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New high folate strawberry a sweet find

Scientists have discovered an 'alpha strawberry' that is very sweet in flavour and has folate levels that may be up to three times higher than standard strawberries.

Folate is an important B-group vitamin which is critical for a range of biological functions in adults and children, including the production of DNA and other genetic material. It is also essential for the healthy development of the foetus in early pregnancy and can help to prevent neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

The strawberry research is funded as part of a [\\$10M Hort Innovation program](#) aimed at developing naturally nutrient-dense food, and delivered and co-funded by the [Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation \(QAAFI\)](#), University of Queensland which is supported by the QLD Government.

Hort Innovation chief executive John Lloyd said while the strawberry is yet to undergo taste testing through consumer panels to see if it is as good as conventional breeds, the finding is exciting.

"This is essentially an 'alpha strawberry'. It contains way more folate than we would expect to see in a standard strawberry," he said.

Mr Lloyd said the variety was developed to help growers meet consumer demand.

"Consumers are becoming more health conscious and are looking for the maximum amount of nutrients in their food," he said.

"Conversely, [research](#) has also shown that four out of five Australian adults are not getting the recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables a day to get the nutrients they need.

"This new strawberry variety could help growers continue to tap into that health-conscious market through a novel offering."

QAAFI lead researcher, Dr Tim O'Hare said his team had identified a number of high folate strawberries so far in the Naturally Nutritious project, but this yet-to-be-named variety appears to be particularly high.

"High folate is generally found in dark green leafy vegetables, so having this folate dense strawberry variety is really novel," Dr O'Hare said.

"If people ate a 250g punnet of these high folate strawberries, it would give them their recommended daily intake of folate."

Dr O'Hare said the new strawberry was discovered by analysing the unknown biochemical properties of various strawberry lines.

"The next step will be to see how well the folate in this strawberry is absorbed by the body and also how well it grows in a production setting and, most importantly, to ensure that consumers like its taste."

Strawberries are grown in all states of Australia by an estimated 500 growers concentrated in the Sunshine Coast area of Queensland, the Yarra Valley and the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Wanneroo and Albany in WA, the Adelaide Hills in SA and Launceston in Tasmania.

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