Floating Gate MOS Capacitor with High-Density Nanodots Array Produced by Protein Supramolecule

Kiyohito Yamada¹,², Shigeo Yoshii¹, Shinya Kumagai¹, Atsushi Miura², Yukiharu Uraoka²,
Takashi Fuyuki² and Ichiro Yamashita¹,²,³

¹Advanced Technology Research Laboratories, Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd.,
3-4 Hikaridai, Seika, Kyoto 619-0237, Japan
Phone: +81-774-98-2516 E-mail:yamashita.ichiro@jp.panasonic.com
²Graduate School of Materials Science, Nara Institute of Science and Technology,
8916-5 Takayama, Ikoma, Nara 630-0101, Japan
³Core Research for Evolutional Science and Technology, Japan Science and Technology Agency,
4-1-8 Honcho, Kawaguchi, Saitama 332-0012, Japan

1. Introduction
Nanotechnology is attracting a great deal of research attention and nanofabrication is one of the hottest topics in the nanotechnology. We propose a new biological method which can produce nanometric inorganic functional structures. This method named “Bio Nano Process” (BNP) utilizes biominalization, self-assembly and vulnerability of the protein supramolecules.¹-⁶ As the first application of the BNP, we have been producing a monolayer of nanodots embedded in the SiO₂ layer of the MOS capacitor, which is the key component of the floating gate memory MOS transistor (FGNM).⁷ In order to realize sufficient magnitude and uniformity for the memory window and decrease the influence of interface traps in SiO₂/Si on the memory window, a nanodot density of higher than 10¹² cm⁻² is necessary. Therefore, we employed small cage-shaped protein with ferricyanide core, Listeria ferritin (Lis-fer), the outer and inner diameters of which are 9.4 and 4.5 nm, respectively. The density of a nanodot array produced using Lis-fer should exceed 10¹² cm⁻².⁴,⁶

In this paper, we present each step of the fabrication of the MOS capacitor with a 4.5-nm-nanodot array using Lis-fer and the electrical properties of the obtained MOS capacitor.

2. Experimental
A p-type Si substrate with a 3-nm-thick SiO₂ layer was exposed to 3-aminopropyl-triethoxysilane (APTES) vapor and SiO₂ surface was covered with APTES. Lis-fer was adsorbed on the APTES modified Si substrates by controlling the electrostatic interaction between the protein and the substrate surface.⁴ The adsorption density of Lis-fer was observed by a high resolution scanning electron microscope (SEM). After the protein shell and APTES elimination, a SiO₂ layer with a thickness of 20 nm was deposited on the substrate with an array of nanodots by PECVD method using tetraethyl-orthosilicate (TEOS) as silicon source and Au electrode was deposited on the SiO₂. The obtained MOS structure was annealed at 450°C for 1h in reducing ambient gas (H₂:N₂=10%/90%). To investigate the geometric condition and the elements of nanodots in the SiO₂ layer after annealing, a cross-sectional transmission electron microscope (TEM), an X-ray photoelectron spectrometer (XPS) and electron-energy-loss spectroscopy (EELS) was carried out. Capacitance-voltage (C-V) characteristics of the MOS capacitor were measured.

3. Results and Discussion
Fig. 1 shows the SEM image of the substrate after Lis-fer adsorption. Since SEM can not visualize protein shells, only nanodot cores can be seen as white dots. The density of nanodots was 1.8 x 10¹² cm⁻², which is higher than the target density 10¹² cm⁻². Since the ferricyanide core of Lis-fer is nonconductive, the core needs to be reduced to the conductive nanodot for electron confinement. Therefore, the reduction process of the obtained MOS structure was employed by annealing.

The geometric conditions of the embedded nanodots and MOS structure were investigated by cross-sectional TEM. As shown in the TEM image (Fig. 2), the Lis-fer nanodots embedded in a SiO₂ layer after annealing were just above the tunnel oxide layer and have a spherical shape. The diameter of the Lis-fer core decreased from 4.5 to 3.2 nm after annealing. This shrinkage also supports the desorption of oxygen atoms from a ferricyanide core during annealing. They are isolated from other nanodots, which is important for the floating nanodot gate memory or electron confinement nodes.

The XPS, Fe 2p, spectrum of nanodot embedded in SiO₂ layer was measured before and after annealing, as shown in Fig. 3(a). The XPS spectrum showed a peak corresponding to Fe₂O₃ at 711 eV before annealing. After annealing, a new peak at 707 eV corresponding to metal iron appeared and a broadening toward the low energy side of the peak around 711 eV could be attributed to FeO, which has a peak at 710 eV. That is, cores embedded in the 5-nm-thick SiO₂ layer used in XPS were reduced partially from Fe₂O₃ to Fe₂O₃, FeO or Fe. To investigate the elements of nanodots in SiO₂ after annealing, EELS measurement was carried out. Fig. 3(b) shows the EELS signals corresponding to O-K obtained from a nanodot. The typical peak shape of an iron oxide was not observed after annealing.⁸ From results of the above cross-sectional TEM, XPS and EELS observation, we suppose that the an iron oxide core reduced to a metal iron after annealing, which is supported by our previous work.⁹
The C-V characteristics of the MOS capacitor measured at 1 MHz with DC sweep of ±10V showed a clear hysteresis, as shown in Fig. 4. The anti-clockwise hysteresis can be observed reproducibly, and it indicated the charging and discharging of electron in the embedded nanodots. The flat band shift (ΔVfb) as the capacitance hysteresis is plotted against dot density in Fig. 5. This result indicated that ΔVfb increases with increasing dot density and expanded ΔVfb will enhance device performance when applied in floating nanodot memories.

By using BNP, nanodots array controlled dot size and density and selected dot type can be fabricated on substrates. \(^1\) Therefore, it is possible to investigate effects of dot size, dot density and dot type on charge injection characteristics in nanodots array and we expect to obtain knowledge to improve FNGM in the future.

4. Conclusions

High-density Lis-fer above 10\(^{12}\) cm\(^{-2}\) with a ferrihydrite core were adsorbed onto a Si substrate. The protein shells were eliminated by heat treatment and the obtained array of cores was embedded in a SiO\(_2\) layer. After forming an aluminum electrode on this SiO\(_2\) layer, the sample was annealed in reducing gas. The MOS capacitor with nanodots showed hysteresis in CV curve, which indicates the electron confinement in the cores made by Lis-fer. The results described in this study clearly demonstrate that a larger memory window, or ΔVfb, can be attained by employing an array of high-density nanodots, which will make it possible to fabricate much scaled floating gate type memory.

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References