

Overview of Whole Grain Forum, Beijing, China April 20-21, 2011

“We hope you can bring whole grain foods to China as soon as possible.”

That’s what Yu Xiaodong, General Director of China’s Public Nutrition and Development Center (PNDC) said in his opening remarks at the Whole Grain Forum held April 20-21, 2011 in Beijing. The Forum, jointly organized by the PNDC with the Whole Grains Council, the Grains for Health Foundation, and the China Cereals and Oils Association, brought together an estimated 200 Chinese and Americans to explore the best ways to increase whole grain consumption in China.

Chinese authorities, led by Mr. Yu, are eager to move quickly. In fact, the Forum was moved up seven months from its original November timeframe because, as Mr. Yu said, “We don’t want to wait more than another half year” to meet this “urgent need of consumers.”

Below is a summary of the Beijing Whole Grain Forum, including key points that may be of interest to companies seeking to address China’s whole grain needs.

Goals of the Chinese Authorities

China aims to move from “over-processing” of food to “moderate processing” of food. Forum speakers mentioned several government initiatives and goals being planned or already in the works, including:

- designating whole grain industry as “an industry to encourage”
- designating refined grains as “an industry to limit”
- providing more R&D support for whole grain foods
- encouraging new equipment for whole grain technologies
- fast-tracking definitions and labeling regulations for whole grains
- offering public “training and propaganda” to educate consumers on the benefits of whole grains

Two speakers mentioned specific targets for 2015: to increase sprouted brown rice from 3% of rice to 15% of rice, and to increase whole wheat flour from 11% to 25% of flour.

Mr. Yu plans to hold a “Family Campaign to focus on whole grains,” with a special emphasis on children’s foods. By starting kids on whole grains as young as possible, China can stem rising rates of childhood obesity. He suggests working through pediatricians and making a strong appeal to parents.

Health and Productivity are both Motivators

Last year, the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) reported that diabetes in China now affects 9.7% of people over age 20, just short of the U.S. rate of 10.7%. It’s estimated that 92 million people have diabetes, with another 148 million having pre-diabetes. Health reasons are certainly motivating the Chinese to promote whole grains – but productivity is another strong motivator.

Although China is the world’s largest wheat producer, it is also the world’s largest wheat consumer. The region’s worst drought in 60 years has led wheat imports to rise

more than 30% this year, according to data from Bloomberg. Several speakers at the Whole Grain Forum mentioned the compelling math of using whole grains to increase available supplies by 20-30%. (A bushel of wheat yields only about 42 pounds of refined flour but the same bushel can yield 60 pounds of whole wheat flour – so consuming whole grains stretches the yield of grain crops by about a third.)

One speaker also cited the potential for whole grains to provide economic development for the rural regions where most grain is grown. Investment in new mills geared to production of whole grain flour, or new equipment for sprouting brown rice, could give an economic boost to these generally poorer regions.

Drawing on Chinese Culinary Traditions

China prides itself on its history as “The Kingdom of Grains.” The Chinese have an ancient tradition, dating back as far as 2800 BCE, that a combination of grains (rice, wheat, and millet usually among them) should be the basis of every diet. Because of this tradition, multigrain products are viewed very favorably.

Because staples – rice, noodles and steamed buns – constitute the majority of grains consumed, making whole grain versions of these foods could make the biggest impact. Dr. Gary Hou, Technical Director and Asian Foods Specialist at the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland, OR, gave a very well-received talk on formulation issues with traditional staples like noodles and steamed buns, assuring manufacturers in the audience that reformulation of these foods is very do-able, and resources are available.

Sprouted (or germinated) brown rice was also mentioned repeatedly as a good replacement for polished white rice. Sprouted brown rice has nutritional advantages over plain brown rice, and is also quicker cooking, sweeter in taste, and softer in texture. Japanese technology for sprouting brown rice on an industrial scale is now available and is being used widely in Asia, and has also been introduced here in the U.S. (See the [WGC's feature on Sprouted Grains](#), on our website.)

Opportunities for Western-Style Whole Grain Foods

While staples offer the best opportunity for making big inroads in whole grain consumption, they also present a challenge, since Chinese consumers may be more resistant to changes in these familiar foods. So, although Western-style products constitute a much smaller proportion of food consumed, consumers may be more open to new tastes in these foods.

In fact, whole grains may offer advantages in some cases. Jorge Varate, General Manager of Grupo Bimbo's Asian region, told us that his company offers five varieties of sliced bread in China, and that their whole wheat bread is easily the top seller. “Bread isn't eaten at meals, generally,” said Zarate. “It's eaten as a snack, plain, without any butter, jam or other spread, so the fuller taste of the whole wheat is a real plus.”

Visiting both local chains and a busy Carrefour superstore, we noted a growing selection of Western breads, crackers, cookies, and breakfast cereals. RTE cereals from Cereal Partners Worldwide (Nestlé / General Mills) and cookies from Kraft both

dedicate their back panels to educating consumers about what whole grains are, and why they offer health benefits. Hot cereals, like oatmeal, are quite prominent (more so than cold cereals) as they tie in more closely with the Chinese tradition of hot grain porridges.

Consumer Education and Attitudes

A 2010 HealthFocus International survey of consumers in 18 countries, cited by Cargill's Jessica Wellnitz in her presentation at the Forum, indicated that 75% of Asian consumers are "extremely/somewhat interested in whole grains." Cathy Kapica, of Ketchum, presented data from another survey, comparing Chinese consumers to those in Germany, Argentina, the U.K. and the U.S. When consumers in all five countries were asked, "When you think of food, what comes to mind?" the top answer in China was "Key to Good Health" – while consumers in all four other countries cited "Enjoyment" first.

China has a long tradition of seeing food as medicine, which makes this finding logical and a plus for whole grains. However, another chapter in China's history provides a challenge to whole grains. Until about 30 years ago, China's diet was "whole grain by necessity," as several speakers mentioned. Food was always scarce, and the only flour available was just lightly milled, containing about 95% of the wheat kernel. Thin gruels or porridges were often the only food available. And so, as one speaker put it, "whole grains remind us of the hard times."

White noodles, rice, and snow-white steamed buns, then, are a symbol of China's new prosperity – a fact that will take considerable education and incentives to counteract, to produce an attitude of "whole grains by choice."

Food safety is a key motivator for the Chinese. Consumers have been frightened and concerned by the many recent food scandals in China, the most recent of which involved tainted steamed buns to which the manufacturer had added illegal chemicals to make expired products appear fresh. There is a tendency to trust foreign brands more than local Chinese sources due to these problems.

What's Next for WGC Members

If your company would like to explore opportunities to export whole grain ingredients and foods to China, we suggest several possible next steps:

1) Extend Use of the WG Stamp to your Chinese products

If you work for one of our larger multi-national members, the next logical step may simply be to collaborate with your counterparts in China, to encourage use of the Whole Grain Stamp in China. If you already have a corporate-wide membership, there's no additional cost. Contact Kara Berrini (kberrini@oldwayspt.org or 617-896-4880) to learn more; she can supply you with Chinese graphics once your products are approved for China.

2) Contact USDA staff in Beijing

Wang Jun, a Marketing Specialist with USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, attended the Whole Grain Forum, and urged us to invite companies interested in the China market to contact him. His email is Jun.Wang@fas.usda.gov and his phone number is (86-10) 8531-3951.

Ryan Scott, Agricultural Attaché with USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, reached out to us at the Expo the day before the Forum, and also offered his services to U.S. companies. His email is Ryan.Scott@fas.usda.gov and his phone number is (86-10) 8531-3416.

3) Look into PNDC Certification

The PNDC, China's leading bureau for nutrition, has developed a certification symbol for foods produced with high quality standards. The PNDC mark was developed to counter increasing mistrust of food safety and contamination. If you would like to learn more about PNDC certification, we suggest you contact Dr. Hua Sun, at USS International Group in Plymouth, MN (hsun@usfamily.net or 763-551-7929). Hua coordinated Whole Grain Forum plans with PNDC, for the WGC and the Grains for Health Foundation, and his company can explain the certification process.

4) Contact the Wheat Marketing Center

The Wheat Marketing Center, in Portland, OR, provides a wealth of research and classes to help provide markets for American grains overseas. Our contact there, Dr. Gary Hou, has been very helpful: He interpreted for Mr. Yu at our Portland conference in January, and he translated our Stamp Usage Guide into Chinese, among many other tasks. Visit the WMC's website at www.wmcinc.org or contact Gary (ghou@wmcinc.org or 503-295-0823) to see if he can help you.



Some of the WG Forum participants, including Cynthia Harriman, Kara Berrini, WGC Scientific Advisor Len Marquart, and WGC members Kathy Wiemer (General Mills), Beth Arndt (ConAgra Mills), Cesar Cruz (Grupo Bimbo) and Jessica Wellnitz and Tim Christensen (Cargill).

Program of the Beijing Whole Grain Forum

Vigorously Develop Whole Grain Food to Meet People's Health Requirements

Yu Xiaodong, General Director of the Center for Public Nutrition and Development of the National Development and Reform Commission of China

Development of Whole Grain Foods in the "Twelfth Five-Year" Plan

He Yanli, Deputy Head of the Industry Coordination Division of the National Development and Reform Commission of China

Industry Promotion Policies for Whole Grain and Other Health Foods

Wang Liming, Head of the Consumer Goods Industries Division of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology

Whole Grain Process: Development Direction in the "Twelfth Five-Year" Plan

Wang Lirong, Deputy Director of Grain Logistics and Scientific Development Division of State Administration of Grain

Health Benefits of a Whole Grain Diet

Neil Levin, Nutritionist and Training Director of NOW Foods (USA)

Developing Whole Grain Foods to Promote People's Health

Zhao Faji, Consultant, China Nutrition Society

Regulations Concerning the Definition and Labeling of Whole Grain Foods

Cynthia Harriman, Director of Food & Nutrition Strategies of the Whole Grains Council and Oldways (USA)

American Whole Grain Nutrition and Regulations System

Kathy Wiemer, Director of General Mills Bell Institute of Health & Nutrition (USA)

Global Grains Processing and Technological Trend

Steve McCurry, Vice President of the Grains for Health Foundation (USA)

Global Whole Grain Bread Consumption and Marketing Thoughts

Cesar Cruz, Director of Operations of Asia Pacific Area of Bimbo (Mexico)

How do Whole Grains Fit with Consumers' Approach to Wellness

Cathy Kapica, Senior VP of Ketchum Global Health and Wellness (USA)

Benefits of Wheat Aleurone and Nutritional Ingredients

Walter von Reding, Buhler Corporate Development Nutrition (Switzerland) **Jessica Wellnitz**, Senior Food Technologist, Cargill Foods (USA)

Formulation and Processing Guidelines for Whole Wheat Products

Dr. Gary G. Hou, Technical Director, Wheat Marketing Center (USA)

Processing Technology of Japanese Whole-Grain Rice Foods

Kawano Motonobu, Director of Technology Division of Satake Group (Japan)

In-depth Analysis of Global Whole Grain Products

Beth Arndt, R & D Director of American ConAgra Foods Inc. (USA)

Characteristics and Thread of the Development of China's Whole Grain Foods

Tan Bin, Deputy Director, Lab of Cereals & Oils Process of the Academy of Scientific Research of the State Grain Administration of China

Vigorously Promote the Development of Whole Grain Nutrition & Health Foods

Wang Ruiyuan, Vice Standing Chairman of China Cereals and Oils Association

Whole Grain Assists Building a Healthy Dietary Structure

Jia Mei, Head of Nutrition, Health & Wellness of Nestle, Greater China Area

R&D of Whole Grain Staple Foods in China, and Industrial Applications

Qu Lingbo, Vice President of Henan Industry University

Providing Safe, Reliable, Nutritional, and Healthy Food to Consumers

Pierre Bertholat, Vice CEO of Carrefour China; CEO of Carrefour East China (France)

Ideas for the Development of Whole Grain Food in China

Li Lite, Professor of China Agriculture University

Adapting Market Trends, and the Future of Low Fat Healthy Food

Zeng Cheng, President of Hubei Fucheng Konjac Industry Development Co.

Whole Grain Meals for Schools

Len Marquart, President of Grains for Health Foundation, (USA)