

Old apple varieties could provide important health benefits

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Researchers from Cranfield University and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew have constructed the metabolic fingerprint of British heritage apples and mainstream commercial varieties highlighting the extraordinary phytochemical content of some very old apples with dates of introduction spanning several centuries.

The results have revealed that key metabolites with enhanced health promoting properties have gradually been bred out from modern cultivars with the focus instead being on sweetness, crispy texture and appearance.

Sourced from the National Fruit Collection, this study represents the first major attempt to map the biochemical profile of traditional UK apples with unique traits and intended for diverse uses including dessert, cider and culinary apples.

In the light of these findings, there may be scope revisiting some of these underutilised heritage cultivars, in an effort to develop food products which could lead to improvements in consumers' health and more diverse agriculture practices.

Professor Leon Terry, Cranfield University, said: "The project brings together the expertise of two internationally recognised, UK-based organisations with the collective view that a change is required so crops are selected on their health-promoting properties."

"Older cultivars contain the benefits of naturally high health-promoting phytochemical content. Industry today has tended to focus on growing varieties based on their price, size, visual appearance, storage potential and yield, rather than how good they are for the consumer."

Although more than 7,500 varieties of apples exist worldwide, many [heritage](#) varieties have been abandoned in favour of mainstream varieties, leading to the decline of traditional [apple](#) orchards in many countries, including the UK.

Provided by Cranfield University

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