



**Desmond R. Layne**

dlayne@clemson.edu

# Stone Fruit

## Healthy Eating And Healthy Marketing

**D**ID you ever wonder how much fruit should be a part of your daily diet? This is a very good question, one that could impact your health! You can get the answer to this question via a friendly government website at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov)). I entered my age, sex, and level of physical activity and found out that I should eat 2 cups of fruit every day. According to the site, this could mean an apple in the morning and 32 grapes in the evening.

Fruits provide fiber, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals that are essential to the human diet. They can be a delicious substitute for sugary snacks or “seconds” at the holiday meal table. Because they have a low energy density compared with other foods (i.e., extra serving of mashed potatoes and gravy), they provide a greater volume (to make you feel full sooner) but are lower in calories and can be helpful in a weight management program.

In today’s fast-paced culture, vitamin pills and other dietary supplements have unfortunately become a popular convenience and substitute for fruit. Grab-and-go fruit “juices” often contain only 10% real juice while being loaded with added sugar. Some of the plant-based, even “herbal” products, fail to deliver the essential antioxidants that are naturally packed into our favorite fruits. Antioxidants such as the anthocyanin pigments that are found in the skin cause fruits to have red/purple colors. The best antioxidants come from natural sources, not a pill.

Antioxidants are secondary plant metabolites that can help our body deal with various oxidative stresses (i.e., smoking, pollution, drugs, alcohol, radiation, etc.) that may cause cell damage in our bodies and lead to disease. Scientists reported in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2006) results of an analysis on the antioxidant activity of 1,113 food

samples obtained from the USDA National Food and Nutrient Analysis program. Of the top 50 foods with the highest antioxidant content, many fruit or fruit products were listed. These included (ranked highest to lowest) blackberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, prunes, tart cherries, and plums.

### Marketing Advantage

So how is knowing this kind of information helpful? First, a diet rich in fresh fruit and vegetables is not only delicious but it is healthy eating. Second, results from research-based analytical and clinical studies can be an effective tool in healthy marketing.

Take, for example, one of our popular stone fruits, the tart cherry. Research sponsored by The Cherry Marketing Institute (Lansing, MI) has linked several important health benefits to consuming cherries. These include reducing inflammation and pain associated with gout and arthritis, and reducing risk factors for heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. Because cherries also contain melatonin, the regular natural sleep pattern may be aided and the impact of jet lag lessened. Dried, pitted tart cherries have become a popular snack (like raisins or Craisins — dried cranberries) and marketing as a “Super Fruit” has helped to increase grower profitability and give consumers another healthy, delicious snack to enjoy.

So how about you? What “super fruits” do you market through your operation? Do you tell consumers about the health benefits? Do you provide any educational literature for customers to encourage them to make healthy choices? How about children who might tour your oper-



Photo courtesy of The Cherry Marketing Institute

Dried, pitted tart Montmorency cherries have become a popular snack and marketing as a “Super Fruit” has helped to increase grower profitability and give consumers another healthy, delicious snack to enjoy.

ation as part of a school group — do you send them home knowing that fruits are a much better choice than Fritos? Do they actually get to taste the difference?

In my last column, I promoted the idea of a fruitful education. By the time you read this column, my HORT 455/655 “Just Fruits” class here at Clemson University will be over. However, I would like to share one encouraging thing a student told me the other day: “Dr. Layne, now instead of buying Doritos for a snack, I am buying whole grain crackers and dried fruit.” Amazing.

Finally, when I was in graduate school, I visited a cherry farm in Traverse City, MI. My wife and I bought a bag of dried tart cherries — they weren’t cheap and we were poor! My then-two-year-old son would say “two cheh-weeze” when he was ready for us to dole a few more out to him during the ride home. Start them young and they will be frugivores forever! ●

Desmond R. Layne, Ph.D., is an associate professor of pomology, tree fruit specialist, and state program team leader for horticulture at Clemson University. He is also president of the American Pomological Society. For more information, go to [www.clemson.edu/hort/peach/index.php](http://www.clemson.edu/hort/peach/index.php).