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2009 Raspberry Health and Nutrition Roundtable Report

Introduction

The following report summarizes findings from interviews conducted with scientists whose research has been funded by or product has been donated by WRRC (Alan Crozier, University of Glasgow; Venket Rao, University of Toronto; Jim Joseph USDA-ARS Tufts University; and Gary Stoner, Ohio State University), participants in the WRRC June 24, 2009 Roundtable (Venket Rao; Alan Crozier; Clare Hasler, University of California Davis; Henry Bierlink, Erin Thoeny, Dan Sakuma, Tom Krugman, WRRC; and Rodger Wasson, Leigh Selby, Wasson & Associates), and interviews conducted with key scientists who were unable to attend the roundtable (Britt Burton-Freeman, Illinois Institute of Technology; Gary Stoner; and Jim Joseph).

Held in conjunction with the 2009 Berry Health Benefits Symposium, the Roundtable discussion focused on scientific and nutrition trends affecting the category of berries in general and specifically raspberries. One important goal of the 2009 Roundtable was to update the findings and progress since the last roundtable held in April of 2007.

Berries as a Category

There is growing scientific evidence that berries as a whole food (i.e. the total package of beneficial compounds) continue to be related to improved health with respect to cardiovascular disease, neurological diseases, cancer, etc. Berries have anti-inflammatory and antioxidative qualities, but scientists think that these factors don't fully explain all of the benefits. There are other mechanisms at work, and procyanidins are part of the puzzle; however, all of the researchers agree that it is not one component of the fruit that is providing protection against diseases, but many mechanisms in the whole food working synergistically. Dr. Crozier added that this is part of the reason that pills are increasingly getting bad press. The consensus is that future research should not be focused solely on a single mechanism (i.e. ellagic acid) but on the whole package of nutrients and biochemicals.

The scientific research presented at the symposium was more sophisticated than in previous years. Researchers observed that the scientific community is requiring more rigor and human studies. This trend is not exclusive to scientists; twenty years ago, acceptable consumer messages were limited to general messages that focused on foods that tasted good and were good for you,

but today, consumers are also demanding more information and more specific evidence. Health is the lens through which people are viewing the food industry, and food categories are competing with each other for their share of stomach space.

Previously, much research centered on identifying the unique attributes of one berry compared to another berry. This trend has shifted. While the mechanisms and biochemistry vary considerably and sometimes significantly from different types of berries, there is general agreement that all berries are healthy and share similar effects on health, wellness, and protection against many diseases. The biggest differentiators in the category are taste and seasonality. Part of the key message for raspberries is to communicate that all berries are good for you and should be consumed at least 3 to 5 times a week, including raspberries. Dehydrated and frozen raspberries preserve nutrients at their peak ripeness and are in season all year long.

Current and Future Raspberry Research

Although all berries share protective and preventive qualities, research specific to raspberries is critical to add to the body of science and create news opportunities for the red raspberry industry. Communications efforts need to extend to influencers such as health care professionals, and specifically to dietitians who can help consumers change their dietary behaviors.

The research underway by Dr. Crozier on colonic health may reveal that there is a significant connection between the health of the colon and other diseases, including cardiovascular disease. Dr. Rao's research is analyzing many different biomarkers, and preliminary data suggests important anti-inflammatory properties. Dr. Joseph's research adds raspberries as beneficial to brain health.

Roundtable Recommendations

1. To encourage additional research, provide frozen raspberries and/or dehydrated powder to research institutions.
2. To zero in on specific mechanisms, more affordable in vitro studies could be added to existing studies for \$8,000 to \$20,000 each. Resulting findings could establish an important basis and recommendations for more specific future human studies.
3. Post-docs scramble for research funds and product for testing hypotheses. Identify and contact universities with active nutrition research programs. Through competitive RFP process, provide minimal funding and/or product to post-doc students to pursue nutrition research using raspberries.
4. Stress frozen raspberries as an out-of-season alternative to fresh. Recognize the lack of difference between nutritional benefits from fresh versus frozen in marketing communications.
5. Identify existing or new clinical trials. Provide funding to include raspberries.
6. Use National Berry Crop Initiative (NCBI) to launch an Institute for Berry Research, focusing on increasing all berry consumption (3-4 times per week) as part of 5-a-day program.