 100-plus-year legacy of transforming how the world experiences taste and nutrition, Ajinomoto Co. Inc. began with a simple yet powerful idea—making food more delicious to improve people’s health. Born from the discovery of umami by Dr Kikunae

By **Sanjiv Das** | March 31, 2026



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Rooted in a 100-plus-year legacy of transforming how the world experiences taste and nutrition, Ajinomoto Co. Inc. began with a simple yet powerful idea—making food more delicious to improve people's health. Born from the discovery of umami by Dr Kikunae Ikeda in the early 20th century, the company pioneered monosodium glutamate (MSG) as a way to provide umami taste and enhance overall flavour while supporting better nutrition. Today, that legacy has evolved far beyond food. In a wide-ranging conversation with ***NUFFOODS Spectrum*** during his visit to CFTRI Mysore for the international workshop on *Sensory Strategies for Sodium Reduction in Indian Traditional Foods*, ***Miro Smriga, Executive Officer and Vice President at Ajinomoto Co. Inc.,*** highlights how Ajinomoto has grown into a global leader in amino acid science—spanning nutrition, medical foods, and even semiconductor technologies—while staying true to its founding philosophy of delivering health without compromising flavour. Edited excerpts: –

How was Ajinomoto Co. Inc. born?

Ajinomoto Co. Inc. was founded over 116 years ago by a scientist who discovered the amino acid glutamate in kombu kelp. This discovery led to the identification of *umami*, now recognized as the fifth basic taste. Inspired by this, the idea emerged to create a pure glutamate-based seasoning—monosodium glutamate (MSG), popularly known as Ajinomoto.

In 1908, Dr. Kikunae Ikeda identified glutamic acid as the key component responsible for the umami taste in kelp stock. Suzuki Saburosuke II, who shared Ikeda's vision of "making simple meals more delicious through umami and improving the nutritional status of the Japanese people," commercialized the world's first umami seasoning, AJI-NO-MOTO, in 1909. This marked the beginning of the Ajinomoto Group's journey.

For over a century, the company has carried forward its founding philosophy of "eating deliciously and becoming healthy." By leveraging the functions of amino acids, Ajinomoto has continuously worked to enhance overall flavour while reducing sodium, without compromising palatability.

It is important to note that MSG is not a synthetic chemical, as is often misunderstood. It is derived from natural sources like kombu and produced through fermentation. During this process, it crystallizes into a pure form of glutamate, making it a naturally derived substance.

Dr. Ikeda’s motivation was rooted in the socio-economic conditions of early 20th-century Japan, where malnutrition was widespread. He believed that improving the palatability of food would encourage people to eat better and, in turn, improve their nutritional intake. This vision laid the foundation of the company—promoting nutrition without compromising taste, accessibility, or local food culture. These principles continue to define Ajinomoto’s philosophy today.

As the company expanded its research on amino acids—of which 20 are used to build proteins in the body, including nine that are essential in the human diet, many derived from sources such as soy. —it began developing a wide range of food products and other solutions based on different amino acid combinations.

What are the other products?

Food remains one of Ajinomoto’s largest businesses. However, the company has also leveraged its amino acid technology to develop innovative solutions such as Ajinomoto Build-up Film (ABF), which plays a critical role in semiconductor components. In fact, this technology is present in everyday devices such as computers and smartphones.

Beyond semiconductors, Ajinomoto is also active in healthcare solutions. Using amino acid technology, the company produces medical foods tailored to specific nutritional needs—for instance, for the elderly or patients with specific health conditions. This segment has become a major and rapidly growing part of the business.

Today, Ajinomoto is a diversified company, with a wide range of products all connected by its core expertise in amino science. While nutrition remains central, its applications extend far beyond food.

As a technical Executive Officer, what new possibilities do you foresee in the coming years?

The growth of medical foods is particularly promising. Amino acids can help make these products more affordable and accessible while improving their quality. We anticipate double-digit growth in this segment. The semiconductor biofilm business is also expanding, and we are investing in dedicated manufacturing facilities to support this growth.

Additionally, nutrition continues to be undervalued in many countries, including India. Protein deficiency remains a significant challenge, and we believe our solutions can make a meaningful contribution in addressing this issue. Dietary sodium reduction and reduction of daily calories are other areas where our products can contribute substantially.

How do you manage quality control?

We have our proprietary Ajinomoto System of Quality Assurance named ASQUA and a global network of more than 800 quality experts, each specializing in different areas. At the same time, our global headquarters team for quality control is relatively small, with around 15 members based in Japan. This central team gathers and analyses information from across the world and uses these insights to develop training and learning programmes for our global workforce.

Given the diversity of our businesses—from food to pharmaceuticals—we cannot rely on a single, highly specific quality system. Instead, our approach is unified by a common principle: customer satisfaction. This serves as the foundation that connects all our operations.

You currently have a near-monopoly in the semiconductor segment. Do you foresee competition?

There is certainly competition, particularly with increasing investments in East Asian countries, and we are also mindful of potential competition from India. While the future cannot be predicted, Ajinomoto is committed to maintaining its leadership position.

Since establishing our first overseas subsidiary in 1917, we have consistently focused on addressing local needs and improving nutrition at the community level. We see strong potential for future growth in India.

Do you have any specific plans for India?

We see significant opportunities in India, particularly in nutrition and amino acid-based products, where there is a strong societal need. Environmental sustainability is another key area. As one of the world's largest producers of milk, India offers great potential for the application of amino acids in dairy production.

Additionally, India's growing biopharma and fine chemicals industries present further opportunities for expansion. In the future, we expect growth not only within Japan but also in markets like India—particularly in nutrition, feed applications, and biopharmaceuticals.

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Read online: https://nuffoodsspectrum.in/interviews/23/23290/india-offers-great-potential-for-the-application-of-amino-acids-in-dairy-production.html

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