

Caldic Positions India as a Key Hub for Food and Nutrition Innovation in APAC

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Smita Shetty, Managing Director, Caldic India,

India's evolving food and beverage industry is driving demand for products that combine nutrition, taste, convenience and affordability, prompting ingredient suppliers to strengthen their local innovation capabilities. To address these needs, Caldic has established its Food Innovation Hub (iHub) in Taloja, Maharashtra, bringing together application laboratories, pilot plants and blending facilities to support formulation development, testing and scale-up. In this interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum Asia, Smita Shetty, Managing Director, Caldic India, discusses the market trends shaping the facility, the challenges of nutritional fortification and sensory optimisation, and how integrated sourcing, regulatory and supply-chain capabilities can help food manufacturers accelerate product development. She also outlines India's growing importance in Caldic's Asia-Pacific Food & Nutrition strategy and the role the iHub could play in developing locally relevant solutions with wider regional potential.

What are the key market trends and customer requirements in India that led Caldic to establish the Food Innovation Hub, and how will the facility address the growing demand for locally relevant food and nutrition solutions?

India's food and beverage industry is evolving rapidly. Consumers are looking for products that are not only great tasting, but also more nutritious, convenient, affordable and aligned with changing lifestyles. At the same time, food manufacturers

are under increasing pressure to innovate faster, improve formulations and respond to very specific local consumer preferences.

We saw an opportunity to bring our global application expertise closer to the Indian market and combine it with a deeper understanding of local needs. That was one of the key drivers behind establishing the Food Innovation Hub in Taloja.

The iHub is designed to be more than an application laboratory. It is a space where customers can bring a challenge or an idea and work with our technical teams to explore ingredients, develop formulations, test concepts, run a pilot trial and conceive a blended solution to move towards faster & agile commercialisation.

Our ambition is to shorten the journey from customer challenge to innovation to market, while developing solutions that are relevant to Indian consumers and, increasingly, to markets across APAC.

How will the iHub's application laboratories, pilot plants, and blending facilities help Caldic move from formulation and testing to commercial-scale production more efficiently? What types of food and nutrition applications are you currently prioritising?

One of the biggest advantages of the iHub is that it brings several stages of the innovation journey together.

Typically, there will be gaps between an initial formulation, application testing, pilot-scale validation and eventually commercial production. The iHub allows us to work through these stages in a much more integrated way from understanding the customer brief and developing the formulation, through testing, blending, and scale-up. One example is the pilot plant which enables us test small batches of a product fast and adjust the formulation instantly to ensure the right properties.

This gives our customers greater confidence that what works in the laboratory can be translated into something that is technically and commercially viable at scale.

Our focus areas include nutritional fortification, texture and taste, alongside applications where manufacturers are looking to improve product performance, formulation efficiency and consumer appeal. We see significant opportunities across areas such as beverages, bakery, dairy and dairy alternatives, snacks and other food applications where nutrition and sensory performance need to come together.

Ultimately, the objective is simple: reduce the time from an idea to market-ready solution.

Nutritional fortification, texture, and taste are identified as key focus areas for the facility. What are the major formulation challenges you are seeing in these areas, and how is Caldic helping customers develop products that meet evolving consumer expectations?

Today, consumers increasingly want several things at the same time. They want healthier and more nutritious products, but they do not necessarily want to compromise on taste, texture, convenience or affordability.

For example, adding proteins, fibres, vitamins or other functional ingredients can influence taste, mouthfeel, or colour characteristics. This means the technical challenge is not simply adding an ingredient, it is finding the right combination and dosage to deliver a product that not only has the right nutritional profile but also tastes good and has the right texture and colour.

This is where application expertise becomes critical.

At Caldic, we work with customers to understand the complete formulation challenge rather than looking at ingredients in isolation. Our teams can evaluate different ingredient systems, optimise formulations and test their performance in relevant applications. The iHub strengthens this capability by giving us one hub where we can collaborate with customers on multiple aspects of the product to deliver complete solutions.

How does the integration of formulation expertise with sourcing, blending, regulatory, and supply-chain capabilities strengthen Caldic's ability to provide end-to-end solutions to food manufacturers in India and across APAC?

For us, innovation does not end with a successful formulation. A solution has to be scalable, compliant, commercially viable and reliably supplied.

This is where Caldic's integrated model creates significant value. We can bring together application and formulation expertise, ingredient sourcing, regulatory understanding, blending, quality and supply-chain capabilities to meet all customer requirements.

That means we can support customers not only in answering "Can we formulate this?" but also "Can we scale it? Can we manufacture it consistently? Is it compliant? Can we ensure a reliable and competitive supply?"

The iHub becomes an important connecting point between these capabilities.

It also creates an opportunity to leverage Caldic's broader global and APAC network. Solutions developed for a specific Indian consumer or customer need can potentially be adapted for other markets, while insights and technologies from across our global network can be brought into India.

This allows us to be a solutions partner, rather than simply an ingredient supplier.

Sustainability has been incorporated into the design and operations of the Taloja facility. What measures are being implemented to improve energy efficiency, logistics, and resource utilisation, and how do these align with Caldic India's broader sustainability goals?

Sustainability needs to be embedded into how we design and operate our facilities and how we work with our customers; it cannot be treated as a separate initiative.

At the Taloja facility, we have considered areas such as energy efficiency, resource utilisation, operational efficiency and logistics as part of the overall design and operating approach.

There is also a broader opportunity to support our customers in developing more sustainable formulations whether through ingredient choices, optimised formulations, improved resource efficiency or more efficient supply models.

For Caldic India, sustainability is therefore both an operational responsibility and an innovation opportunity. As we build the iHub, we want it to help us create solutions that deliver the right balance of performance, nutrition, consumer appeal, commercial viability and sustainability.

Looking ahead, what role do you see India playing in Caldic's Asia-Pacific Food & Nutrition strategy, and what are your priorities for expanding the iHub's capabilities, customer partnerships, and innovation pipeline over the next few years?

I see India playing a very important role in Caldic's Food & Nutrition growth story in APAC.

India has a large and increasingly sophisticated food industry, a diverse consumer base and a strong culture of innovation. It is also a market where we see opportunities to develop solutions that can have relevance beyond India.

Our priority now is to build on the foundation we have created with the iHub. That means deepening our technical capabilities, expanding the range of applications we can support, and most importantly, building stronger partnerships with suppliers and customers.

We want the iHub to be a place where customers come when they have a formulation challenge or a new product idea and work with us to find the answer.

Over the coming years, I would like to see the iHub develop into a strong innovation and collaboration platform for India and APAC, connecting customers, our technical teams, principal suppliers and our wider Caldic network.

For me, the real measure of success will not simply be the number of formulations we develop. It will be the number of customer ideas that we help turn into successful products in the market.