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Sweetcorn, but not as you know it

Scientists in Queensland are developing purple sweetcorn varieties with the horticulture industry to help growers respond to increasingly health-conscious consumers.

Being delivered by the University of Queensland, and jointly funded by the grower-owned research and development company, Hort Innovation, the new varieties are being developed through natural breeding programs.

Head researcher Tim O'Hare said his team were focussed on developing sweetcorn with high levels of specific phytonutrients for human health.

"Not only is purple corn fun, the actual pigments in the varieties we are developing are phytonutrients and they have different health benefits to that of a traditional yellow corn," he said.

"The anthocyanins have been shown to be linked to cardio-vascular health and by that we mean lowering blood pressure or reducing atherosclerosis, reducing the chance of having a heart attack."

While the researchers find the taste of the purple corn almost identical to that of traditional varieties, they are in the process of asking the experts.

Consumer and professional 'taste testing' panels are assessing the flavour, smell and texture of the varieties, to help the scientists confirm that any alteration does not harm the flavour and quality of the products, and how these new types compare to traditional sweetcorn.

Hort Innovation chief executive John Lloyd said Australia is fortunate to have plenty of access to home-grown, healthy produce.

"Everyone loves Australian sweetcorn. It is extremely healthy and second to none with consistent quality making it sought-after both here and overseas," he said.

"What this project aims to do is build on that success, and offer growers more varieties to help diversify their product range and respond to the rising uber-health-conscious-consumer pocket of the market."

The new corn varieties are being investigated as part of the \$10M Naturally Nutritious project, using Hort Innovation's Health, Nutrition and Food Safety Fund.

This Fund aims to help equip Australian horticulture for the future ahead by facilitating collaborative cross-industry investments focused on longer-term, complex and traditionally underinvested areas of research.

This work is being delivered as part of the five-year Naturally Nutritious program. The aim of Naturally Nutritious, is to provide initial research into the development of innovative, appealing products that are nutrient-dense, can be differentiated in the marketplace, and are visually attractive and flavoursome.

The Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, University of Queensland, is supported by the QLD Government.

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