

A salt replacement from the sea – how wild wrack seaweed makes a suitable salt replacement

Researchers from the Centre for Food Innovation at Sheffield Hallam University have been looking at ways to beat the unhealthy side effects of too much salt in foods.

By using Seagreens® wild wrack seaweed instead of traditional salt to flavour food, they have achieved a reduction in salt whilst still maintaining the flavour and taste properties of the food.

Reducing salt in foods is a current hot topic in healthy living. The Food Standards Agency in the UK, the Food and Drugs Administration in the USA, and a number of other food safety and consumer health authorities are all strongly advising a reduction in the amount of salt in foods.

Such warnings against a high salt diet are aimed at preventing ill health including raised blood pressure and subsequent heart health problems. But it is recognised that salt does add to the flavour and taste of many foods and reducing it can adversely affect the flavour of the food.

Salt substitutes are available on the market (many based on potassium chloride) but they are not suitable for use in all foods, sometimes leaving a bitter taste in the mouth. They are also often perceived as additives in a food – going against the increasingly demanded clean label approach.



Certain types of seaweed can make a suitable salt replacement

Suitable replacements

A pure and natural product that would give the salt taste, plus other food safety and nutritional benefits, is in demand. The University has been exploring the potential for the Seagreens® product to meet this demand. Not all seaweeds are suitable for direct food use as they may have a less well balanced profile of nutrients. They could also be contaminated by toxic metals, organic pollutants such as pesticides or even sewage bacteria. The degree of contamination is usually related to the closeness of harvest to populated land masses.

The product that the Sheffield Hallam team have been investigating is a wild wrack seaweed harvested from clean, unpolluted waters around the less inhabited parts of Norway.

Seagreens® is the product of an Anglo-Norwegian joint venture and is harvested and processed to give a food safe and highly acceptable product that can be incorporated into a range of foodstuffs. It is a certified material in the UK and the USA for use in organic and biodynamic foods.

The University has carried out extensive testing on the seaweed and looked at its microbial profile to confirm the absence of a wide range of toxic, carcinogenic or teratogenic chemical substances. These include organotin and other toxic metals, polychlorinated biphenyls and organophosphates. The material has come out A1 in all aspects tested. Early testing also suggested that when used in some meat products it has an antibiotic, or at least a bacteriostatic effect on common spoilage and potential food poisoning organisms.

Too good to be true?

The test results to date are encouraging. There are many benefits to using wild wrack over sodium chloride including

- a salty taste with only 3.5% sodium present and a good balance of other minerals
- free from all the common contaminants tested for
- appears to be allergy free after more than ten years use as a food supplement and additive
- 100 per cent vegetable in origin so suitable for vegetarians and vegans

Wild wrack does have a relatively high level of iodine which, although an essential mineral, is contraindicated during pregnancy. But even for this mineral, there is evidence from many parts of the world that it is a deficiency in pregnancy rather than an excess that is the problem.

Within the Centre for Food Innovation, product reformulation to meet developing health needs has been an important area of work. The early work on this sea derived product appears to suggest many potential uses as a salt replacer.

The Centre for Food Innovation

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