

The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC) has announced it will be working with two renowned international scientists to investigate the effects of blueberries on metabolic health.

The berry from the fogs of New Jersey is already known worldwide for its antioxidant properties which has boosted commercial success significantly, but as volumes rise the industry is looking for new benefits.



Photo: Harvard School of Public Health

More than 100 health research manuscripts relating to blueberries and bilberries were published last year, but the USHBC wants to take health claim credibility to the next level.

"We want to be the trusted fruit, the fruit that we can rely on that has good science, so we're careful in the claims we make and the things we say," USHBC research committee chairman Dave Brazelton told attendees at the International Blueberry Organization (IBO) Summit in Santiago de Chile on Tuesday.

"Because we do the research doesn't mean we have the effect; we have to do the hard work, and when we believe we the crop has this health effect, we want to explore it.

"Now we approach centers of academic excellence that are highly respected, and we're focusing on and emphasizing clinical research with human populations; much more expensive than animal work but it's really where the public is going. They are getting more and more sophisticated on this."

To "walk the walk", the council spent US\$50,000 developing a fake blueberry that could be used as a placebo in trials, and just over a year ago began negotiations to start a study with Dr. Aedin Cassidy from the University of East Anglia in the U.K. and Dr. Eric Rimm from the Harvard School of Public Health in the U.S.

"What do we want to do? We want to be the first fruit or vegetable to be associated with improving metabolic syndrome. When the public talks about metabolic syndrome, we want them to talk about blueberries. We want to do the work to see if that in fact is going to be happening."

Brazelton said the contract was signed within the last month, with the researchers set to study the effects of blueberry consumption on insulin resistance and vascular health over

three years.

"We're literally launching this now, it's large. The clinical trial will be 144 subjects. We have to feed over a long time.

"It's thousands of pounds of blueberries freeze dried, delivered in little packets so they're stable. We have to substantiate the bioactivity in this material - we have to come up with a way to feed this every day, and we have to come up with a placebo that does the same thing.

"It's very complicated work - we use dried blueberries so we can stabilize the dosage, and we do that and we do a freeze dry technique and then we seal it in nitrogen containers."

The USHBC contributed US\$1 million for the study, with additional funding from the Canadian and Chilean industries.

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