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Comvita and High-Value Nutrition National Science Challenge invest \$1.3 million in clinical trial programme

Comvita, global leader in Mānuka honey, has underlined its commitment to understanding the effects of Mānuka honey on digestive health, announcing today the launch of a \$1.3m clinical trial programme, supported by the High-Value Nutrition (HVN) Ko Ngā Kai Whai Painga National Science Challenge.

The clinical trial programme will be delivered in collaboration with the University of Otago, with the research partners having been awarded \$875,000 in funding from HVN for this purpose, to be used over two years.

Although honey has been used to treat various ailments since ancient times and is used in traditional Chinese medicine to support digestive comfort, there are gaps in the understanding of how honey's scientific properties deliver these benefits.

Mānuka honey, harvested from the nectar of the *leptospermum scoparium* tree native to New Zealand, has high levels of natural phenolic compounds, many of which are unique to Mānuka honey, that give it a range of bioactive properties not found in other honey types.

Building on Comvita's discovery of Leptericidine™, a newly identified natural compound found only in Mānuka honey, the research will seek to better understand the bioactive properties of this compound for digestive health. Specifically, it will investigate the potential of Comvita Leptericidine™ Standardised Mānuka Honey to improve gastrointestinal symptoms and quality of life in people with digestive discomfort; and its impact on inflammatory biomarkers, immune cell function and the gut microbiome.

The clinical trial programme is being led by Dr Jody Miller and Professor Nicole Roy, from the Department of Human Nutrition at the University of Otago, in collaboration with Comvita New Zealand Limited, the Department of Medicine at the University of Otago, the Malaghan Institute of Medical Research and the Riddet Institute.

University of Otago Senior Research Fellow Dr Jody Miller says while there is scientific evidence that Mānuka honey is an effective topical treatment for wounds and burns, the potential health benefits of consuming Mānuka honey are less well understood.

"Chinese consumers, in particular, use Mānuka honey to soothe digestive symptoms, but how it does this is unknown. Research points to the recently discovered natural compound, Comvita Leptericidine™, as playing a key role in the inhibition of enzymes involved in the development of gastrointestinal inflammation and pain.

"This clinical trial will help us to understand how Mānuka honey with standardised levels of this compound may improve digestive health and its mechanism of action in the body," says Miller.

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Comvita Chief Science Officer, Dr Jackie Evans, says that up to a third of the adult population is impacted by digestive discomfort such as pain and burning or excessive belching and nausea after eating.

“These sorts of symptoms are associated with substantial impairment of quality of life, increased work absenteeism, reduced productivity, and increased use of healthcare services – and often they have no obvious cause or cure. Hence, there is a considerable unmet health need to develop and test new therapeutic approaches or ways of relieving these health issues.

“We are incredibly excited to be embarking on this ground-breaking clinical research into the digestive health benefits of our Mānuka honey. Comvita has earned its global reputation as the expert in Mānuka honey through its long history of scientific leadership and research excellence, and we are committed to investing more to understand the unique and special properties of this iconic Aotearoa New Zealand honey. The anticipated outcomes of this research, combined with Comvita’s unique hive to home business model, will enable us to develop and deliver effective Mānuka honey products to millions of people worldwide who suffer from poor digestive health,” concludes Dr Evans.

High-Value Nutrition Challenge Director Joanne Todd says the research – the first of its kind – strongly aligns with the HVN mission to develop high-value foods with validated health benefits to drive economic growth.

“The clinical trial, which will be conducted over the next two years, is a fantastic example of how HVN fosters economic growth through collaboration between New Zealand’s leading Universities and Research Institutes and the global industry leader in this sector.” says Todd.

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Background information

Comvita (NZX:CVT) was founded in 1974, with a purpose to heal and protect the world through the natural power of the hive. With a team of 500+ people globally, united with more than 1.6 billion bees, we are the global market leader in Mānuka honey and bee consumer goods. Seeking to understand, but never to alter, we test and verify all our bee-product ingredients are of the highest quality in our own government-recognised and accredited laboratory. We are growing industry scientific knowledge on bee welfare, Mānuka trees and the many benefits of Mānuka honey and propolis. We have pledged to be carbon neutral by 2025 and carbon positive by 2030, and we are planting more than two million native trees every year. Comvita has operations in Australia, China, North America, South East Asia, and Europe – and of course, Aotearoa New Zealand, where our bees are thriving.

High-Value Nutrition (HVN) Ko Ngā Kai Whai Painga is one of the eleven National Science Challenges. The Challenge has \$45 million of funding for 2019 - 2024. Visit the HVN website for more details: <https://www.highvaluenutrition.co.nz>.

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