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## RESEARCHERS REPORT ON NEW BRAIN, HEART AND VISION HEALTH STUDIES AT ANNUAL WILD BLUEBERRY HEALTH RESEARCH SUMMIT

***The 15<sup>th</sup> annual summit offers new evidence that eating blueberries may help protect against a wide range of chronic diseases and age-related illness.***

**Portland, Maine** – Leading researchers from the United States, Europe and Canada gathered recently in Bar Harbor, Maine, to collaborate and share their latest findings on the potential health benefits of Wild Blueberries.

2012 marks the fifteenth year that members of “The Bar Harbor Group” have convened the Wild Blueberry Health Research Summit. Focused on emerging blueberry health research, the summit brings together experts in a wide number of fields, including brain health, cardiovascular disease, cancer prevention, diabetes, vision health and metabolic syndrome.

“Over the past 15 years, the scope of Wild Blueberry health research has broadened dramatically,” said David Bell, executive director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine. “This year alone, well over 100 new studies, in a wide range of areas, will be published on the blueberry’s potential benefits to human health.”

There has also been an increase in the number of human clinical trials being discussed at the summit. “Fifteen years ago, much of the research was conducted in vitro or using laboratory animals,” noted Susan Davis, MS, RD, nutrition advisor for the Wild Blueberry Association of North America. “Today, we are seeing very exciting results from researchers who are looking at the impacts of adding Wild Blueberries to the human diet.”

Among the studies discussed at this year’s summit are several focused on brain function, vision health and metabolic syndrome, a cluster of risk factors associated with diabetes and heart disease.

Highlights of these studies include:

### **Slowing Cognitive Decline and Improving Memory and Motor Function in the Elderly**

- Dr. Robert Krikorian of the University of Cincinnati's Cognitive Aging Program has been investigating the effects of blueberry supplementation on memory and other age-related conditions in older adults. Early studies demonstrated improved cognitive function in elderly subjects who consumed Wild Blueberry juice.

Current trials are investigating the effect of blueberry supplementation on memory, metabolic function, inflammation and brain function in elderly subjects with normal memory decline as well as those with Mild Cognitive Impairment, a risk factor for dementia.

- Dr. Mary Ann Lila, director of the Plants for Human Health Institute at North Carolina State University, reported on an ongoing study examining the effect of Wild Blueberry consumption on cognition, body composition and inflammatory and oxidative stress markers in older individuals with mild cognitive decline. The study, led by Carol Cheatham of the University of North Carolina's Nutrition Research Institute, comes out of UNC's USDA program on Individualized Nutrition.
- Dr. Barbara Shukitt-Hale from the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University, who previously demonstrated that a blueberry-enriched diet improves memory and motor function in laboratory animals, is now beginning a clinical trial. She will study similar parameters in people who are middle to old age and consume a diet supplemented with blueberries.

### **Improving Brain Function at Any Age**

- Researchers at England's University of Reading are investigating the benefits of blueberries in both elderly and younger individuals. Dr. Georgina Dodd, Dr. Laurie Butler and Professor Jeremy Spencer found that blueberry supplementation can acutely improve cognitive function and cerebral blood flow in healthy young and elderly subjects.
- In another University of Reading trial, Adrian Whyte, Dr. Claire Williams and Dr. Graham Schafer are looking at the impacts of blueberries on the cognitive function of children aged 7-9, the first time this age group has been studied.

### **Reducing the Risk Factors for Diabetes and Heart Disease**

- Dr. William Cefalu of the Pennington Biomedical Research Center of the Louisiana State University System is now building on his group's prior research that showed the positive effect of a blueberry diet on insulin sensitivity, a key factor in contributing to the development of type 2 diabetes.

He is currently conducting clinical trials focusing on the effect of blueberries on cardiovascular risk factors that are associated with metabolic syndrome or pre-diabetes. Specifically, his team is evaluating whether supplementing a diet with blueberries will reduce blood pressure, improve lipid levels and improve blood vessel function. Although analysis is currently ongoing, preliminary results appear to be very encouraging.

- Dr. Ana Rodriguez-Mateos and Professor Jeremy Spencer, from the University of Reading, conducted research indicating that Wild Blueberries can improve cardiovascular function in healthy young men. The findings suggest that the polyphenols or bioactive plant compounds in Wild Blueberries may help prevent the progression of cardiovascular disease and atherosclerosis.

## **Preserving Eye Health**

- Dr. Wilhelmina Kalt, food chemist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, reported on the work of Dr. François Tremblay from the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dr. Tremblay's team is studying how a blueberry-enriched diet may prevent retinal degeneration, which can result in serious eye disorders and diseases. These animal studies provide strong preliminary evidence that Wild Blueberries could have a protective effect in some retinal conditions; a clinical trial is currently ongoing to see if a Wild Blueberry-enriched diet could be beneficial in preventing retinal degeneration in humans.

## **Why Wild Blueberries are the Superfruit Leaders**

- Dr. Rui Hai Liu from the Department of Food Science at Cornell University reported on the results of a new analytical tool measuring the relative flavonoid content in various fruits and vegetables. Flavonoids are plant compounds such as anthocyanin, a potent antioxidant found in the deep-blue pigment of blueberries. Wild blueberries have a dramatically higher concentration of flavonoids than most other fruits and vegetables.

“This rich ‘phytochemical cocktail’ may explain why scientists continue to see such promising results from blueberry health research,” said Dr. Wilhelmina Kalt. “The best news is that this potent health ally is so easily available in the supermarket. Everyone can – and should – add this amazing superfruit to their daily diet.”

## **Harnessing the “Power of Blue”**

The simple takeaway from these and other ongoing studies is that Wild Blueberries are a smart addition to a healthy diet. They are good for the brain, good for the heart, good for the eyes and readily available year-round in the frozen fruit section of the supermarket.

Now scientists are looking for more ways to bring the antioxidant “power of blue” to consumers. During the summit, NC State’s Dr. Mary Ann Lila described her research

on the development of low-caloric, shelf-stable functional foods that combine the bioactive compounds from Wild Blueberries with health-promoting proteins to create a novel and highly versatile food ingredient.

While researchers work to understand how the antioxidants and other compounds in Wild Blueberries function in the body to promote human health and prevent disease, one thing is certain: more good news will be forthcoming.

Currently, there is a comprehensive blueberry research library with hundreds of health-related studies on a wide variety of topics that is updated regularly by Dr. Ronald Prior. The Wild Blueberry Association Research Library™ is available at [www.wildblueberries.com/researchdatabase](http://www.wildblueberries.com/researchdatabase).

**About the Wild Blueberry Association of North America ([www.wildblueberries.com](http://www.wildblueberries.com))**

The Wild Blueberry Association of North America is a trade association of growers and processors of Wild Blueberries from Maine and Canada, dedicated to bringing the Wild Blueberry health story and unique Wild Advantages to consumers and the trade worldwide.

For news, recipes, and related health information about Wild Blueberries, visit [www.wildblueberries.com](http://www.wildblueberries.com) and [www.wildblueberryhealthblog.com](http://www.wildblueberryhealthblog.com), and follow [www.facebook.com/wildblueberries](http://www.facebook.com/wildblueberries) and [www.twitter.com/WildBBerries4U](http://www.twitter.com/WildBBerries4U).

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