

Blackcurrants could contain key to ageing gracefully

Kim Nutbrown 04:45, Apr 10 2019



SUPPLIED

David Eder and Jim Grierson are the managing directors of Viality New Zealand, which has developed a supplement to allow people to tap into the benefits of blackcurrants.

Move over blueberries, there's a new super food on the block – although it turns out it has been here a while.

The humble blackcurrant graces the backyards of many Kiwi homes and has long been harvested for its vitamin C properties, but now another benefit has been uncovered by researchers at Auckland University.

Associate Professor Dr Jian Guan, of the university's Centre for Brain Research, has discovered blackcurrants contain a key brain nutrient.

Guan found blackcurrants contain high levels of cyclic Glycine-Proline (cGP), which normalises the insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1) hormone and is important for overall body health and wellness.

"It is a very exciting finding because it is something completely natural that can support your body and mind to stay healthy as you age."

Guan said the increase in cGP is not "anti-ageing", but helps provide a better quality of life for people as they age.

"It's unique to see a response like this in a natural product."

North Canterbury's David Eder, a second-generation blackcurrant grower, and agronomist Jim Grierson worked with Guan to establish a natural blackcurrant supplement called Brain Shield, which can be taken daily.

The pair set up Vitality New Zealand, which produces Brain Shield, after having worked with blackcurrants for many years.

"We had always known there was more to them. It's interesting that most gardens in New Zealand had them growing there and had done for generations and yet no-one was particularly sure why," Eder said.

He said blackcurrants had taken "a bit of a knock" over the Ribena scandal that erupted in 2004 when two college students discovered the product contained low amounts of blackcurrant juice and no detectable traces of vitamin C.

Eder said there was also the notion that blackcurrants were an old-fashioned or "nana fruit" used only for jams and preserves.

There was no denying the significant health benefits of the blackcurrant though, he said.

Grierson said the high cGP levels were unique to New Zealand blackcurrants.

"This is a major development for the industry and we are excited about the possibilities and what this might mean for growers and New Zealand.

"New Zealand blackcurrants really are a superfruit."