



Digestive Health Programme

Principal Investigator - Professor Nicole Roy, AgResearch

Collaborating Organisations: Malaghan Institute of Medical Research, Plant & Food Research, the University of Auckland, University of Otago, Massey University, Edible Research Ltd

Research Investment: \$6.5 million over 5 years

In New Zealand's large and growing food export markets in Asia digestive health is a common and rising topic of concern. Healthy digestion is critical to physical health, and mental health and wellbeing. Approximately 30 per cent of the population has at least one of the Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (FGDs), such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), where "everything looks normal" and there is no detectable disease, but where there are actually abnormal digestive processes, such as hypersensitivity.

In phase 1, the Digestive Health research programme focused on understanding the linkages between diet, gastrointestinal symptoms and disorders, metabolism, physiology and microbial populations (the microbiome) to better predict food-health gastrointestinal relationships. This will enable the New Zealand food and beverage (F&B) industry to predict the gastrointestinal health benefits of foods and ingredients and generate validated scientific evidence of these health benefits.

"The Digestive Health programme works closely with the New Zealand food and beverage industry, including Māori agribusinesses, to ensure that their research is relevant for industry. This includes work with New Zealand industry partners to validate their approach and test food concepts. This new funding will enable the research team to continue to assist Māori and non-Māori food and beverage entities, in developing and testing products for improved gastrointestinal health outcomes," says Ms Todd.

Nicole Roy, Principal Scientist and Science Team Leader of the High-Value Nutrition Digestive Health Programme based at AgResearch says that "phase 2 of the programme will expand on the research from phase 1, and will include identifying products that have the potential to benefit digestive health and contribute to the export of high-value foods, and therefore increase export revenue."

"This research is important for consumers, in particular the so-called "Worried Well" emerging middle and upper classes in Asia. To excel at their careers and contend with advancing age, they will purchase (F&B) products that will help them to feel physically comfortable, fit and mentally sharp," she says.

There are already examples of New Zealand F&B products targeting digestive health that are establishing health messaging based on New Zealand reputable research. Two examples are products by Zespri International (green kiwifruit) and the a2 Milk Company (bovine milk).