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The Seaweed Health Foundation – Dr Craig Rose

Seaweed is known as a highly nutritious, natural and tasty food source which has been utilised for millennia around the world to deliver multiple health benefits. This traditional food is now seeing a resurgence of interest for food and health, thanks to its unique nutritional profile, taste and the fact that it is totally sustainable.

Of the approximately 10,000 seaweed species globally, there are estimated to be 600 species around the UK. No seaweed is considered toxic, and when you know what you are looking for, there is a vast array of incredible seaweeds that taste great and can be eaten for flavour as well as for health.

In the UK, seaweed harvesting ranges from small scale artisan operations to larger scale commercial activities. Even at the largest scale, the sustainability of harvesting wild seaweed is well-known, with the largest UK company ([Hebridean Seaweed Company](#)) working in partnership with the regulators and winning **numerous awards** for their approach.

The environment in which seaweeds thrive is harsh. Some plants will be covered by sea water at high tide for part of the day, and then exposed to drying winds or fresh rainwater at low tide. To survive, seaweeds need to be able to adapt, and it is often these adaptations, such as high levels of antioxidants, that offer the health benefits to humans.

Seaweeds provide all essential dietary minerals. No land plant approaches seaweeds as a source of the minerals needed by human metabolism. They also provide minerals absent from food crops grown on mineral-depleted soils, and are often added to compost. Some organic farmers are now using seaweed tea sprayed directly onto leaves for foliar feeding; it is absorbed through the stomata and acts to keep plants plague-free and to get trace elements into the fruit and vegetable crop being fertilised.

As an example their high of mineral levels, an 8 g portion of *Ulva lactuca* (sea lettuce) provides 260 mg of calcium, equalling approximately 37% of the RNI of calcium for an adult male. In comparison, the same portion of cheddar cheese provides just 5% of the RNI. In relation to iron, there is more iron in an 8 g serving of dry *Palmaria palmata* (Dulse/Dillisk) than in 100 g of raw sirloin steak (6.4 mg versus 1.6 mg, respectively).

A mineral commonly associated with seaweed is iodine. With the UK now considered iodine deficient (66% of adult females and 76% of girls of school age are deficient), there is an urgent need to utilise seaweed as natural safe source of iodine, helping to prevent thyroid issues and breast cancer. This is especially important as iodine from other sources (eg dairy) is increasingly being displaced by environmental pollutants.

Seaweed is also strongly antibacterial, thanks, in part, to its iodine and polyphenolic contents. Sulphated polysaccharides such as carrageenans, fucoidans and rhamnogalactans from marine algae have substantial antiviral capacity against enveloped viruses, such as herpes, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and HIV.

Furthermore, the balance of minerals and peptides derived from seaweed are proven to have hypotensive effects in the human circulatory system. Hypertension is one of the major, yet controllable, risk factors in cardiovascular disease (CVD). CVD is the main cause of death in Europe, accounting for over 4.3 million deaths each year. In the United States it affects one in three individuals. Hypotensive peptides derived from marine and other sources have already been incorporated into functional foods such as beverages and soups. In the area of heart health, seaweeds are also being used as a salt replacement.

Because of the wealth of information available on seaweed, the Seaweed Health Foundation and its members have developed courses to train and educate on the benefits and uses of seaweed. (See below.)

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Feed the Foundation of Health

The Seaweed Health Foundation is an independent and not-for-profit forum for research; it also works to raise awareness of the benefits of human food quality seaweed in terms of salt reduction, nutrition, weight management and sustainability.

The Foundation provides expertise and training to its members and external stakeholders, and has developed and delivered courses on seaweeds for organisations and individuals, including their BANT accredited [seaweed for food and health course](#).

In the past few months alone, the Foundation has also raised over £53,000 in research funding to support the seaweed industry. Their previous work on salt reduction was highlighted this year as a "[Big Idea for the Future](#)" in the Research Councils UK report (see page 58 for seaweed).

For more information on courses please see [the course overview](#); this can be tailored for specific needs and delivered as the BANT accredited course. Further dates for courses are to be announced soon, and can be reviewed on the Foundation's website www.seaweedhealthfoundation.org.uk.

For all other details, [please contact](#) the Seaweed Health Foundation Executive Director, Dr Craig Rose.

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