

\$4 MILLION INVESTMENT IN NEW HEALTH INITIATIVE

A NEW NATIONAL research initiative designed to educate and encourage children to eat more vegetables aims to increase their daily intake of fresh produce by more than half a serving per day.

Supported by Hort Innovation through \$4 million in R&D funding, the 5-year VegKIT project will deliver a free toolkit for educators, health professionals and research agencies that includes information on dietary guidelines, and evidence-based knowledge of flavour exposure and food preference.

Delivered through a collaboration between CSIRO, Flinders University and Nutrition Australia, the project will investigate the influencers behind kids' exposure to, and acceptance of vegetables through behavioural and produce innovations.

Hort Innovation Research & Development Manager, Jemma O'Hanlon, said the project would help to establish a national framework promoting the importance of vegetable consumption for improved health outcomes in children.

"The VegKIT project will bring together a number of research and educational resources with the ultimate aim of increasing a child's vegetable intake by more than half a serving per day.

"In that view, there is potential to increase demand for fresh produce by 19,000 tonnes per year if every child (aged 2-6 years) increases consumption by greater than half a serving - demonstrating a great return on research investment.

"This project will also disseminate knowledge and increase advocacy and leadership using a whole of system approach, with the target users of the outcomes being vegetable levy payers, health professionals, government agencies, early learning educators, researchers and representative bodies."

CSIRO Project Lead Dr David Cox said that vegetables were important for long term good eating habits and overall health, but surveys suggest 95 per cent of Australian children weren't eating enough.

"Unfortunately, it's not as simple as putting more vegetables on the plate," he said.

The five-year project will deliver six key activities:

1. Best practice guidelines to increase vegetable intake
2. A national online register of initiatives to increase vegetable intake
3. Further development and coordination of the Vegetable Intake Strategic Alliance (VISA)
4. Updated dietary advice for maternal, infant and early years, using evidence-based knowledge of flavour exposure and food preference development, to facilitate children's vegetable intake
5. Initiatives in the community (for long day-care settings) to increase children's vegetable intake
6. Supply chain initiatives (industry innovations and early primary school settings) to increase children's vegetable intake.

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"This project is about getting children to enjoy vegetables, using knowledge about the development of taste preferences, and then using this information to find practical ways of addressing the problem. Part of this work will include revising dietary advice to mothers, working with childcare providers to improve children's experiences of vegetables and working with industry to make vegetable products more appetising for children."

- David Cox
