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By Fred Searle

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'More room for health claims in berries'

Sector needs to move beyond talking about antioxidants and highlight benefits for cardiovascular system and gut health, says Medicinal Chef

Emphasising the multiple health benefits of berries presents a major untapped opportunity to boost sales in the soft fruit sector, nutritionist and chef Dale Pinnock has urged.

As demand increases for high quality information on how diet and lifestyle can influence our health, soft fruit supplier Soloberry has joined forces with the self-styled 'Medicinal Chef' to develop eight exclusive berry recipes for the company.

In addition, he is trying to spread awareness of the many ways that berries can improve our health, with a focus on how, in practice, they benefit you.

This week he presented some of these advantages to the soft fruit industry at The Global Berry Congress in Rotterdam, following recent research from the University of Reading and King's College London.

Three major advantages highlighted by Pinnock at the conference were that they help to bring down blood pressure; they protect against thrombosis by guarding against endothelial damage; and they strengthen our gut flora, helping to protect us from pathogens and infection.

"When people have spoken about the health benefits of berries in the past, it's always been this same word thrown around: antioxidants," he said. "True, there are loads of antioxidants in there, but this is probably the least exciting thing that's going on.

"In the UK in particular, we've been doing a lot of research on a specific class of compounds found in berries: polyphenols. They're a very diverse group of phytochemicals that are found in a wide array of different foods."

One type of polyphenol in particular, anthocyanins, has major benefits for the cardiovascular system, which is

especially important given that heart disease is the single biggest killer in the western world.

Anthocyanins are part of the chemistry that gives berries their deep colour pigments, so the darker the berries, the higher the concentration of these beneficial compounds.

By triggering endothelial cells (on the interior surface of blood vessels) to secrete nitric oxide, anthocyanins cause the walls of blood vessels to relax and dilate, thus lowering blood pressure.

This nitric oxide also plays a second role, helping to protect against damage to the endothelium, which can lead to the clogging of a vessel or thrombosis.

In addition, research at King's College London has shown that polyphenols can strengthen our gut flora, which provides a physical barrier, helping to stop opportunistic pathogens from making their



Dale Pinnock (far left) and Rachel Montague-Ebbs with Eurofruit's Mike Knowles at the Global Berry Congress

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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way into the body and causing infection.

"This isn't going to replace medication any time soon – that's not the point," said Pinnock. "The point is that when you understand how day-to-day foods can influence your health you can start to do something for yourself. You can engage in your own healthcare."

Commenting on the best way to convey these potentially complicated health messages to consumers, he added: "It's about doing it in soundbites that are actually applicable. You can really go down the rabbit hole

and reach some extreme levels of detail if you want, which isn't necessary for the consumer at all.

"It's about finding soundbites that resonate with people's desires, and we're at a time now where people are crying out for information, particularly with things like degenerative health conditions that are plaguing our healthcare systems."

Soloberry's head of brand and communications Rachel Montague-Ebbs acknowledged that it can be "very tricky"

to make health claims on food packaging but she said it's all about research.

"The British Summer Fruits team works with University of Reading quite a lot and we're trying to really dig into the key nutritional elements," she said. "Then it's about trying to turn that into the right story for the consumer."