

Kamesh Ellajosyula



Kamesh Ellajosyula is Vice President of Manufacturing for Packaged Foods Business and the Director of the Olam Innovation Center in Bangalore.

Kamesh joined Olam in 2010 and has led the setting up of the PFB manufacturing network. His 18 years' experience includes leadership roles in food safety, technology, quality, procurement, international R&D, new product development at Rich Products Corporation and Frito Lay. He has received a Master's in Food Technology from the Pennsylvania State University and a MBA from State University of New York.

From concept to consumer: developing affordable and nutritious products for African markets

As the team at Olam's new research and development centre, ODC, in Bangalore, India, it's our job to create and develop food products that will then be made in Africa for African consumers. Working in tandem with the African team of manufacturing and marketing, we've made some great strides in the past year.

Along with many other projects, we've considered how to deliver a tasty, refreshing and healthy yoghurt drink which appeals to Nigerian palates (FreshYo) while our unique innovation in cream biscuits – one biscuit with a combination of two delicious creams (Chic Choc Twingles) has proved to be a winner. We've worked, too, on satisfying a massive demand for tomato paste, a central ingredient in Nigerian cooking, and indeed many African dishes (DeRica). All of these products are tailored to the taste and modest budgets of under-served consumers, with relevant nutritional requirements also being addressed.

When it comes to innovating in confectionery, if you've ever seen a child with a lollipop, you know what joy looks like. A simple treat that children everywhere have enjoyed for centuries, a lollipop can hardly be improved upon for delivering satisfaction. Or can it be? That's the question we asked ourselves when tasked with creating new affordable confectionery products for target consumers in West Africa. Based on consumer understanding we recently introduced a double-headed lollipop – two times the delight!

While the development process for each new market entry is different, each has taken the path from concept to market in very little time. That's really down to the investment Olam has made in our new pilot plant, research laboratory and talent.

There are few better places in emerging markets to build an R&D facility than Bangalore. It's a centre for excellence in food science, enabling us to build a talented, experienced local team. It also gives us easy access to suppliers, manufacturers, research centres and packaging expertise, and it offers good logistic links to our West African factories and consumers.

Olam has also invested in a key capability for our lab called pilot scale equipment. The equipment



beautifully bridges the gap between the lab bench where product concepts are brought to fruition on very small scale (1 litre) and the full model, where we test production at volumes of 10,000 litres (or a ton) and upwards. At ODC, the pilot scale model means we can do test runs of just 100 litres and solve any problems we encounter at that volume before moving on to test much higher volumes in the factory. Similarly, in confectionery we can screen many concepts and prototypes, fine tuning formulation before scaling up in the plant. It helps ensure that our eight- and nine-year- old Nigerian lollipop fans get a finished product that is just like the one they green-lighted!

Most importantly, our extended testing means that when a new product leaves the ODC it is fully ready for production and packaging on the ground in Africa. This helps us maintain our ability to offer innovative, upscale, high quality products at affordable prices.

All of this also means we're employing local talent in the centre in Bangalore, as well as local talent at our production and packaging facilities in Africa. So it's a win-win all the way.