

IMPROVING THE FOOD INDUSTRY MENU, WITH MUSHROOMS.

By Leah Bramich, AMGA

Anyone who has ever spent more than a few days in a hospital, or visited an elderly friend or relative in a care home, would most likely agree - despite the best intentions, the catering is less than inspiring. A collaboration between Nutrition Research Australia (NRAUS) and the AMGA is working hard to show the benefit of adding mushrooms to the menu, not only to improve the palatability of institutional meals, but to boost their nutritional offering as well.

One-on-one interviews highlighted the potential of mushrooms to boost menus in the institutional catering sector, with their significant nutritional and culinary benefits. The next part of the project includes menu interventions, showcasing how adding Australian mushrooms to menus can be a cost-effective way to vastly improve the nutritional profile and appeal of menus in these settings.

Initial research undertaken by Nutrition Research Australia in partnership with the Australian Mushroom Growers' Association reveals the Australian food industry has a lot more to learn about the health benefits of the mighty mushroom, with taste and culinary benefits overshadowing the vast nutritional benefits of mushrooms in the nationally accredited commercial cookery curriculum.

CEO of NRAUS, Dr. Flavia Fayet-Moore explains that mushrooms are part of the Fungi Kingdom with a unique set of nutritional properties found across different food groups, including vegetables, grains, nuts, and meats, as well as unique bioactive compounds not commonly found in animals or plants.

"Mushrooms contain three unique bioactives not commonly found in animals or plants and provide essential vitamins and minerals such as B vitamin,



selenium and are a natural non-animal source of vitamin D. With one in four Australian adults having Vitamin D deficiency, this provides a great opportunity for the institutional sector to tap into a 'Food as Medicine' approach."

"Mushrooms are not specifically recognised as a fungi group within the nationally accredited commercial cookery curriculum. There is an opportunity to provide further education about the qualities of the unique Fungi Kingdom and its ability to support many diverse dietary requirements of Australians - including the growing flexitarian, vegetarian, vegan, dairy free and gluten free needs."

The qualitative in-depth interviews with 12 Key Opinion Leaders and quantitative research conducted with

654 food industry professionals from a broad range of areas, revealed there is a common misconception with non-health industry professionals that mushrooms are a meat protein equivalent.

“Mushrooms have a unique umami and meaty taste profile, making them a great culinary replacement for meat. From a nutritional perspective, unlike meat, mushrooms contain minimal protein, but they also contain no saturated fat. With their combined umami and nutritional profile, mushrooms can help to reduce the sodium and saturated fat content of meals when replaced for meat.”

The research is part of a bigger project funded by the Australian mushroom industry to educate the food industry of the unique nutritional benefits of Australian grown white and swiss brown mushrooms. These everyday mushroom varieties provide a unique combination of nutrients that can assist food service providers, in particular catering institutions, achieve their plant-forward menu goals, while reducing fat and sodium, and increasing the nutritional content of menu items - in a cost-effective way.

The educating the food industry of the nutritional benefits of Australian Mushrooms project is a Hort Innovation Mushroom Fund strategic levy investment and is led by the Australian Mushroom Growers Association (AMGA). Together with Nutrition Research Australia (NRAUS) and food industry expert Chef Adam Moore, the project aims to tackle some of the nation's biggest nutrition problems with mighty mushrooms. Engaging key players in the food industry, including Hospitals, Aged Care, Quick Service Restaurants and Food Manufacturers and identifying opportunities for Australian mushrooms to be included in menus, the program aims to improve health outcomes on a large scale.

After consolidating the relevant nutrition research and discovering the unique benefits mushrooms provide in a culinary setting, the project has developed a number of resources, designed by Chef Adam Moore and Dr. Flavia Fayet-Moore of NRAUS. The resources provide nutritional and culinary information specifically relevant for the food industry and will be used as the 'educational tool kit' as the project shifts to the engagement phase. The kit includes educational videos, a kitchen poster, fact sheets and an educational booklet, and are housed on the Australian Mushroom Growers website, <https://australianmushroomgrowers.com.au/food-industry/>. The resources are free to download, will be communicated to the broader food



industry, and will be utilised as the project shifts to the last and most exciting phase - engaging with high quantum of influence food industry organisations.

Leah Bramich, project lead and General Manager of the AMGA explains.

“Right now, we are in preliminary talks with the Mater Hospital in Brisbane, and an aged care facility in Coffs Harbour, to collaborate with NRAUS and Chef Adam Moore for ‘mushroom menu interventions’”

“By identifying the organisation's unique nutrition challenges, and working directly with their chefs and kitchen teams to use mushrooms to solve these challenges, we are creating powerful case studies to highlight mushrooms unique culinary and nutritional benefits for the next phase, where we educate the food industry at scale, via a PR campaign and a roadshow conference program.”

Exciting opportunities

Renowned chef Luke Mangan is the executive chef of the Mater Hospital, an institution already in the food service and health care spotlight due to its revolutionary in-room on-demand dining service. This presents an exciting opportunity to highlight the unique culinary and nutritional benefits of mushrooms to the wider food service industry.

Hort Innovation
Strategic levy investment

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