

Wild Blueberry Health Research Builds Momentum at Annual Summit

PORTLAND, Maine (August 20, 2009) — Antioxidant-rich Wild Blueberries were the sole focus of discussion at the recent Wild Blueberry Health Research Summit in Bar Harbor, Maine. An annual meeting of leading scientists studying Wild Blueberries for their disease fighting potential, the Health Research Summit continues to serve as the catalyst for discoveries about the beneficial effects of blueberry-enhanced diets on fighting oxidative stress and inflammation. Wild Blueberry research has been led by a core group known as the Bar Harbor Group. Scientists from the U.S. and Canada participate in an annual Wild Blueberry Health Research Summit to share current findings and advance collaborations into new areas.

Summit participants including James Joseph, Ph.D. and Barbara Shukitt-Hale, Ph.D. from the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University and Don Ingram, Ph.D., from Louisiana State University's Pennington Biomedical Research Center and formerly with the National Institute on Aging, recently collaborated on an important study in the area of cardiovascular health demonstrating that a blueberry-enriched diet protects the heart muscle from damage in animal models. (PLoS One, 2009 June 18; 4(6):e5954)

"We've seen a positive effect of blueberries on brain function and are encouraged by this new research that shows a positive link to heart health," said Dr. Joseph. "We're finding that what's good for the brain is also good for the heart," said Dr. Ingram. "In this study blueberries appear to act as both an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent providing a protective effect against cardiovascular damage," continued Ingram."

Others are involved in research related to metabolic syndrome, a combination of medical disorders including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, abdominal obesity, and impaired glucose tolerance responsible for increased risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Working with Wild Blueberry fruit compounds known as anthocyanins, Mary Ann Lila, Ph.D., from North Carolina State University, Plants for Human Health Institute led a team of researchers that demonstrated that blueberry phytochemicals helped alleviate hyperglycemia in rodent models, a condition associated with diabetes and metabolic syndrome. (Phytomedicine, 2009 May; 16(5): 406-15)

"Anthocyanins, the natural plant compounds that give Wild Blueberries their deep blue color, may have anti-diabetic activity," said Dr. Lila. "With metabolic syndrome and diabetes on the rise, gaining a better understanding of how a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables may forestall some of these conditions is critical."

According to Susan Davis, MS, RD, Wild Blueberry Health Research Summit facilitator and Nutrition Advisor to the Wild Blueberry Association of North America, excitement is building around clinical trials. "We have seen success in pilot studies exploring the effects of Wild Blueberry consumption on vision, cardiovascular health, and cognitive impairment," said Davis. "Researchers want to build on pilot study results that are showing a positive effect in study subjects, while simultaneously advancing in vitro and in vivo work examining the actual bioactive compounds in the berries."

SOURCE: Wild Blueberry Association of North America

CONTACT: Sue Till, SWARDLICK MARKETING GROUP, (207) 775-4100