



TOMATO+HEALTH NEWSWIRE
REPORT 3 - 15,10,07

Humble tomato defends attack

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Tomato is the second largest agricultural sector in Europe and a major food sector worldwide for both fresh, and more importantly, processing markets. A new research project LYCOCARD, publicly funded by the EU, will run for 5 years at a cost of 5.2M€ to determine the precise health benefits of lycopene, and other potent nutrients found in tomato and processed tomato products, in preventing or treating cardiovascular diseases.

In January of this year, a new scientific reference book *"Tomatoes, Lycopene & Human Health"* was published with a chapter that looks at previous and current scientific findings in this area. Dr. Tiina Rissanen, working in the Research Institute of Public Health at the University of Kuopio, Finland, found concrete results in the multi-centre European Study of Antioxidants, Myocardial Infarction and Cancer of the Breast (EURAMIC). This project examined the association between the antioxidant concentration in fat tissue and the incidence of myocardial infarction (heart attack) in 10 countries.

"The study found that men with the highest concentrations of lycopene in their adipose tissue had a 48% reduction in the risk of developing cardiovascular disease when compared with those men with the lowest lycopene levels. In a part of the same EURAMIC study from the Malaga centre, there was a 60% lower risk of myocardial infarction (heart attack)."

While these results seem very positive, a number of other studies have been less conclusive and so the urgent need for well-funded and intensive research is essential. Hence, LYCOCARD will hopefully establish the precise nature and reasons why the once unnoticed and humble tomato may be transformed in the hearts and minds of the public into a superfood.