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## Sweet taste of success for East Cape oranges

📅 April 28, 2016 👤 Wendy Knowler

IT'S official – oranges grown in the Eastern Cape are more nutritious than those from the Western Cape.

Dr Cindy Hunlun discovered this while undertaking the first investigative study of its kind in South Africa on the content and health value of locally produced orange juice.

Her studies earned her a doctorate in food science from Stellenbosch University last month.

Hunlun, who worked in the juice industry for five years before being appointed as a lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, investigated the chemical and phenolic content of three widely cultivated South African orange varieties – mandarin, navel and valencia – in both the Western and Eastern Cape, over three seasons.

She found antioxidant levels of Eastern Cape oranges were higher than those of the Western Cape, making them more nutritious.

Hunlun's supervisor and Stellenbosch University food science department head Dr Gunnar Sigge said while a lot of work had been done on the cultivation and packaging of citrus fruit, local research into its health value had been minimal up to now.

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As much as two million tons of oranges are harvested annually for the export market and local consumption, some of them processed into orange juice.

Most orange juice sold in South Africa is made from concentrate which is frozen and then sold to juice producers.

Hunlun found that it had far less health value than a glass of freshly squeezed juice – lower phenolic levels and fewer antioxidants.

And the health value of orange juice made from frozen concentrate was further diluted by the addition of other fruit juices, hence that word “blend”.

“Many juice formulations only include the minimum amount of orange juice allowed by law – 50% – possibly due to cost [and] the high acidity of citrus,” Hunlun said.

“So to make it sweeter they [juice manufacturers] add other fruit juices.”

In Hunlun’s view, the legislated minimum percentage of the named fruit should be increased to 80%.

“That would allow the juice manufacturers to achieve the desired acidity while increasing the phytonutrient content that is specific to citrus fruit.”

First prize would be to produce 100% pure orange juice, she said.

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