North West bush fruit endorsed by American celebrity

Story by IMPACT MEDIA

A US television celebrity and dermatologist who is CEO of an international cosmetic company recently travelled to Broome to film a documentary on the native fruit gubinge, also known as Kakadu plum, which will be a key ingredient in a new range of skin care products her company is developing.

Dr Audrey Kunin, who founded the online range of 'Dermadoctor' lotions, said medicine and nature could be combined to great effect in developing skin care products and that today's consumers were increasingly interested in the story behind the natural ingredients.

A wild Australian native fruit with 10 times more vitamin C than oranges and rich in healthy anti-oxidants, gubinge is the subject of a University of Western Australia-led project investigating the domestication of Kakadu plums in enrichment plantings to help Australia's fledgling bush tucker industry expand as a major Aboriginal enterprise.

UWA's Dr Liz Barbour is leading the project, which also involves the Kimberley Training Institute, the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Northern Territory Government and Charles Darwin University. An Indigenous Steering Committee oversees their work.

Dr Kunin said gubinge was a "super fruit" with a fantastic story to be told about its incredible levels of Vitamin C and antioxidants and the way local Aboriginal people were engaged in developing a sustainable, organic industry which will help preserve their traditional culture.

Dr Kunin is a frequent guest on the popular "Dr Oz" television show and her advice and products are regularly featured in US journals and newspapers and magazines. She said she first learned of gubinge while searching the internet for natural sources of Vitamin C and antioxidants which are highly sought after as anti-aging agents in skin care products.

The prized bush fruit is uniquely Australian and occurs naturally from the southwest Kimberley to Kakadu in the Northern Territory.

When Dr Kunin featured it during one of her appearances on Dr Oz she said the response from the American public was enormous. As a result she decided to develop a range of skin care products using extracts from the fruit.

The short documentary was filmed in and around Broome and will be part of the promotion used to launch the new range, due for release next January.

During Dr Kunin’s stay in Broome she visited the Balu Buru Training and Research Centre at 12 Mile where over the last eight years the Kimberley Training Institute has developed sustainable cultivation models for gubinge and other high-value native plants as well as new concepts in carbon farming.

Late last year KTI signed an agreement with local traditional owners Nyamba Buru Yawuru to further develop the site as a centre of excellence in native plant cultivation and carbon farming, maximising opportunities for and involvement with Aboriginal communities.

Dr Kunin also travelled to Bidyadanga community 180km south of Broome where gubinge trees planted during community training programs from 2003 onwards are now producing bumper crops.

At Bidyadanga, Dr Kunin met Traditional Elder Merridoo Walbidi, who as a young boy in 1963 was a member of one of the last family groups living the traditional life in the Great Sandy Desert. Mr Walbidi has been a driving force in the establishment of the bush food plantations at Bidyadanga.

When Dr Kunin asked him why he felt growing traditional bush foods was important he said: “When we lived in the desert it was all we had to eat and there was no diabetes, no heart disease. It was a hard life but bush foods kept people strong and healthy.”

Bidyadanga Community Chairman James Yanawana said he was hopeful Dr Kunin’s visit would encourage an expansion of gubinge enrichment plantings and other traditional bush foods as well as reintroduce the horticultural training.

Dr Kunin also interviewed local Aboriginal women Pat Torres and Val Sibosado who are independently developing value-added products and business opportunities related to gubinge and other bush foods.