



A consortium of industry, scientists, chefs and Oldways to increase consumption of whole grains to provide better health for all consumers

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Patricia N. Daniels
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Food and Nutrition Service, USDA
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 528
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

October 3, 2006

Docket ID 0584-AD77, WIC Food Packages Rule

Dear Ms. Daniels,

The Whole Grains Council is a non-profit consumer-advocacy group working with scientists, chefs and industry to promote increased consumption of whole grains for better health.

We support the proposal of USDA/FNS to add whole grains to the WIC program, and applaud FNS for recognizing the health benefits of whole grains. Your organization's proposed rules for Revisions in the WIC Food Packages and the IOM report *WIC Food Package: Time for a Change* represent important first steps toward the goal of increasing whole grain consumption for at-risk women and children.

In the following pages we are offering suggestions for moving to the next step, by

1. Proposing a definition of whole grain that contributes dietarily significant amounts of whole grains, yet is more inclusive of the types of foods that can be easily purchased and will be readily eaten.
2. Suggesting other foods that should be considered for inclusion with those qualifying for use in the WIC program.
3. Urging that the allowance for bread or other grains, for women, be at least equal to that required for children.
4. Expressing concerns about a possible mismatch between voucher amounts and common packaging sizes.
5. Offering the help of the Whole Grains Council and the Whole Grain Stamp in working with local WIC offices to successfully implement the new WIC regulations.

The Whole Grains Council appreciates the opportunity to provide input as FNS works toward final regulations, and we stand ready to meet with your agency, to testify, or to otherwise assist in this process in any way that may be helpful.

Sincerely,

Jeff Dahlberg
Chairman, Whole Grains Council

The Whole Grains Council (WGC) has the following comments on the proposed rules for revision of the WIC food packages:

1. **Whole grains should be defined more broadly.**

This proposal generally requires that foods qualify for the Whole Grain Health Claim in order to be included, which means that foods must contain at least 51% whole grain by total weight, and the whole grains used must have a fiber content of at least 11%, and certain maximum fat levels.

The Whole Grains Council instead supports a standard of 8 grams of whole grain per serving. 8 grams, equal to half a minimum MyPyramid / Dietary Guidelines serving, represents a dietarily significant amount of whole grain, and would offer more flexibility to WIC offices in carrying out their mission.

We support the 8 gram standard for the following reasons:

A. The IOM Report is Unclear. Although the proposal is based on the IOM report *WIC Food Package: Time for a Change*, the proposal and the IOM report differ in their recommendations for cereal and bread (although they are consistent on the matter of other whole grains):

	IOM Report	WIC Proposal
Cereal Section 4-3 IOM	<p>“Ready-to-eat cereals and hot cereals ... must be <i>whole grain</i> (e.g., a minimum of 51% of the grain in the product must be whole grains) and conform to other specifications (e.g., must be iron-fortified, must not exceed added sugars limitations.)” <i>Section 4-3</i></p> <p>“...contain a minimum of 51% whole grains—a minimum of 51% of the grains in the product must be whole grains—using dietary fiber as the indicator.” <i>Table B-1</i></p>	<p>“...cereals must meet labeling requirements for making a health claim as a “whole grain food with moderate fat content... (e.g., must contain a minimum of 51% whole grains)... [and] a minimum of 28mg iron per 100g ... and not more than 21.2g of sucrose and other sugars per 100g of dry cereal.” <i>Table 4</i></p>
Bread Section 4-3 IOM	<p>“Bread must conform to FDA standard of identity for whole wheat bread (i.e., a minimum of 51% of the grain in the product must be whole grains). Or Bread must meet labeling requirements for making a health claim as a “whole-grain food with moderate fat content” (i.e., a minimum of 51% of the grain in the product must be whole grains).” <i>Section 4-3</i></p> <p>“...contain a minimum of 51% whole grains—a minimum of 51% of the grains in the product must be whole grains—using dietary fiber as a marker.” <i>Table B-1</i></p>	<p>“...any bread that conforms to the ... FDA standard of identity for whole grain bread as defined by 21 CFR 136.180 or that meets labeling requirements for making a health claim as a “whole grain food with moderate fat content”... (e.g., must contain a minimum of 51% whole grains).” <i>Table 4</i></p>
Other whole grains	<p>“Brown rice, bulgur, oatmeal, barley; without added sugars, fats, oils, or salt; ... soft corn or whole wheat tortillas without added fats or oils... Soft corn or whole wheat tortillas without added fats or oils could be allowed.” <i>Section 4-3. Table B-1 is virtually identical.</i></p>	<p>“...brown rice, bulgur, oatmeal, and whole-grain barley without added sugars, fats, oils, or salt;... soft corn or whole wheat tortillas without added fats or oils...” <i>Table 4</i></p>

The IOM report, while referring to the FDA whole grain health claim, actually advocates using the FSIS standard, which authorizes as whole grain those foods where *51% of the grain* is whole grain (and at least 8g of whole grain are present). The WIC proposal, in contrast, advocates the FDA health-claim standard, which requires that *51% of the total weight* of the product must be whole grain.

These are two very different standards, with very different implications for the available foods in the WIC program.

For breads, both the IOM report and the WIC proposal send a few additional unclear mixed signals.

- The FDA standard of identity for whole wheat bread (21 CFR 136.180) requires all of the grain in the bread to be whole grain, not 51%, as stated by IOM.
- 21 CFR 136.180 is a standard for whole *wheat* bread, not whole *grain* as stated in the WIC proposal. It does not allow for grains other than wheat to be used. There is no standard of identity for whole *grain* bread.

B. The Whole Grains Health Claim has Severe Limitations for Whole Grain Foods in WIC.

The Whole Grains Council does not recommend that FNS use the standard of the Whole Grain Health Claim. The Whole Grain Health Claim, though ground-breaking at the time it was introduced in 1999, has limitations that would seriously affect the flexibility of WIC. Perpetuating the limitations of this standard by using it as the foundation for additional programs like WIC would be unfortunate for two important reasons:

1. **It discriminates against high-moisture foods.** Requiring 51% of total weight to be whole grain sets an uneven playing field for breads and other moist foods. Since breads usually contain about 40% moisture, the proposed WIC definition mandates that around 51/60 of the dry ingredients be whole grain, for bread – while cereals with a much lower dry-weight proportion of whole grain would qualify.
2. **It discriminates against lower-fiber grains.** The Whole Grain Health claim requires foods to prove that they contain at least 51% whole grain by the presence of a certain level of fiber in the whole grain. This level is set at 11%; therefore, foods must have an overall fiber level of at least 5.6% (51% x 11%) to qualify for the Whole Grain Health Claim.

Grains vary widely in fiber content. Most varieties of wheat have around 12.2% fiber and barley generally has 17% fiber or more. But many popular and healthy grains have *less* than 11% fiber, too. Brown rice has around 3.5% fiber, and corn around 7.3%. *[All fiber values from SR 19.]*

This means that, in order to qualify for the Whole Grain Health Claim, foods must often contain much more than 51% of their weight as whole grain. For example, a 30g RACC of breakfast cereal would need to have 1.7g of fiber to qualify for the Whole Grain Health Claim. Here are how different grains would stack up:

Grain	Percent fiber in this grain	Grams of grain which produce 1.7g fiber	% of 30g RACC this amount represents
Barley	17.3%	9.8 grams	33%
Wheat	12.2%	13.9 grams	46%
Oats	10.6%	16.0 grams	53%
Corn	7.3%	23.3 grams	78%
Brown Rice	3.5%	48.6 grams	162%

As the table above shows, barley and wheat easily qualify for the Whole Grain Health Claim when they make up 51% of the total weight of a product. Oats can squeak by, if 53% of the

product is oats rather than 51%. A cereal must contain 78% whole cornmeal to qualify for the Health Claim, and brown rice can never qualify, even if 100% of the food's ingredients are brown rice.

In 1999, it was not yet widely accepted that whole grains offer many other health benefits beyond fiber – and that those benefits are also found in lower-fiber grains like corn and rice. Today we know better, and we realize that any standard using fiber as a compliance marker should take into consideration the different fiber levels of each grain.

Rice and corn are widely used grains in the cereal industry, and any standard adopted for WIC should give manufacturers incentive to use whole grain corn and brown rice. The Whole Grain Health claim does not provide that incentive, as it largely rules out the use of corn and rice. Requiring instead that each product contribute a dietarily-significant 8g of whole grain (half a minimum “MyPyramid” serving) treats all grains and all food-types fairly and equally.

C. An Alternate Standard: Half a Serving of Whole Grain. The Whole Grains Council believes that all foods offering at least 8g of whole grain per labeled serving should be considered “whole grain” for the purposes of the WIC program. This means that each food would provide a dietarily-significant amount of whole grain, equal to half a minimum serving under the Dietary Guidelines.

We urge this definition of whole grain, for several reasons.

1. Studies indicating the nutritional benefits of whole grain show that these benefits arise from eating specific amounts of whole grain. To the best of our knowledge, no study has ever shown health benefits from eating foods with a certain percentage of whole grain.
2. Many WIC participants may not be accustomed to the fuller taste of whole grains, and foods that are significantly but not totally made with whole grains are more likely to actually be purchased and eaten. We agree with the Dietary Guidelines Advisory committee report that recommended this approach, saying “mixed grain products are often appealing to consumers who do not choose to eat 100 percent whole grains.”
3. This reality-based approach is consistent with other requirements in the WIC proposal. For example, the WIC proposal does *not* require that participants purchase only skim (no-fat) milk, even though skim milk has all the benefits of other milks and less saturated fat. Instead, the proposal calls for fat-reduced milk (2% or less fat) for older toddlers and mothers – because many people simply will not drink skim milk. Requiring that whole grain foods be made almost entirely with whole grains is like requiring skim milk for everyone.
4. USDA/FSIS has incorporated the 8g standard into its guidance for labeling whole grains. In its October 14, 2005 Interim Policy Guidance, FSIS calls for products labeled whole grain to contain a significant amount of whole grain, and goes on to say, “A significant amount of whole grain would be at least a one-half ounce equivalent of whole grain ingredient, i.e., at least 8 grams of dry whole grain ingredient, per labeled serving and per reference amount customarily consumed.”
5. FDA encourages the use of gram descriptions on whole grain packaging, and the Whole Grains Council's Whole Grain Stamp also uses this approach. Using a threshold of 8g would make it easier for states to determine eligible products, as there is nothing on packaging that tells if a product is 51% whole grain.

While we support the 8g standard, we also support foods with higher whole grain content. The Whole Grains Council recommends that local WIC programs include a range of whole grain food choices in their allowed product lists, from those with 8g of whole grain content per serving to those that are 100% whole grain. This approach will allow WIC participants to start their transition to whole grains at a level that is comfortable and appropriate for them, while allowing for increased acceptance of whole grain flavor and texture over the coming years.

2. **A wider range of foods should be allowed, including all commonly-accepted whole grains and whole grain pasta. Reasonable amounts of healthy fats should be allowed in all whole grain foods.**

a. Allow all grains. The Whole Grains Council supports the proposed inclusion of brown rice, barley, bulgur and tortillas as alternatives to bread. We also urge the inclusion of all other grains widely recognized as whole grains by the U.S. government and by the American Association of Cereal Chemists, as follows:

All members of the Poaceae (or Gramineous) family including but not limited to:
Wheat and bulgur wheat, including spelt, emmer, faro, einkorn, kamut and durum; rice; barley; corn (including popcorn); rye; oats; millet; sorghum; teff; and triticale.

Pseudocereals normally included as grains:
Buckwheat; amaranth; quinoa; and wild rice.

Although some of these grains are not readily available in supermarkets today, it is important to recognize that WIC regulations are not likely to change again for many years, during which period different grains may grow in prominence, especially as different ethnic populations create demand for them.

b. Include more foods. We also urge the inclusion of whole grain pasta as another nutritious and more available alternative.

Corn and whole grain tortillas are an excellent addition, given that the proportion of Hispanics in the WIC program has grown from 23% to 39% in the twelve years from 1992 to 2004. However, we suggest two modifications in this alternative.

- First, we support the wording “whole grain” tortillas instead of whole wheat, to include tortillas that may also include whole grains other than wheat.
- Second, we urge FNS to examine the availability of “whole wheat tortillas without added fats or oils.” Although corn, with its higher inherent level of lipids, can be made into tortillas without adding other fats or oils, it is our observation that virtually all commercial tortillas made with grains other than corn must usually have some added fat. In final rulemaking, we would favor setting fat limits similar to those set for WIC breads and cereals.

c. Allow healthy fats in all whole grain foods. A reasonable amount of healthy fats should also be allowed in grain side dishes. Limitations of saturated fats and trans fats similar to those proposed for breads and cereals should be appropriate, setting a uniform fat standard for all whole grain foods in the WIC food packages.

3. **Women should be allowed at least as much bread (or alternatives) as children.**

Under this proposal, children would receive 2 pounds of whole grain bread, tortillas or side grains per month. Pregnant and nursing mothers would receive 1 pound of bread, tortillas or side grains per month, while post-partum mothers would receive none. Both mothers and children would receive 36 ounces of whole grain cereal.

We see no reason why adults should get only half the bread of children (or none), when their nutritional needs are greater. Other than juice for non-nursing mothers, all other amounts of all

other foods in the WIC proposal stay the same or increase for women as compared to children. While we are mindful of the need to be cost-neutral, we urge that 2 pounds of bread or alternative also be provided for women.

4. Amounts allowed should harmonize with available package sizes.

Care must be taken to ensure that a wide variety of qualifying foods are available in all supermarkets frequented by WIC participants, even if those markets have limited selection. We are concerned that some amounts in the WIC proposal may not easily correspond to typical package sizes in supermarkets. If sizes don't correspond to allowances, participants will have a limited supply of choices, and may end up with smaller amounts of healthy foods by, for instance, having to use a two-pound bread voucher for a 24 oz. loaf of bread. Bread, in fact, has the biggest potential mismatch problem.

Bread. Most whole grain loaves are heavier than "white bread" loaves. According to figures from Interstate Bakeries, 56% of 100% whole wheat/whole grain loaves are sold in a 24 oz loaf and 26% are sold in a 20 oz loaf. In many markets, a mother may not be able to buy *any* whole grain bread with a one-pound voucher.

Tortillas. Popular brand tortillas come in a variety of package sizes, including 10 pcs./11.5oz, 10 pcs 17.5 oz, 8 pcs/20 oz, 8 pcs/17 oz., 8 pcs/16 oz., 12 pcs/12 oz. We don't see a problem in this category.

Brown Rice. Rice is typically sold in 28 oz sacks or 14 oz boxes. A one-pound limit would restrict WIC participants to the small boxes, which generally cost much more per ounce. (A local market sells 28 oz for \$1.69 and 14 oz. of instant brown rice for \$1.99.)

Oatmeal. Oatmeal is allowed both as a "bread alternative" and as a hot cereal. Rolled oats are almost universally sold in cardboard cylinders of 18 oz or 42 oz. Instant oats (without sugar) are sold in a box of 12 packets weighing 11.8 oz. Oatmeal would be difficult to purchase with the bread allowance, but two 18-oz cylinders would optimize the cereal allowance of 36 oz.

Cereals. RTE cereals come in a many sizes, including 12, 15, 18, 20, and 24 oz boxes. It would be fairly easy to combine sizes and come close to optimizing the 36 oz allowance.

Whole Grain Pasta. Earlier we urged the inclusion of whole grain pasta. Most pasta is sold in 1 pound packages, and would fit easily into a 1- or 2-pound bread-alternative allowance.

5. The Whole Grain Stamp can help make WIC a success.

State WIC offices are faced with an arduous task in determining which whole grain foods can be included on their approved lists. Today, over 800 products use the Whole Grain Stamp to alert consumers that they contain at least a half serving (8g) of whole grain content. Although the Stamp only controls for whole grain content and does not judge other variables like fat or sugar content, it can be an extremely useful time-saver for focusing in on products offering a significant amount of whole grains. The Whole Grains Council's Stamp program can help reduce the burden of local WIC offices as they move forward with the new WIC regulations.

We also believe that, if many of the foods included in the WIC program display the Whole Grain Stamp, WIC participants will become more aware of this increasingly-popular symbol, and may be motivated to look for the Stamp when they are buying breads, cereals and other grain foods with their own money. In this way, the healthy-eating message delivered by the WIC program is multiplied many times over.

We look forward to working with FNS in any way possible to help with the success of the implementation of whole grains into this important program.