Smart packaging the way of the future for fresh-cut fruit and veggies

Research into the packaging of fresh-cut fruit and vegetables is providing new insights into ways to increase the shelf-life and quality of produce.

Post-doctoral fellow Dr Matthew Wilson will discuss developments in novel packaging and preservation technologies at the Australian Research Council (ARC) Industrial Transformation Training Centre for Innovative Horticultural Products conference, which begins in Hobart today.

Dr Wilson’s research aims to identify and evaluate innovative new packaging options that offer significant supplier, retailer and consumer benefits over existing methods.

“Packaging form, appearance and functionality are key influences of consumer perceptions of fresh produce,” Dr Wilson said.

“New packaging innovations can deliver more usable and convenient fresh products to consumers, with improved quality, freshness and longer fresh shelf-life. Efficient packaging is also important for reducing waste of resources and produce.

“Passive modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) has long been used for fresh produce, however the latest developments are ‘active packaging’ that optimises ripening and controls bacterial levels, ethylene or odours.

“We are working closely with key suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables, including Woolworths, to evaluate, develop and demonstrate how new technologies can improve outcomes for their customers and suppliers.”

As part of the two-day conference there will be presentations from national leaders at the forefront of food innovation, including representatives from Woolworths, Meat and Livestock Australia and Food Innovation Australia.

The Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture’s Associate Professor Tom Ross, who leads the Centre for Innovative Horticultural Products, said the conference was an excellent opportunity to share innovation and knowledge.

“The Centre is focused on high-impact research projects that are developed in direct consultation with industry partners, to drive growth and innovation in the nation’s fresh fruit and vegetable sector,” Associate Professor Ross said.
“This impact-driven approach gets people energised. We are not just going into industry with our results, we are taking it that step further and engaging them throughout the whole process.”

Other topics to be discussed at the conference include: translating research into innovation, consumer expectations from organic food, and improving the quality of bananas in the post-harvest supply chain.

The conference program is available online.

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University of Tasmania, Communications and Media Office
Phone: 03 6226 6385 or 0418 229 864
Email: tia.comms@utas.edu.au