

MEDIA RELEASE

VEGKIT TAKES THE PRESSURE OFF PARENTS

Parents know too well the struggle to get their kids to eat more veggies. It can be frustrating and often seems impossible. In fact, only 6% of children 2-17 years are consuming the recommended amount of vegetables each day. But parents are not alone in their efforts to get more veggies into kid's diets. Australia's VegKIT project partners CSIRO Australia's National Science Agency, Flinders University and Nutrition Australia are working to help parents by supporting key settings (such as day care centres and schools) to increase veggie intake.

VegKIT has launched a collection of new resources that provide practical strategies, insights and guidance. The resources aim to inspire educators and carers, as well as policy-makers, food industry and vegetable growers.

"We have parents coming to us telling us of the struggles of mealtimes at home. But the fact is, a lot of the children in our care are here for 6-10 hours a day. It shouldn't be on parents alone." **Julie Lemmon, Healthy Eating Leader, and Centre Cook at Clarendon Street Childcare Centre in Melbourne said.**

Currently, 2 million children (49%) aged 0-12 years attend formal care and majority of their daily meals and snacks are provided here. In fact, 60% of children are eating their meals outside of the home. Care environments play a pivotal role in a child's acceptance of vegetables.

CSIRO's Dr Gilly Hendrie explains, "In this project we wanted to focus on places where children spend their time outside of their homes; on people who directly impact children's vegetable intake through food provision; and on education environments."

VegKIT research has found food manufacturers, policy makers and growers can also positively influence kids' diets.

Olivia Bates, CEO Nourishing Bubs and Paediatric Dietitian agrees, "The food industry certainly has a role to play in increasing children's vegetable consumption. As an industry, we have a direct link to children and their parents. A project like VegKIT provide us with evidence-based insight into the types and composition of products that children are likely to not only accept, but like to eat. Food industry can absolutely help children love their veggies by focusing at least part of their R&D efforts on developing products which hero vegetables."

CEO of Nutrition Australia Vic Division, Lucinda Hancock explained "At the moment there is little guidance on what strategies are likely to be successful. VegKIT's aim is to give those people who work with children in eating environments sustainable solutions and strategies. Kid's low vegetable intake is everyone's issue, not just parents."

And the benefits of increasing veggie intake are widespread. Not only does establishing a love of vegetables help children carry that love along into later life, but ensuring each child is eating an additional ½ cup of veggies per day provides obvious benefits for vegetable growers, and a flow-on effect for the economy.

“We know as growers we are contributing to the health and well-being of Australian kids. In return, there is potential to raise 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. That’s worthy of our efforts”, said **Catherine Velisha, CEO of Velisha Farms.**

The new VegKIT user guides are the first in a series of ongoing project deliverables for this \$4 million, five-year national project funded by Hort Innovation and led by CSIRO, Flinders University and Nutrition Australia. VegKIT aims to increase Aussie kids intake by at least an extra 1/2 serve of vegetables every day.

Research & Development Manager for Hort Innovation, Jemma O’Hanlon said, “To shift consumption, we will need everyone to play their part over a number of years. The new VegKIT resources provide the guidance and support that critical settings need. The project partners are genuinely excited about what we collectively can achieve with the VegKIT project. If we can get kids eating just an extra ½ serve of veggies every day we’ll have an enormous impact on the health of this nation.”

The new VEGKIT guides are all available free-of-charge and can be downloaded on the refreshed VegKIT website. Stay up to date www.vegkit.com.au

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Media Contact

Michelle Lausen

Nutrition Australia

mlausen@nutritionaustralia.org

0428 494 007

Project Spokespeople

Lucinda Hancock

Chief Executive Officer

Nutrition Australia Vic Division

lhancock@nutritionaustralia.org

03 8341 5810

0403 042 094

Jemma O'Hanlon

Research & Development Manager

Accredited Practising Dietitian

Hort Innovation

jemma.hanlon@horticulture.com.au

Gilly Hendrie

Research Scientist

Public Health & Wellbeing

CSIRO

gilly.hendrie@csiro.au

David Cox

Principal Research Scientist & Team Leader
of Behavioural Sciences

CSIRO

david.cox@csiro.au



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Gilly Hendrie, CSIRO



Olivia Bates, Nourishing Bubs



Catherine Velisha, Velisha Farms



Jemma O'Hanlon, Hort Innovation

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