

Raising Awareness of Nutrition and Berry Benefits with Healthcare Professionals

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In February 2022, Nutrition Research Australia (NRAUS) kicked off a 2-year strategic levy investment project, **Health and Nutrition Information for the Berry Industry (MT21000)** funded by Hort Innovation using the Blueberry, Raspberry and Blackberry Funds and contributions from the Australian Government.

Why do we need this project?

Not only are berries a nutritional standout, rich in vitamins, minerals, and dietary fibre, they are also a source of numerous non-nutritive and colourful “bioactives”, compounds which give fruit and other plant foods colour, but also give us additional health benefits including reduced risk of chronic diseases. One bioactive getting more attention of late are polyphenols. Berries are one of the highest dietary sources of polyphenols and have an impressive nutrition story to tell.

Health care professionals (HCP) are a trusted source of nutrition information, that can increase awareness of both their specific health benefits and culinary uses. However, the specific therapeutic effects, bioactives, and the doses required to achieve these is not common knowledge among health-care professionals.

There is an opportunity to educate health care professionals on the latest berry nutrition science, and their culinary uses to make it relevant and practical, thereby ensuring berries are top of mind and support client recommendation.

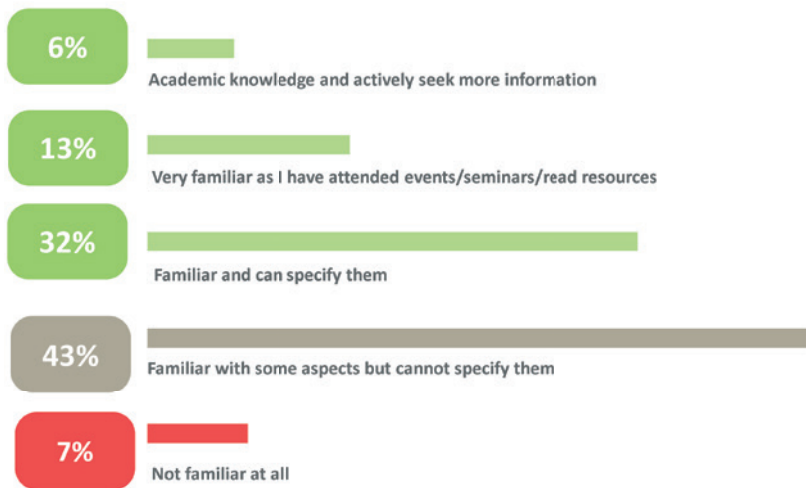
What has been accomplished so far?

In May 2022, NRAUS launched their Berries healthcare professional Market Research Survey. The survey sought to obtain baseline data on perceptions and attitudes to be used as a benchmark for project evaluation at project end as part of monitoring & evaluation, plus gain market insights to help tailor key message development and adjust the communication plan. The survey of over 200 respondents found whilst the majority of HCPs rate themselves as confident discussing the benefits of berries, aside from being able to specify they contain vitamin C and more generally bioactives, more than half were not able to specify any other nutrients or specific bioactive types.

Nearly half (42%) of respondents are not regularly recommending berries to their clients and when they do, a mix of berries or blueberries are most common, with very few specifically recommending blackberries or raspberries. Nutritional and health benefits and taste and convenience are key drivers. Not being top of mind (40%) and lack of nutritional and health knowledge for 1 in 4 are the key barriers to recommendation. Cost was reported as an issue for only a small subset of respondents (15%). Most are not familiar with growing practices of Australian berries with a large proportion (25%) not familiar at all and they yearn for more information on how growing affects nutritional quality.

Half of healthcare professionals surveyed do not feel able to identify specific nutritional properties of Australian berries

Q. How familiar are you with the different nutritional properties (nutrient content and bioactive components) of Australian berries?



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n = 214

Note: Values total >100% due to rounding errors

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The NRAUS science team, led by Dr Michelle Blumfield, undertook a comprehensive, referenced ‘deep dive’ literature review in the first half of 2022 to investigate ‘What are the health effects of Australian berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries)?’ Its aim was to provide an evidence base to inform key messages in the education campaign. It highlighted berries to provide unique nutrition benefits, that differ between berry type.

One of the key findings was that berry consumption was associated with positive health effects linked to vascular health, brain health, exercise recovery, weight and ageing, and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. Current focus is now on planning and activating the communication and education campaign.

What is to come?

Engaging collateral is to be developed including infographics, facts sheet and an animation, all to be freely available via an NRAUS dedicated ‘Berries hub’. In December, an exciting and exclusive key opinion leader (KOL) online event is planned.

It aims to build a healthcare professional KOL ambassador and influencer network that can communicate and amplify project key messages throughout the project via their health-care professional and consumer community.

Other planned educational activities include a webinar, and dietitian and GP conferences.

