




 Health benefits: Founder and CEO of Super Sprout Melinda Richards with Broccoli Sprouts Picture: Andy Rogers

Entrepreneur believes in the power of pure broccoli sprout powder

CAMILLE SMITH, *The Weekly Times*

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MELINDA Richards first learnt about the power of broccoli sprouts when she was helping her mother fight breast cancer a decade ago.

“John Hopkins University discovered, about 20 years ago, there was this compound called sulforaphane, which was particularly potent in broccoli sprouts,” says the Queensland-based entrepreneur. “When they started to research it, they found it was potent for attacking tumours and cancers.”

Empowered by the science, Melinda and her father, thoroughbred breeder Col Richards, started to grow broccoli sprouts straight away. Col had a wheat grass growing venture in Melbourne, so they added broccoli sprouts. But it took several years to perfect the process.

“Unfortunately, it was too late for Mum,” says Melinda, whose mother passed away, followed in 2015 by Col, who was 84 and “robust right up until the end”.

Melinda persevered growing the sprouts, determined their carcinogen-blocking powers could help others. She has expanded the company, Super Sprout, way beyond expectations, now distributing nationwide and exporting to the US and China.

Broccoli is grown hydroponically in climate-controlled chambers, inside a factory at Campbellfield, north of Melbourne. Sprouts are then harvested, freeze-dried and milled into powder, which is sold through health food stores and organic grocers across Australia and online.

While the products resemble supplements — in white tubs with screw caps — Melinda explains there is nothing but milled plant in each bottle.

“The biggest challenge for Super Sprout is that because we provide broccoli sprouts in a different form, it doesn’t mean it’s not a whole plant food,” she says.

Compared to fresh veg, the powder offers convenience, long shelf-life and a higher concentration of sulforaphane in every serve. A constant temperature, what it is grown in, exact measurement of water and nutrients delivered through fertigation are part of Super Sprout's trade secrets.

Melinda keeps these elements of the growing process close to her chest to maintain control over the sensitive process. Sprout growers are subject to scrutiny from food standards inspectors due to the high incidence of food-borne illnesses around the world associated with sprouts, which need warm, humid conditions to germinate.

Operations manager Brendan Richards is meticulous about hygiene. Hair nets and gloves are mandatory and you could picnic off the floor of the factory, it is that clean.

"We are never advocating the replacement of fresh fruit and veg," says Melinda, who also sells beetroot and blueberry powders under the brand. "But these products are hard to get, either hard to grow or hard to handle. The other really big advantage of the powder is that for fussy eaters ... they don't even know they are eating it."

C6H11NOS₂

Sulforaphane is a carcinogen blocker that is produced when animals or humans eat broccoli sprouts. Research suggests sulforaphane helps the body fight inflammation, disease, cancer and even autism.

2

Sprouts are grown hydroponically on shelves in two large climate-controlled growing chambers fit with growing lights. Six staff manage the growing, harvesting, transport and packing.

18

Melinda's late father, thoroughbred breeder Col Richards, started a hydroponic wheat grass operation 18 years ago. He saw horses at Brisbane's Doomben Racecourse eating wheat grass sprouts as part of their diet. "He said, 'I really like that' and he brought it down here to Melbourne," Melinda says.

8

About eight years ago, Melinda and her father shifted the focus of Super Sprout from wheat grass to broccoli sprouts, while they were helping Melinda's mother fight breast cancer. Their efforts were too late to help, but Melinda is determined other people will benefit.

600

The growing facility at Cambellfield produces about 600kg of fresh sprouts every week, which mills into 60kg of finished powder. "We certainly are able to ramp it up a lot more than what it is," Melinda says. "We are preparing to do that for our Chinese and American markets to a point."

\$49.95

A 135g tub of broccoli sprout powder sells for \$49.95, and the powder is available in smaller 70g tubs.

100

Compared to the mature plant, some cruciferous vegetable sprouts – such as broccoli – contain up to 100 times higher levels of glucoraphanin, the molecule that produces the disease-fighting sulforaphane.

5

Broccoli sprouts are grown to about five days, then hand harvested, carefully bagged and transported to a freeze-drying facility the same day, where freeze-drying removes most of the water without damaging the cells of the plant. Sprouts are then milled by another company and returned to Campbellfield to be packed into bottles by hand.

50%

Half of the production volume is sold domestically, via two distributors. The other 50 per cent is exported to the US and China. Melinda estimates the foreign markets are in their infancy, and plans to grow steadily, while retaining control of the hand-grown, hand-harvested and hand-packed product.

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One teaspoon of milled broccoli sprout powder contains about 10 teaspoons of broccoli sprouts.

36

The freeze-dried broccoli sprout powder has a 36-month shelf life while sealed. Once opened, the food can last up to two months

...can last up to 10 months.



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