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Are Consumers Making Half Their Grains Whole?

Whole Grains Council's innovative programs measure – and nudge – progress

Alexandria, VA, April 24, 2009 – Whole grain consumption is up 20% since 2005. That's the encouraging message from the **Make (at least!) Half Your Grains Whole** conference held April 20-22, 2009, in Alexandria, VA. Organized by Boston-based non-profit Oldways and the Whole Grains Council, the conference offered the first solid evidence that changes in U.S. Dietary Guidelines and widespread use of the Whole Grain Stamp packaging symbol – both dating from January 2005 – have accomplished major changes in consumer behavior.

A double-digit increase in whole grain consumption is compelling and indicates whole grains are moving into the mainstream, according to NPD Group's Joe Derochowski, who presented data from his firm's National Eating Trends survey, released publicly for the first time at this conference. Still, consumers are enjoying on average only 11% of their grains as whole grains, he added.

This falls short of the 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines' recommendation for making half or more of our grains whole. Repeated studies over the past few decades show that those who consume more whole grains reduce their risk of heart disease, strokes, diabetes and some cancers, while also improving their weight control.

The Whole Grains Council's own measurement tools offer encouraging signs indicating that whole grain consumption will continue to grow:

- **Popular women's magazines include more whole grains in recipes, photos and stories.** The Whole Grains Council presented its first Whole Grains Yardstick Awards at the conference. Four magazines – *Parents*, *O / the Oprah magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Women's Day* – were honored for topping other magazines in their coverage of whole grains. "Over 13 million people read these four magazines every month," said Cynthia Harriman, Director of Food and Nutrition Strategies for Oldways and the Whole Grains Council. "By making a third or more of the grains pictured and described in their articles and recipes *whole* grains, they are having a profound effect in making whole grains the norm."
- **The price gap between whole grains and refined grains is narrowing,** reducing a barrier for many families in the current recession. An in-depth study presented by Lisa Mancino of USDA's Economic Research Service reported that, although whole grains still cost more than refined grains, the gap is shrinking steadily. A product-by-product supermarket survey carried out by the Whole Grains Council and unveiled at the conference provided a companion snapshot of current pricing differentials, with some categories (notably cereals) now proving to be *less* expensive than their refined cousins.



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- **The Whole Grain Stamp is used on 2,500 products in seven countries.** Consumers find this packaging symbol to be a trusted and convenient way to know which foods contain significant amounts of whole grain. “Increasingly, consumers email us asking us why certain products *don’t* have the Whole Grain Stamp,” reported WGC Program Manager Kara Berrini. “The Stamp makes shoppers feel more confident they’re getting the whole grain their families need.”

Throughout the conference, which attracted government policymakers, health professionals, and industry, the emphasis was on progress through cooperation, coordination, and action among national decision-makers from all three groups. “When manufacturers create delicious whole grain products, government policies support them, and the health/non-profit sector popularizes them with creative and innovative programs, we’ve learned that we *can* move the consumer needle toward enjoying healthier foods like whole grains,” concluded Oldways President K. Dun Gifford.

Please contact Alison Clancy (aclancy@oldwayspt.org or 617-896-4888) for more information, including copies of all data and reports, and video clips or photos from the conference.

Oldways is a non-profit consumer advocacy group changing the way people eat through positive and practical programs grounded in science and tradition. The Whole Grains Council (WGC) is an Oldways program working to increase consumption of whole grains for better health. The WGC’s many initiatives help consumers to find whole grain foods and understand their health benefits; help manufacturers and restaurants to create delicious whole grain foods; and help the media to write accurate, compelling stories about whole grains. You can learn more about both at oldwayspt.org and at wholegrainscouncil.org