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Evidence Links Tomato Products to Heart Health

APTOS, Calif. (March 8, 2011) – The reasons to include more delicious tomato products in your diet keep accumulating. Scientists from around the globe gathered in Rome, Italy on February 25, 2011 to review the science on tomato products and heart health at the final meeting of LYCOCARD, a five-year European Union-funded scientific research project on tomatoes and lycopene, the powerful antioxidant that gives tomatoes their red color. Howard D. Sesso, ScD, Associate Epidemiologist, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Assistant Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, presented findings on the epidemiological evidence linking lycopene with cardiovascular disease.

Tomato products are an excellent source of the powerful antioxidant lycopene, as well as potassium, folate, and vitamins A, C and E, according to Sesso. In fact, more than 80% of the lycopene in the U.S. diet comes from tomato-based foods, such as canned tomatoes, tomato sauce, pasta sauce, pizza sauce, tomato soup, tomato juice, salsa and ketchup. Sesso presented epidemiological evidence from several studies linking lycopene and tomato products intake with a possible decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. The potential mechanisms behind any benefits for tomatoes include lycopene's status as a potent antioxidant, which may play a role in the regulation of cholesterol metabolism, and lycopene's ability to possibly improve levels of LDL cholesterol, oxidative stress and inflammation. Sesso is currently investigating the relationship between tomato products and coronary risk factors in more than 38,000 women from the Women's Health Study.

According to Sesso, "Increasing evidence suggests that consuming tomato products may be beneficial to heart health. Our work is not done, however; ongoing studies hope to add important data on tomatoes, lycopene, and cardiovascular disease, plus shed light on potential mechanisms of effect."

If you'd like to learn more about the cardiovascular benefits of tomato products, please visit the Tomato Products Wellness Council website at www.TomatoWellness.com and the Facebook Page: *Make it Red with Tomato Product!* to discover a wealth of information on health, science, recipes, and cooking with tomato products. See our latest YouTube video on the Tomato Wellness Channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPFEEeLoslA>.