UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE VIÇOSA
CENTRO DE CIÊNCIAS EXATAS E TECNOLÓGICAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE TECNOLOGIA DE ALIMENTOS
Secretaria da Pós-Graduação em Ciência e Tecnologia de Alimentos

Campus Universitário – Viçosa, MG – 36570-000 – Telefone (31)3612 6705/6760 - E-mail: dta@ufv.br

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HEALTH BENEFITS AND FOOD APPLICATIONS OF COWPEA

Graduate student: Joy Chinenye MBA

Advisor: Frederico Barros (Departamento de Tecnologia de Alimentos-UFV)

Cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*) is a nutritious crop that flourishes in areas where other edible legumes cannot grow because of its heat and drought tolerance. As a result, it is a crop that is both environmentally and climate friendly. It is the most often produced legume after the common dry bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) and chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*), and it is a significant source of high-quality dietary protein and energy for millions of people living in semi-arid locations. Cowpea is high in key bioactive compounds that can help improve human health in a variety of ways, in addition to its nutritional benefits. Phenolic compounds, which are mostly contained in the seed coat, are the most important group of bioactive substances in cowpea. Cowpea consumption has been shown to protect against a variety of chronic inflammation-related disorders, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. Researchers have also discovered that eating whole grain cereals and pulses may offer health benefits in addition to complementing amino acid nutrition. This is due to the structural differences in the bioactive components of whole grain cereals and pulses, which allow them to complement each other in function. Interestingly, cowpea has found applications in a variety of food products, including ready-to-eat breakfast cereals (RTE), bakery products, weaning foods, extruded snacks, and a variety of other indigenous recipes.

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