

NUTRITIONAL DATA KEY TO INCREASING PULSE USAGE

Funding support from pulse growers is helping to build the strong foundation of scientific evidence needed to make health claims for marketing purposes.



Dr. Julianne Curran, Vice-President Market Innovation, Pulse Canada

The mission of increasing sales and diversifying markets for Canadian pulses takes place on many fronts. One of the most important is in the area of nutrition, educating consumers and processors about the role of pulses in a healthy diet.

“When we’re marketing in order to create demand and interest in pulses and ingredients derived from pulses, there’s one question we’re always asked,” said Dr. Julianne Curran, Pulse Canada’s Vice-President, Market Innovation. “That is, ‘what are the health and nutrition benefits of pulses?’”

As the Pulse Canada website states: Pulses are an essential part of a healthy and sustainable diet. That kind

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—Dr. Julianne Curran

of general statement is one thing, but making a specific health claim – say, eating pulses can lower blood sugar – is a whole different ballgame. To do so, extensive and highly specific data must be provided before Health Canada will allow the health claim to be made.

Once a health benefit is claimable, it becomes a powerful asset in Curran’s hands as she works with food processors to include pulses or increase pulse content in their products.

“We market evidence-based messages and we need that strong, credible evidence to support the work that we do,” Curran said. “That’s why the research funded by the grower

associations is so important, and closely linked and relevant to what we do.”

Nutrition-based marketing at the heart of 25 by 2025

Between 2014 and 2016, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada scientist Dr. Dan Ramdath – funded in part by pulse growers – built a body of evidence that supported the following claim: A serving of beans, instead of low-fibre starchy foods such as corn, rice, potatoes or macaroni, results in reduced blood sugar after a meal. While a minimum 20% improvement is needed under a health claim, in this study, blood sugar was between 32% and 65% lower with pulses than with the starches.

“Of all the research that’s been funded over the last few decades,” Curran said, “the work related to blood sugar or blood glucose has given us a strong evidence base to support our marketing messages.”

In 2019, Pulse Canada unveiled 25 by 2025 – a strategy that aims to sell 25% of the pulses being produced in Canada into new uses and markets by mid-decade. Processors are a key target. Nutritional messages, including specific health claims where approved, are vital for marketing.

Curran explains that the health benefits of peas and pea ingredients have not been studied as much as those of beans, so this will be a priority going forward. Nutritional evidence will be important in Pulse Canada’s ongoing discussions with processors.

“We have set large volume targets under 25 by 2025,” Curran said, “and the use of pulse ingredients will likely be the most direct path to get us there. We want to work closely with processors to expand processing and make sure they source Canadian. Nutritionally and functionally, we are well-aligned with where the food industry is going.”