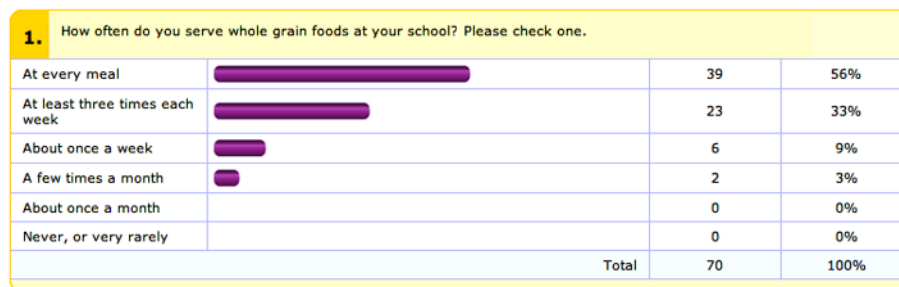


# WHOLE GRAINS COUNCIL SCHOOL FOOD SURVEY

The Whole Grains Council is conducting an ongoing survey of school foodservice directors, to assess attitudes toward whole grains and implementation of them in school cafeterias. Our pilot survey group (March 16 – April 15, 2009), furnished us with preliminary data from our first seventy school foodservice professionals. Read on, to enjoy an interesting snapshot of whole grains in schools.

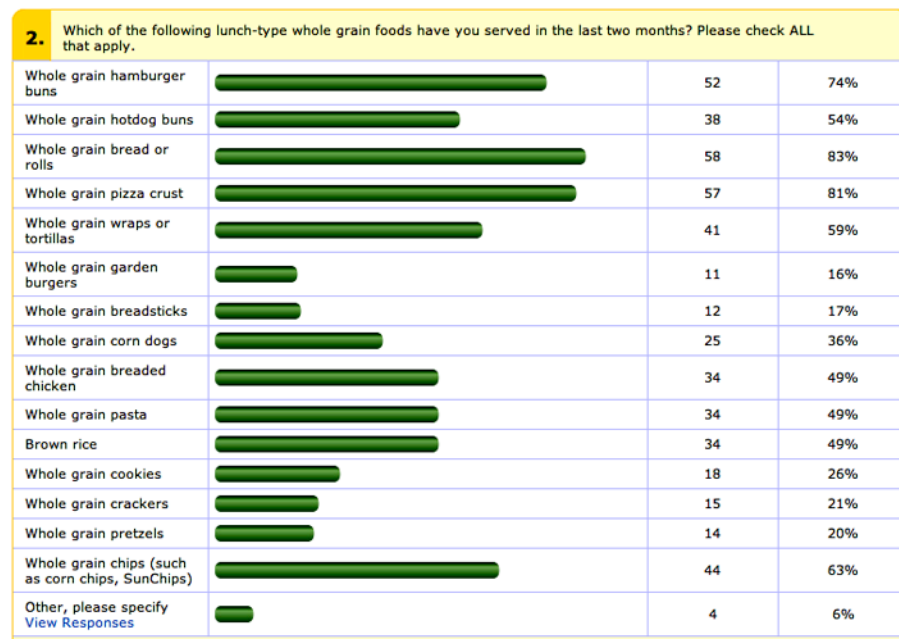
## Question 1: How often do you serve whole grains in your school?

Whole grains are not yet required at schools, but a great many schools have decided not to wait for school requirements to change; they're making sure their kids get more whole grains today. We found that the majority of our early responders serve whole grains at every meal.



## Questions 2 and 3: What kinds of whole grain foods do you serve?

We divided our query into lunch-type foods and breakfast-type foods, to focus in more clearly on the types of foods that schools serve most often. It was no surprise to learn that hamburger buns, bread, and pizza crust were most popular at lunch, with cold cereals and granola bars leading the pack for breakfast.



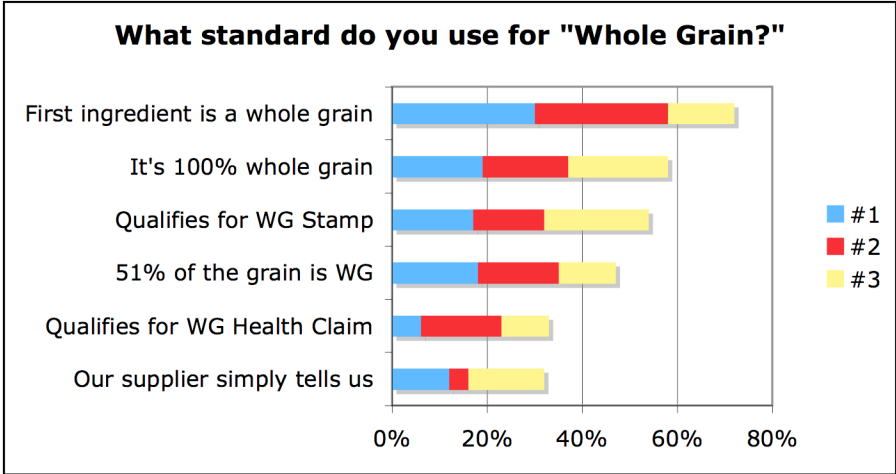
3. Which of the following breakfast-type whole grain foods have you served in the last two months? Please check ALL that apply.			
Whole grain muffins		17	25%
Whole grain English muffins		17	25%
Whole grain cold cereals		60	87%
Oatmeal (including instant)		34	49%
Whole grain hot cereals (other than oatmeal)		5	7%
Whole grain toaster pastries (such as PopTarts)		23	33%
Whole grain pastries (Danish, croissants, etc.)		5	7%
Whole grain granola bars or breakfast bars		38	55%
Other, please specify <a href="#">View Responses</a>		10	14%

Other foods mentioned by respondents included:

- various composed whole grain salads
- whole wheat dinner rolls
- whole grain pancakes, waffle sticks, and French toast sticks
- whole wheat bagels
- graham crackers

**Question 4: But what IS a whole grain?**

Since there is as yet no requirement to serve whole grains in schools, there is also no clear, universal definition of when a food qualifies as “whole grain.” So next we asked our school foodservice directors to tell us, *What standard(s) do you use for deciding a food “is whole grain?” Rank the standard you use most often as “1” then number any others you use, in order. Check “Don’t Use” if you never use that standard.*

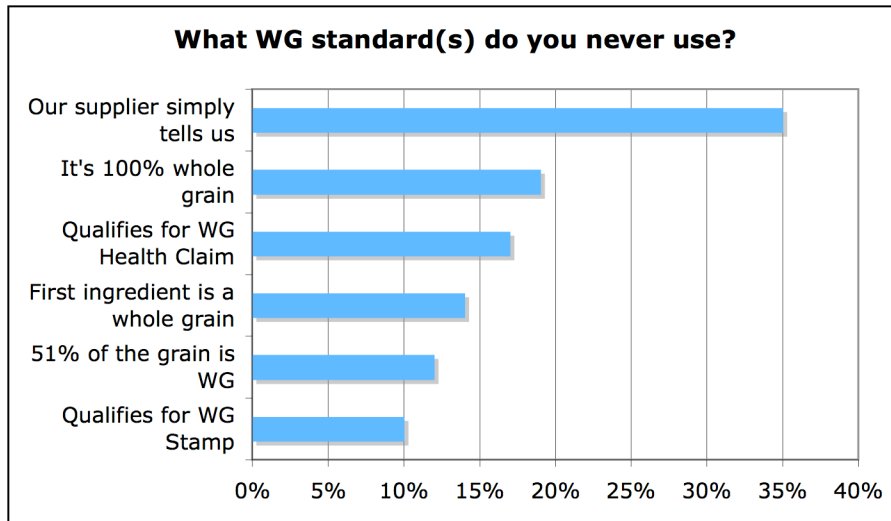


We asked them to rank their choices in order, then focused on their #1, #2 and #3 answers, as shown in the chart above.

Almost as interesting as learning which standards these school foodservice directors used, was learning which approaches they did *not* use. The least popular choice was simply believing the

supplier. 35% said they never used this approach, while another 34% placed this approach as their 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> choice.

We were pleased to see the Whole Grain Stamp place third, overall, as a standard for choosing whole grain foods, and equally pleased to see that the Whole Grain Stamp was cited *least* often as a standard that they “don’t use.”

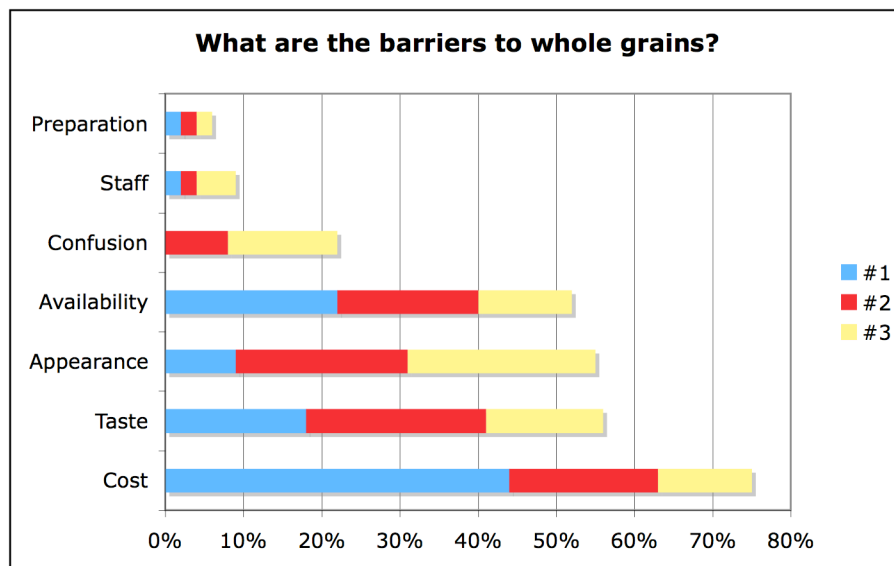


#### Question 5: What are the barriers to whole grains?

Anecdotally, we had heard many reasons for why whole grains might not be served at every meal – or ever, at some schools. We picked six of the reasons we had heard most often, and asked respondents, *What do you see as the barriers to serving more whole grains? Please rate these in order, where 1 is the toughest barrier for you to overcome. Check "not a barrier" if you feel this point is a non-issue at your school.*

The six potential barriers that we asked about were:

- **Cost – whole grains are more expensive.**  
Schools are on very tight budgets, and every penny in one product turns into millions.
- **Taste – our kids aren’t yet used to the stronger taste.**  
If new foods increase plate waste, or reduce participation, they can be counter-productive.
- **Appearance – they’re darker; our kids won’t try them.**  
Has the availability of white wheat helped with this issue?
- **Availability – hard to find the whole grain foods we need.**  
Schools deal with certain distributors, and put out bids in advance. Are the foods there?
- **Preparation – takes more time and labor.**  
Many schools don’t have kitchens or dishwashers, and need pre-prepared foods.
- **Staff – our staff resist changing to whole grains.**  
We’d heard this cited as a barrier, but were pleased to find it was not a major factor.
- **Confusion – we’re not sure which foods ARE whole grain.**  
You can’t serve more whole grains if you don’t know what a whole grain *is*.



As you can see in the chart above, cost was the top barrier cited individually with 44% saying it was the toughest barrier to overcome, and 75% of school foodservice directors citing cost as one of their top three barriers. Taste, appearance, and availability also factored large, with a majority citing these three as one of the top three barriers to serving more whole grains. Specifying and preparing whole grains seem to be the least of schools' worries.

#### Question 6: How have you overcome barriers like these?

School foodservice directors are a plucky bunch, not given to folding under pressure. (Think about it. If you've tried to get your own kids to eat good food at home, imagine doing it day after day with thousands of kids. It takes a certain resolute personality!)

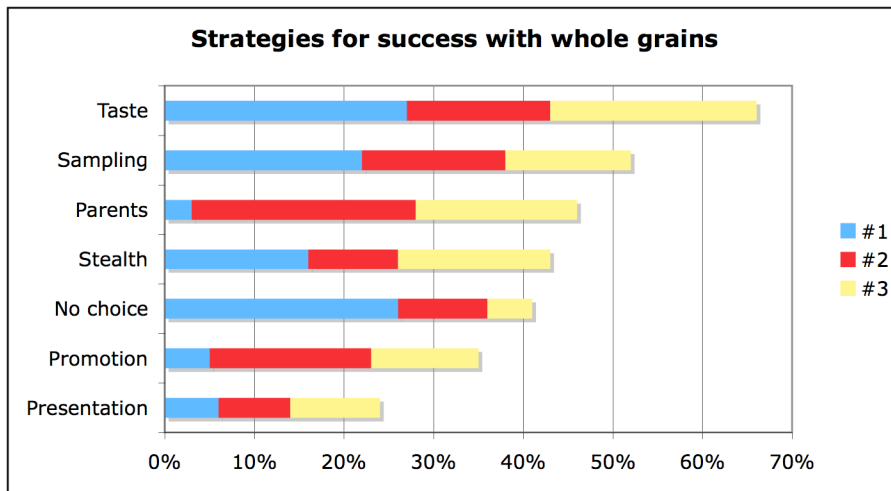
We wanted to learn more about the strategies school foodservice directors use for whole grain success, so we asked, *What has led to success with whole grains, at your school? Please rank these in order, where 1 is the most successful approach you've found. If you've never tried a particular approach, mark it "don't use."*

The six success strategies were:

- **Taste** – we make sure everything is delicious.
- **Stealth** – we hide whole grains and don't tell the kids.
- **Sampling** – we let kids try new foods without risk.
- **Promotion** – we educate and get the kids excited.
- **No choice** – we just serve 'em, with no other option.
- **Parents** – we do wellness programs, newsletters, etc.
- **Presentation** – we use special displays in the lunch line.

The most surprising finding from this question was that 29% of our early responders said that they never use "stealth" to sneak whole grains into kids' tummies. On reflection, however, this

may be related to the fact that so many schools are not set up to cook from scratch. This makes it difficult to add oatmeal to a meatloaf, or bury whole grain pasta in a casserole.



Taste is always the number one factor in consumer satisfaction, whether foods are being eaten at home, at a restaurant or in a school cafeteria. “Hold your nose and eat it; it’s good for you!” rarely works with adults, let alone kids, so these wise school foodservice professionals know the burden is on them to make whole grains simply taste good. Then, the recipe for success was to add a little sampling, so the kids can discover the good taste without blowing all their lunch money on an unknown – and get the parents involved.

Schools that send home newsletters with a “food of the month” and other nutrition tips, for instance, find it helps when new foods encountered at school get reinforced at home. This turns out to be a two-way street. Parents who want their kids to eat healthier may be tired of always being the ones to introduce new tastes; knowing the foods for which the schools have already done the groundwork helps!






**Question 7: How much more would you pay for whole grains?**

Since we suspected cost would be a major barrier to adoption of whole grains, we included a question fine-tuning respondents’ attitudes to the cost issue, by asking, *How much more are you willing to pay for whole grains? You get what you pay for, generally, and whole grains include two to three times the nutrients of refined grains. Does this added value justify paying more? Check the one answer that best describes your position.*

Some respondents felt it was important to qualify their answer on this question:

- *I would pay extra, if a product is exceptional and kids like it.*
- *Hard to pay 1 cent more, but we would still try.*
- *It would depend on how it affected the menu cost.*
- *It depends on the popularity of the item and the taste profile.*
- *Cost is not considered.*

**7.** How much more are you willing to pay for whole grains? You get what you pay for, generally, and whole grains include two to three times the nutrients of refined grains. Does this added value justify paying more? Check the one answer that best describes your position.

I cannot pay even a penny more for whole grains.		17	25%
I would pay up to 5% more for whole grains.		37	54%
I would pay up to 10% more for whole grains.		8	12%
I would pay up to 15% more for whole grains.		1	1%
Other, please specify <a href="#">View Responses</a>		6	9%
Total		69	100%

As the responses above show, the majority of respondents were willing to pay a small premium for whole grains, with most answering that they'd be willing to pay 5% extra for whole grain foods. In light of budgeting reality at all schools, this willingness seems to indicate the high esteem in which school foodservice directors hold whole grains.

That said, 25% say they cannot pay even a penny extra for whole grains, let alone the large premiums charged for some products. One regional food coop buyer told us a few years ago that she paid 6¢ each for white hamburger buns, but that her supplier wanted 15¢ for whole wheat buns – and insisted on selling them only in 8-packs, which added hugely to labor costs and waste. On the other hand, one of our respondents stated, “We pay 1-2% extra” and many larger districts have told us that their bargaining power allows them to insist on price parity between refined and whole grain foods.

### Question 8: How can manufacturers help?

Since the Whole Grains Council works regularly with over 200 manufacturers of whole grain products, we feel we're in an ideal position to act as messenger between the schools and food companies. With this in mind, we asked, *What could manufacturers do to help you serve more whole grains? We are gathering input from schools which we will pass on to manufacturers of breads, pizzas, cereals, and other grain products. This is your chance to give them as many constructive suggestions as you can think of – or to add any other comments.*

We got an earful with this question; more than half of our early respondents took the time to write extra comments. “Make it taste good, look appealing and not be too expensive so we can afford to serve it,” was a comment that summed up the general feeling. For ease of review, we've grouped all comments by category and listed them here.

### Cost and availability of whole grains

- *We have had more pizzas offered in the past year with whole grain crusts but price has prohibited us from purchasing most of them. We need more WG pasta choices at affordable pricing and also offered by USDA [Commodity Program].*
- *Having less expensive whole grain options would go a long way to our serving more. Budgets are so tight and we are being hit on all sides with price increases that we cannot pass along.*
- *Run rebates for whole grain items to counteract the high cost per case.*
- *They need to make more whole grain foods and not charge a lot more for them.*
- *Reduce the costs of the product.*
- *Cost is an issue. Limit production on white flour items.*
- *More choices and ample supply.*

- *Whole grain PopTarts are almost double [the cost of] regular. I think the manufacturers should keep the cost down so we can offer more whole grains.*
- *Make them cost effective*
- *Make them tasty and affordable. With the market like it is and school nutrition budgets ever tighter, we need to change the culture so that whole grains are the first choice and manufacturers don't have to take [the bran and germ] out to put them back in!*

### **Product quality, taste, and appearance**

- *Don't give schools the "bottom of the barrel" product—our kids deserve better and if we are going to test the product our time needs to be used wisely.*
- *Basically we need more choices that are appealing to children.*
- *Better tasting products. Products that hold better on a hot line.*
- *Make a variety of items available. Need white appearance.*
- *Keep whole grain "blended" items to help kids transition to heartier flavor.*
- *Kids should not be able to detect the grain in the mouthfeel. "Gritty" product is not well accepted by them.*
- *We need breadsticks that taste good and are at least 51% whole grain. We need a pizza crust that holds and ships well.*
- *Keep the flavor good! Offer more whole grain and less that is not.*
- *I would like to see more of the pizza (especially the stuffed crust) in whole grains. We are a small school, but the children do like the whole grain rolls - maybe a smaller type ready-to-serve roll in whole grain. Whole grain bagels are hard to find with my distributors.*
- *Some of the whole grain in pizza crust is not very tasty*
- *Make sure that flavor and appearance are not sacrificed to add whole grains. If the food still tastes good, our students will eat it, and not care whether it contains whole grains or not.*
- *Just keep the taste good; kids are getting used to it.*
- *I think experience has taught us all that you can't put [whole grain] in everything, and certainly not all at once. It has to taste good. Market to/educate parents so kids experience it at home. Schools support good eating habits—difficult to change alone.*

### **Labeling and policy issues**

- *Be clear on % whole grain used.*
- *Label the food as "whole grain"...sometimes the battle is knowing if the food qualifies as a whole grain item.*
- *Make the servings = 1 bread serving increments, as it pertains to CN labeling for school foods; for whole grain cereals, please keep sugars natural - not HFCS - we can't use if HFCS is used (that goes for all whole grain foods for that matter, not just breakfast cereals).*
- *Make this a mandatory requirement!*
- *What is the standard? 50 or 51% (policy issue).*

We'd like to end with this final heart-felt message from one school foodservice director:

*Try to keep the food costs down so that the schools can afford to feed the students the proper foods they are supposed to get. The industry needs to do whatever they can to get the food to the students to help fight the obesity problem we have in the U.S. They need to set an example that they care for the children. Help the schools out. Pass the extra cost on to the fast food chains that are not helping with the problem of obesity. We need to start at the base roots and that is at school. Many students depend on the school lunch program for their main meal for the day. It needs to be as nutritious as possible.*

### **About our Early Responders**

We launched the Whole Grains Council School Food Survey on March 16, 2009. From that date until March 31, seventy early respondents completed the survey. Because our respondents were self-selected and this survey does not purport to be a scientific sample, we would like to share the demographics of our respondents.

States represented:	26	
Size of school:	11%	serve fewer than 50 meals daily
	46%	serve 500 to 2,500 meals daily
	26%	serve 2,500 to 10,000 meals daily
	10%	serve 10,000 to 50,000 meals daily
	3%	serve 50,000 to 150,000 meals daily
	4%	serve more than 150,000 meals daily
Meals served	100%	serve lunch
	90%	serve breakfast
	41%	serve snacks, including after-school programs
Grade levels served	68%	Preschool or HeadStart
	94%	Elementary (roughly K-5)
	94%	Middle School (roughly 6-8)
	93%	High School (roughly 9-12)
	0%	College or University
Public vs. Private	90%	Public School
	10%	Private School

We plan to keep this survey open to log ongoing changes in attitudes to whole grains. If you are a school foodservice director and would like to register your views on our survey, please visit <http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB228X4GDQ9W9>

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