Agfest patrons to inform healthy research on local produce

The University of Tasmania will be using Agfest to cultivate a new project exploring the accessibility and consumption of Tasmanian-grown fresh produce.

Researchers from the Centre for Rural Health and the School of Health Sciences will be surveying the event’s Tasmanian patrons to uncover what local produce they are purchasing, and where.

The researchers will also explore barriers preventing them from eating fresh fruit and vegetables which are grown in the State.

Dr Katherine Kent, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University’s Centre for Rural Health, said her team was interested in increasing the community’s access and consumption of fresh local produce.

“Despite growing some of the best produce in some of the most fertile land in the world, many Tasmanians struggle to access healthy, locally grown food,” Dr Kent said.

“We have such a strong, vibrant food economy and it is important to maximise this for people living in Tasmania, especially because there could be many positive health outcomes.

“Figures show that up to 30 per cent of Tasmanians are affected by poor access to healthy and affordable food, and that resulting health care costs the State around $60 million per year.

“The findings will be used to inform future research projects and the development of policies around increasing fresh food consumption by Tasmanians which improve health outcomes.

“We also recognise there are additional health benefits for people consuming fresh produce in regional areas through engagement with primary producers, and the level of social connectivity which comes with that.”

The Centre for Rural Health will use Agfest as an opportunity to pilot the survey before it is rolled out further afield.
It is divided into two parts, with the first asking participants about shopping habits and barriers preventing fresh produce access.

The second integrates a questionnaire exploring what fruit and vegetables are consumed, how often, and what proportion is Tasmanian-grown.

“We needed a pilot site to ensure what we are doing is rigorous and well-received,” Ms Kent said.

“Agfest attracts a broad variety of people, and we hope to get interesting, honest and relevant responses that will guide this research.

“We will be handing out paper forms that patrons can take home, complete, and mail back to us, and beyond that, we’ll be looking to push the survey online.”

The research is the next step in a number of projects led by the team which explore food availability cost and affordability. The team also includes other lead food and nutrition researchers in Stuart Auckland and Sandra Murray from the University’s Centre for Rural Health and School of Health Sciences.

The findings from the Agfest component of the research project will feature in a future academic publication.

Katherine Kent is available for interview and photo/filming opportunities during Agfest (3-5 May) at the University of Tasmania tent, which can be found along 4th Avenue on sites 409-415.

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