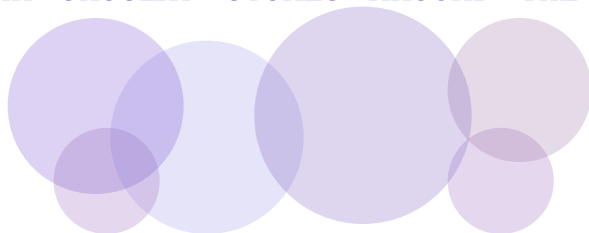


THE PURPLE TOMATO

BY AMANDA YUAN
GRAPHIC BY OLGA BATALOV

GENETICALLY ENHANCED TOMATOES HOLD A BRIGHT
FUTURE IN GROCERY STORES AROUND THE WORLD



As the demand for health beneficial super foods is on the rise, researchers in the agricultural biotechnology field are working tirelessly to make significant leeway in the production of genetically altered produce. A new age of anti-oxidant enriched tomatoes developed by researchers at the British government-sponsored John Innes Center has sparked consumer attention and has marked the dawn of the purple tomato. Researchers speculate that since these tomatoes are enriched with high levels of anthocyanins – anti-oxidants proven to eliminate harmful oxygen molecules and free radicals in the body – they may reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer.

The development of tomatoes with a boost of anthocyanin provided by snapdragons proves to be a small but promising step for genetically modified foods, but critics argue that these genetic changes are faring to be much more difficult than the industry expected. Those skeptical of this genetic experimentation fear that too much time, money, and space is being put into this “project”. Genetic enhancement often requires the introduction of two or more new genes into the original plant or the insertion of a “transcription factor” that controls the activity of the genes, like it does for the growth of purple tomatoes. Many critics consider these current

genetic engineering techniques to be too much of a hassle to continue without proper study because of the potential health risks they pose to crops. However, it is widely agreed that these sacrifices are necessary for advancement in agricultural biotechnology as well as the general benefit of our health and society as a whole.

About 282 million acres of land in 23 nations have been devoted to genetically modified crops, and with this advantage researchers have a greater opportunity to develop crops that can resist drought and thrive in poor soil. The resulting increase in produce will not only benefit farmers, but also the consumers at grocery stores buying these health-enriched foods.

Developers of the purple tomato reported that this enhanced produce may actually help reduce the recommended number of servings of fruit and vegetable consumption per day from five to one, which is an impressive feat seeing how it is often difficult to fit even two or three fruits and vegetables into our daily diet. Researchers are genetically modifying many other food staples in our daily diets - such as rice, bananas, and vegetable oil - to provide higher levels of healthful omega-3 fatty acids. Foods with increased levels of iron, zinc, and vitamin A have also been researched and experimented with, with hopes of entering production and then being stocked for sales at the nearest grocery store. This means that nutrient boosts found in expensive vitamins and other dietary supplements may soon be found in everyday foods, which in turn will make better nutrition more accessible to all consumers and will allow for more frequent consumption.

Purple pizzas, purple tomato sauce, purple ketchup, purple tomato soup, and BLPT (bacon, lettuce, and purple tomato) sandwiches could very well be integrated into health conscious cuisine in the future; so get ready for the future because it is bright – and it is purple.