A traditional salad favorite, green spinach now has some competition. ARS scientists in the Crop Improvement and Protection Research Unit in Salinas, CA, developed and released USDA Red, the world’s first true red spinach variety. Unlike other red-leaved veggie species that go by the name red spinach, USDA Red is a true spinach (Spinacia oleracea). It owes its red color to the phytonutrient betacyanin, instead of the more common anthocyanin.

Betacyanin is a potent antioxidant that has been shown to significantly reduce oxidative stress in humans and may help in preventing inflammation—the condition underlying many chronic diseases. Betacyanin adds another benefit to a plant already loaded with phytonutrients, making spinach a true “super food.”