



Nut Ed
by email

Are Superfoods Really that Super?

Kale, acai, avocado, quinoa, goji berries, kimchi... What do all these foods have in common? They have all been labelled by the media at some point in time as a “superfood”. The labelling of products as superfoods has been a major marketing tactic by the food and wellness industry for decades. So, where did all this superfood hype start? Interestingly, it started with an Aussie favourite... the banana! The United Fruit Company used the term in a marketing campaign around the time of World War I to promote its major importation of bananas. They claimed bananas provided relief for celiac disease (gluten had not been discovered as the problem yet) and they became a staple in children’s diets.

Superfood products are often marketed with extreme claims promoting health enhancing, age-defying benefits and as a means for a fast-tracked approach to health. While most of these superfoods are nutritious when eaten as part of a balanced diet, there is no ‘one food fixes all’ approach! In addition, these products are often expensive and provide the same nutritional benefits as similar, more affordable fruits, vegetables, or grains. No one food alone can prevent disease or slow down ageing - we need a variety of foods to give us all the nutrients necessary for good health. So forget the superfoods and aim for a ‘super diet’ instead - getting five serves of vegetables in a range of colours each day, as well as a healthy intake of fruits, proteins and complex carbohydrates. This is the best road to good health and prevention of chronic diseases. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

Looking at the bigger picture, the branding of these crops as “superfoods” has turned them into global commodities which are in high demand. The production of many of these exotic crops, such as acai and quinoa, is now dominated by large corporations which favour short-term gains over long-term sustainability. This hard and fast, short-term production of foods in lower income countries, such as Brazil and Peru, has negative impacts on the long-term sustainability of these farms and communities. Examples are avocados, acai and cacao, all of which have had severe environmental impacts in their native regions due to unsustainable production levels. Beyond the environmental impacts, domination by these large corporations erodes local food systems, out-pricing native ingredients that were once healthy staples for local communities, leaving them unable to afford these hiked up prices due to global demand.



Image: Quinoa farm in the Bolivian Altiplano

If you would like more information about how to see through food marketing claims to ensure you are making informed choices, check out our blog [“Fact or Fiction? How to make sense of nutrition information online”](#).