New developments in Rooibos research

Rooibos, a unique South African herbal tea, is becoming more popular because of its potential health benefits, specifically as it is naturally caffeine-free and low in tannins when compared to other green and black teas. The long history of being used by local communities does, however necessary, provide important clues as to the possible health promoting activities of this unique South African herbal tea. Rooibos is a very good source of unique and beneficial bioactives such as antioxidants, different to those found in other teas, fruits and vegetables and is particularly rich in phytochemicals such as flavonoids and polyphenols, which are thought to contribute to its health benefits.

To date no clinical intervention study has evaluated the equivalent to a cup-of-tea of fermented and green Rooibos tea as a nutraceutical. This study will also investigate endogenous metabolites and its link to cardiovascular risk; and how a dietary intervention with fermented and green Rooibos can change the outcome of disease risk.

The current study will further investigate the modulation of certain factors associated with the development of heart disease, i.e. oxidative stress and antioxidant status, inflammatory responses, blood pressure, stress responses and genetic variability in a cohort of adults.

For South Africa, it will be a very appropriate and “first-of-its-kind” clinical study involving the use of a proudly South African product and will be conducted by a leading group of South African scientists.

A tribute to Ernest du Toit

On 31 December 2019, the Rooibos industry was shaken by the passing of Ernest du Toit. Ernest served on the SA Rooibos Council’s board as the marketing director since 2015 to 2018 and shared his skills in marketing, sales and strategy development with vigour.

He was the CEO of Annique Health and Beauty since 2008 and firmly believed in the opportunities of the direct selling industry as way for people to lift their self-limiting beliefs and to provide a vehicle for thousands of people to achieve their dreams. Ernest also played a fundamental role in the negotiation processes leading to the signing of an Access and Benefit-sharing (ABS) agreement between the Rooibos Industry and the Khoi-Khoi and San.

Hamba kahle Ernest, we thank you for your unprecedented legacy.
Khoi and San to share in benefits of Rooibos

**Nagoya Protocol**
As a signatory to the Nagoya Protocol, South Africa requires industries that trade in indigenous biological resources, such as Rooibos, to share benefits with traditional knowledge holders in a fair and equitable way.

**Recognition**
When the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) first recognised the Khoi-Khoi and San people as the rightful traditional knowledge holders of Rooibos, a Working Group which included the SA Rooibos Council (SARC) and the Khoi-Khoi and San, represented by the National Khoi-San Council (NKC) and the South African San Council (SASC), was formed to negotiate on benefit sharing in accordance with the environmental legislation of South Africa.

**Negotiations**
After four years of negotiations, an agreement was reached, which included a benefit-sharing levy at 1.5% of the farm gate price of Rooibos, effective from 1 January 2019.

How the benefit-sharing levy will be used, will be independently decided by the NKC and SASC, but it is primarily intended for the upliftment of the Khoi-Khoi and San communities.

**Cederberg region**
Rooibos really only grows in the Cederberg region of the Western Cape. Although farmers have tried to grow it elsewhere in the world, the climate, soil and conditions just aren’t conducive, … and we’d like to think that nature intended it that way.

**Rooibos seed**
Collecting Rooibos seeds can be tricky as they spontaneously burst out when ripe. Rooibos seeds used to be collected from anthills as ants harvested the seeds. Now farmers collect the seeds by sifting the sand around the plants.

**Rooibos grades**
The ‘superior long cut’ is ideal for blending with pieces of fruit and flowers, while an ‘extra fine cut’ lends itself for use in confectionary and espressos. A ‘super cut’ is mostly used in a standard Rooibos tea bag, which makes the tea softer in taste and helps to release more active substances in the cup.

**Uniqueness of agreement**
It’s the first agreement of its kind in the world as this agreement ensures that all volumes of Rooibos sold will be levied through one process.

The accord is regarded as an important milestone in the history of global governance for the preservation of genetic biodiversity, associated traditional knowledge and poverty relief.

**Did you know?**

Visit the SA Rooibos Council’s website for more information: www.sarooibos.co.za