

MEDIA RELEASE

26 April 2023



MUCH MORE TO MUSHROOMS THAN TASTE

Initial research undertaken by Nutrition Research Australia (NRAUS) in partnership with the Australian Mushroom Growers' Association (AMGA) reveals the Australian food industry has a lot more to learn about the health benefits of the mighty mushroom – beyond the known taste and culinary attributes.

The research, part of the larger 'Educating the food industry about Australian Mushrooms' project that has been funded by Hort Innovation using mushroom research and development levy and contributions from the Australian Government, has identified an opportunity to promote the vast nutritional benefits of mushrooms in the nationally accredited commercial cookery curriculum.

NRAUS chief executive officer, Dr Flavia Fayet-Moore, explains that mushrooms are part of the fungi kingdom boasting a unique set of nutritional properties found across different food groups, including vegetables, grains, nuts and meats, as well as three unique bioactive compounds not commonly found in animals or plants.

"Mushrooms provide essential vitamins and minerals such as B vitamin and selenium, and are a natural non-animal source of vitamin D," Dr Fayet-Moore said. "With one in four Australian adults having Vitamin D deficiency, this provides a great opportunity for the institutional sector, such as hospitals and aged care facilities, to tap into a 'food as medicine' approach to mushroom cooking and consumption.

"Mushrooms and fungi more broadly are not recognised as a food group within the nationally accredited commercial cookery curriculum. There is an opportunity to provide further education about the qualities of the unique fungi kingdom and its ability to support the many diverse dietary requirements of Australians – including the growing flexitarian, vegetarian, vegan, dairy free and gluten free needs."

Qualitative in-depth interviews with 12 key opinion leaders in the food industry and quantitative research conducted with 654 food industry professionals revealed there is a common misconception with non-health industry professionals that mushrooms are a 'meat protein equivalent'.

"Mushrooms have a unique umami taste; which is that delicious savoury taste profile, imparted by glutamates, making them a great culinary replacement for meat," Dr Fayet-Moore said. "From a nutritional perspective, unlike meat, mushrooms contain minimal protein, but they also contain no saturated fat. With their combined umami and nutritional profile, mushrooms can help to reduce the sodium and saturated fat content of meals when replaced for meat."

Led by AMGA in partnership with NRAUS and involving food industry expert and chef, Adam Moore, the 'Educating the food industry about Australian Mushrooms' project is using mushrooms to tackle some of the nation's biggest nutrition challenges.

The project aims to educate the food industry about the unique nutritional benefits of Australian-grown white and Swiss brown mushrooms. These everyday mushroom varieties provide a unique combination of nutrients that can assist food service providers, in particular catering institutions, achieve their plant-forward menu goals, while reducing fat and sodium, and increasing the nutritional content of menu items – in a cost-effective way.

"We have received great insights from one-on-one interviews with industry professionals and can clearly see that mushrooms can offer significant nutritional and culinary benefits, particularly for the institutional catering sector," Dr Fayet-Moore said.

"Our next step in the project is menu interventions, showcasing how adding Australian mushrooms to menus can be a cost-effective way to vastly improve the nutritional profile and palatability of menus."

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Engaging key players in the food industry, including hospitals, aged care, quick service restaurants and food manufacturers, and identifying opportunities for Australian mushrooms to be included in menus, the program aims to improve health outcomes on a large scale.

Food industry professionals can express interest in participating in the project by enquiring on the AMGA website: <https://australianmushroomgrowers.com.au/contact-us/>.

ABOUT HORT INNOVATION

Hort Innovation is a not-for-profit, grower-owned company that delivers more than \$120 million in research, development and marketing activities on behalf of Australian horticulture each year.

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