



European Research Day 2017

4 December | Delegation of the European Union to Japan, Tokyo

T11 - Dr. Ana SAN GABRIEL, Associate General Manager, Spanish Ajinomoto Co. Inc, Global Communication & Science Group

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My research project:

Umami taste, the fifth basic taste or the savoury taste of broths, cheese and tomato, is the base for cooking traditional Japanese dishes. Like the Mediterranean diet, which has been widely studied in the last fifteen years and accepted as a healthy dietary pattern, the Japanese traditional cuisine (*Washoku*) is rich in ingredients that are thought to contribute to positive health outcomes such as vegetables, fish, fruits, soy or whole grains. However, the Mediterranean diet has a higher caloric density, whereas in *Washoku dashi* or kelp seaweed broth is in almost every recipe. In 2013, *Washoku* became part of the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage, which has pushed for more research on the health contribution of *Washoku* in Japan. The country has one of the populations with the longest healthy life span and the lowest prevalence of dietary related cancers compared to other Western nations. Recently, Japanese studies have shown that a close adherence to government dietary recommendations result in lower premature mortality. We believe that the concept of *Washoku* of lower oil levels and a skilful use of *umami* taste, can contribute to reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity that is now a worldwide epidemic.¹

My career path:

My impression is that very few food companies in Europe and globally are doing basic research on food and metabolism. Japanese companies tend to invest more on basic research, although this trend is changing as well and there is a tendency for more applied science in the last 5 years. There are many interesting opportunities in corporate research but the price is that you cannot focus specifically on your personal interests, but on the interest of the company so freedom of research topics are limited. Otherwise, there are opportunities for participation in international congresses and to have a wide and important research network that if you don't work for an influential lab is not easy to build.

My relation to Europe:

We have collaborated with the Nutrition Department of the University of Navarra in Spain to prepare summer courses in San Sebastian about healthy eating, satiety, satisfaction, and taste perception for nutritionists and nutrition students (bachelors and master students). In the course, we had the opportunity to also give a practical lecture on cooking and experiencing *umami* taste at the renowned Basque Culinary Centre in San Sebastian. As a result, our course has received the highest evaluation by participants. This collaboration was important for us because the head of the Nutrition Department at the University of Navarra is the current President of the International Union of Nutritional Science. The next International congress will take place in Tokyo in 2021 and my company, *Ajinomoto*, wants to be a major sponsor in this event.

¹ BALDEON et al., *Amino Acids* 2014; Matsumoto et al., *Am J Physiol Cell Physiol.* 2013; San Gabriel & Uneyama, *Amino Acids* 2013; Lei et al., *Front Biosci* 2012