

**Summary of the *Make (at least!) Half Your Grains Whole* conference  
Organized by Oldways and the Whole Grains Council  
Alexandria, VA • April 20-22, 2009**

We are providing this summary of the April 2009 Whole Grains Council conference so that those who were unable to attend can get an overview of the important information that was released and exchanged there. Think of this document as the Cliff Notes of the conference.

The content of this conference fell roughly into four main themes. In this summary, we'll review each theme, offer main outcomes and conclusions for each, and include references to the conference proceedings for more details. Both the Conference Program Book and most of our speakers' presentations are posted on the WGC website at [www.wholegrainscouncil.org/resources/Make-Half-Your-Grains-Whole-Conference-apr-09](http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org/resources/Make-Half-Your-Grains-Whole-Conference-apr-09)

## **1) ARE WE THERE YET?**

**What we did:** We examined whole grain consumption trends, recent health research, media coverage, supermarket stocking and prices, and chain restaurant offerings to understand where America stands in relation to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines' recommendation to *make at least half your grains whole*.

### **What we found and how you can learn more:**

1. Consumption. Whole grain consumption rose 20% from 2005 to 2008, after staying steady from 1998 to 2005. Despite this rise, Americans still eat only 11% of their grains as whole grains – in contrast to the recommended 50% or more. Children (age 2-17) still eat the fewest whole grains (9% of total grains as whole grains). Adults age 18-34 increased consumption the most from 2005 to 2008, with a 38% rise. (Source: The NPD Group National Eating Trends survey, February 2008.)

*To learn more:* See pages 3-3 to 3-7 of the section “Are We There Yet?” in the conference Program Book, and review the April 20th presentation by Joe Derochowski (the NPD Group).

2. Research. Recent research (both interventions and epidemiological data) continue to support probable benefits of whole grains in reducing the risk of hypertension, metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and cardiovascular disease, while also promoting satiety and weight control. In her presentation, Dr. Julie Jones discussed confounding factors that may account for some studies that don't fit the overall pattern of other whole grain research, and raised the question of whether Randomized Clinical Trials are possible or even desirable in nutrition research. She ended with the consensus statement from the recent international whole grain research summit in Newcastle UK which stated: “There is sufficient evidence showing that higher whole grain diets compared to refined grain diets are beneficial for several health outcomes. High bran/fibre are not equal to whole grain diets but also have a beneficial relationship with health.”

*To learn more:* See Research Summary Tables following page 6-14 in the section “Standards & Definitions” in the Program Book, or download the WGC's full summary of recent research at [wholegrainscouncil.org/files/WGResearchSummary\\_WGCJan09.pdf](http://wholegrainscouncil.org/files/WGResearchSummary_WGCJan09.pdf)



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and review the April 20<sup>th</sup> presentation by Julie Miller Jones (College of St. Catherine). For background information about government policy and the 2005 Dietary Guidelines, review the April 22<sup>nd</sup> presentation of Dr. Robert Post (CNPP / USDA).

3. Media. In a pilot survey of ten major women's and cooking magazines, the Whole Grains Council (WGC) found that none of these publications "make at least half their grains whole." The top four magazines – *Woman's Day*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Parents*, and *O, the Oprah magazine* – featured whole grains in articles, photos and recipes about one-third of the time that grains were mentioned. The WGC plans to continue this Media Whole Grains Yardstick project in the coming year, examining additional publications.

*To learn more:* See pages 3-8 to 3-10 of the section "Are We There Yet?" in the Program Book.

4. Supermarkets. The WGC logged all grain-food SKUs in a representative supermarket, to see whether at least half the grains were whole. We found that whole grain penetration varied widely by category, from a low of 6% of the crackers being whole grain to a high of 80% of the hot cereals being whole grain. Other popular categories were crackers (20% whole grain), pasta (22% whole grain), bread (40% whole grain) and cold cereal (68% whole grain). We also compared prices of whole and refined grains. While the price gap varied by category, we found the median price differential minimal in most categories – in part because high-priced premium imports and gluten-free products were often included in the refined group. When we compared the *lowest* price in each category, however, we found a much larger gap between refined and whole grains, often because generic store brands were available for refined grains and not for whole grains.

Two other speakers helped explain why whole grain products have not yet reached penetration or price parity. Dr. Jon Faubion (Kansas State) explained the challenges manufacturers face in reformulating products to make them from whole grains instead of refined, and Dr. Lisa Mancino (USDA / ERS) detailed research on the effects of price and availability on consumption.

*To learn more:* See pages 3-11 to 3-15 of "Are We There Yet?" in the Program Book. (We'll be posting additional data on the WGC website as we analyze a few final categories.) Also review these four April 21<sup>st</sup> presentations: Connie Clifford (Hannaford Supermarkets); Paulette Thompson (Giant Foods / Stop & Shop); Jon Faubion (Kansas State University); and Lisa Mancino (USDA / Economic Research Service).

5. Restaurants. We surveyed as many as possible of the top 100 chain restaurants in the U.S., and found that 11 of the top 30 chains now offer at least one whole grain option.

*To learn more:* See pages 3-16 to 3-18 of "Are We There Yet?" in the Program Book and page 4-5 On the Menu Hot Topic Sheet in the "Promoting Whole Grains" section. For supplementary information about fine dining restaurants, see the April 20<sup>th</sup> presentation from Paul Lynch (FireLake Grill House and Cocktail Bar).

## 2) HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY PROMOTE WHOLE GRAINS

**What we did:** To help conference attendees more successfully promote whole grains, we offered insights into consumers' perceptions (and misperceptions) of whole grains and their motivations for buying healthy foods overall; we highlighted the potential of social media tools for delivering promotional and health messages; and we presented three case studies of successful whole grain promotions.

### **What we found and how you can learn more:**

1. Consumer Perceptions and Motivations. Based on questions received by the WGC from consumers, there is widespread confusion about what foods really qualify as whole grains, with whole grain foods such as groats, oats, whole wheat flour, and popcorn doubted by some – and non-whole-grain foods such as sesame, flaxseeds, hemp seeds etc. championed for inclusion by others. There is also widespread belief that fiber and whole grain are the same thing. Kara Berrini offered suggestions on how manufacturers can more clearly label foods and communicate with consumers, and how the WGC can help.

Cary Silvers of Rodale gave context to consumers' buying decisions with data from Prevention's 2009 Shopping for Health survey. Taste still trumps all other factors, including cost, though organic sales (never strong beyond fruits and vegetables) have lost ground in the current economy.

*To learn more:* See pages 4-7 and 4-13 in the Program Book or review April 21<sup>st</sup> presentations from Kara Berrini (Whole Grains Council) and Cary Silvers (Rodale / Prevention).

2. Social Media. With newspapers going bankrupt right and left, magazine content dwindling, and network TV losing market share to cable and niche channels, social media like Twitter, Facebook, and interactive websites offer new ways to reach consumers with marketing messages. Social media is "word of mouth marketing on steroids" according to Rob Birgfeld of SmartBrief, who reviewed more than a dozen case studies of successful social media promotional campaigns.

*To learn more:* See page 4-14 of the Program Book or the April 21<sup>st</sup> presentation by Rob Birgfeld (SmartBrief).

3. WG Promotion Case Studies. Successful whole grain promotions have many common elements including:

- a. They involve whole families and/or whole communities.
- b. They help people re-connect with cooking and baking.
- c. They include education about the health benefits of whole grains.
- d. They make whole grains more available and easier to identify.

*To learn more:* See pages 4-15 and 4-16 of the Program Book and review April 21<sup>st</sup> presentations from Lori Tubbs (Naval Special Warfare), Tom Payne (King Arthur Flour), and Morten Meyer (Danish Cancer Society).

### 3) SCHOOLS STEER A NEW GENERATION TO WHOLE GRAINS

**What we did:** While schools provide fewer than 20% of the meals kids eat, their potential for educating a new generation about healthy eating is enormous. We brought in school food experts to explain how the best schools have replaced mystery meat with whole grains and other healthy foods – and to help us understand how manufacturers can help schools achieve their goals.

**What we found and how you can learn more:**

1. Creative School Programs. We learned that the most successful programs for bringing whole grains and other health foods to schools ...
  - a. Allow kids to sample whole grain foods risk-free.
  - b. Educate kids about the health benefits of whole grains in creative ways, including activities, games, and cartoon character “spokespeople.”
  - c. Tailor educational programs to meet state-specific requirements for science, language arts, math and other subjects so that teachers can “justify” the time they take.
  - c. Support foodservice personnel, with details about whole grain commodity foods.
  - d. Improve students’ health and academic achievement.
  - e. Involve parents and the community in educational efforts.

*To learn more:* See pages 4-9 to 4-10 (Hot Topic sheet on Schools) for an overview of data about schools, and pages 5-11 to 5-13 for information about introducing whole grains and other healthy foods into schools. Also review April 22<sup>nd</sup> presentations from Danielle Hollar (Institute for Obesity Research), Jill Patterson (Newtown CT Public Schools), and Margie Saidel (Chartwells).

2. What Schools Want Us to Know. Schools can’t do it all alone. Government needs to help, with better reimbursement rates, and manufacturers need to offer whole grains kids will enjoy, at a price as close as possible to that of refined grains. We surveyed school districts in 26 states to learn more about the barriers to whole grains at schools, and invited the School Nutrition Association to explain cost factors and reimbursement rates.

*To learn more:* See pages 5-3 to 5-10 of the Program Book (the same information is in Cynthia Harriman’s April 22<sup>nd</sup> presentation) and review the April 22<sup>nd</sup> presentation of Cathy Schuchart (School Nutrition Association).

### 4) HARMONIZING WHOLE GRAIN DEFINITIONS

**What we did:** We invited government employees from USDA and HHS (including FDA) to attend a special free workshop on whole grain standards and definitions, following the conclusion of our speaker program. They met with health professionals and food manufacturers from the conference to review the many conflicting definitions of “a whole grain food” from different parts of USDA and from FDA.

After we reviewed the existing standards, participants divided up into five groups of about 8 to 10 people each to discuss two questions:

1. What characterizes a fair standard for a “whole grain food?”
2. What needs to change / happen so that you can do your part to increase whole grain consumption?

Finally, a Consensus Ballot was circulated and was signed by about half of those present.

**What we found and how you can learn more:**

1. A Fair Standard. Our Consensus Ballot asked participants to register their agreement with any or all of four points. Results were as follows:

<b>This %</b>	<b>Agreed with this statement</b>
100%	I support a fair, consistent, and uniform definition of “a whole grain food.”
94.7%	Such a standard definition should guarantee a minimum whole grain content that is widely agreed to be “significant.”
84.2%	Such a standard definition should provide a level playing field for all foods, regardless of moisture content.
73.7%	Such a standard definition should support “transitional foods” that help consumers make incremental, positive changes in their eating habits.

Group discussions elaborated on these statements, with some suggesting 51% of dry ingredient weight as the minimum, and others suggesting 51% of the grain plus some gram-minimum, or the first ingredient (excepting water) should be whole grain.

2. What needs to change / happen. The groups suggested several ways that government policymakers and manufacturers could help clear the way for increased whole grain consumption including:

- a. [govt.] Set a clear “daily value” for whole grain.
- b. [govt.] Encourage packaging that says “Product X provides x% of daily value.”
- c. [govt.] Eliminate the confusing term “ounce equivalent.”
- d. [govt.] Allow more flexibility on package sizes in WIC.
- e. [mfrs.] Develop more whole grain products, with different levels of whole grain content, to help people transition to whole grains smoothly.
- f. [mfrs.] Equalize the price of whole grains vs. refined grains.
- g. [all] Continue to have discussions like these, and include consumers.

*To learn more:* See pages 6-1 to 6-14 in the “Standards & Definitions” section of the Program Book. If you would like to fill out a Consensus Ballot yourself, download the PDF linked to the Workshop on the program schedule on our website.