Claims:

1. A process of forming a salt-enhancing ingredient comprising the steps of
(i) forming an aqueous slurry of spinach plant material, and
(ii) forming a hydrolysate of spinach plant material by subjecting it to an enzymatic hydrolysis using one or more proteolytic enzymes.

2. The process of claim 1, wherein the formed salt-enhancing ingredient is inactivated by heating.

3. The process of any one of claims 1 to 2 wherein the one or more proteolytic enzymes are selected from the group consisting of proteinase, peptidase, and glutaminase.

4. The process of any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the one or more proteolytic enzymes comprise both endopeptidase and exopeptidase activity.

5. The process of any one of claims 1 to 4 wherein the one or more proteolytic enzymes comprise an enzyme preparation from *Aspergillus oryzae* (Umamizyme™) and the hydrolysis is performed at 40°C to 60°C.

6. The process of any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the hydrolysate is formed by subjecting the Spinach plant material to an enzymatic hydrolysis using one or more carbohydrase enzymes in parallel or subsequent to enzymatic hydrolysis by the one or more proteolytic enzymes.

7. The process of any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein the hydrolysate is subjected to fermentation using a *Lactobacillus*; preferably a *Lactobacillus* microorganism selected from the group consisting of *L. plantarum*, *L. casei*, *L. brevis* and *L. helveticus*.

8. The salt-enhancing ingredient formed by the process of any one of claims 1 to 7.

9. The salt-enhancing ingredient of claim 9 which is concentrated at least 1.5 times by removing water.

10. The salt-enhancing ingredient of any one of claims 8 to 9 wherein the salt-enhancing ingredient is spray-dried.

11. A flavor composition for food products comprising the salt-enhancing ingredient of any one of claims 8 to 10 and one or more food grade excipient.

12. The flavor composition of claim 11 wherein the concentration of the salt-enhancing ingredient of claim 9 is 0.25 to 400 ppm based on the use of the unconcentrated salt-enhancing ingredient.

13. A food product comprising the salt-enhancing ingredient of any one of claims 8 to 10, preferably at a concentration of 0.25 to 400 ppm based on the use of the unconcentrated salt-enhancing ingredient.

14. The food product of claim 13 which is a reduced or low sodium food product, preferably with a sodium chloride concentration is 0.15% (wt/wt) to 3% (wt/wt), more preferably 0.15% (wt/wt) to 1.5% (wt/wt).

15. The reduced or low sodium food product according to claims 14, additionally comprising KCl, optionally comprising KCl in a concentration of 0.1% to 2% (wt/wt) KCl.

16. A method of providing a food product enhanced in saltiness wherein the salt-enhancing ingredient as defined in any one of claims 8 to 10 is admixed to a food product.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein the food product is a reduced or low sodium food product optionally containing KCl, optionally comprising KCl in a concentration of 0.1% to 2% (wt/wt) KCl.

Claims

1. A process of forming a salt-enhancing ingredient comprising the steps of
(i) forming an aqueous slurry of spinach plant material,
(ii) forming a hydrolysate of spinach plant material by subjecting it to an enzymatic hydrolysis using one or more proteolytic enzymes;
(iii) subjecting the spinach plant material to an enzymatic hydrolysis using one or more carbohydrase enzymes in parallel or subsequent to enzymatic hydrolysis by the one or more proteolytic enzymes; and,
(iii) fermenting the hydrolysate of the the spinach plant using a *Lactobacillus* bacterium selected from the group consisting of *L. plantarum*, *L. casei*, *L. brevis* and *L. helveticus* at a temperature from 20°C to 40°C.

2. The process of claim 1, wherein the one or more enzymes and *Lactobacillus* bacterium in the formed salt-enhancing ingredient are inactivated by heating.

3. The process of claim 1 or 2 wherein the one or more proteolytic enzymes are selected from the group consisting of a proteinase, a peptidase, and a glutaminase.

4. The process of any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the one or more proteolytic enzymes comprise both endopeptidase and exopeptidase activity.

5. The process of any one of claims 1 to 4 wherein the one or more proteolytic enzymes comprise an enzyme preparation from *Aspergillus oryzae* and the hydrolysis is performed at 40°C to 60°C.

6. The salt-enhancing ingredient obtainable by the process of claim 1.

7. The salt-enhancing ingredient of claim 6 which is concentrated at least 1.5 times by removing water.

8. The salt-enhancing ingredient of claim 6 or 7 wherein the salt-enhancing ingredient is spray-dried.

9. A flavor composition for food products comprising the salt-enhancing ingredient of any one of claims 6 to 8 and one or more food grade excipients.

10. The flavor composition of claim 9 wherein the concentration of the salt-enhancing ingredient of claim 9 is 0.25 to 400 ppm based on the use of the unconcentrated salt-enhancing ingredient.

11. A food product comprising the salt-enhancing ingredient of any one of claims 6 to 8, preferably at a concentration of 0.25 to 400 ppm based on the use of the unconcentrated salt-enhancing ingredient.

12. The food product of claim 11 which is a reduced or low sodium food product, preferably with a sodium chloride concentration is 0.15% (wt/wt) to 3% (wt/wt), more preferably 0.15% (wt/wt) to 1.5% (wt/wt).

13. The reduced or low sodium food product according to claim 12, additionally comprising KCl, optionally comprising KCl in a concentration of 0.1% to 2% (wt/wt) KCl.

14. A method of providing a food product enhanced in saltiness wherein the salt-enhancing ingredient as defined in any one of claims 6 to 8 is admixed to a food product.