



Partial to whole grains

Discovering a slew of new whole grain products

BY NICK ROSKELLY

Healthier eating trends are reshaping the food industry and whole grain formulations are a leading force in the change.

Even a casual observer of food trends knows that whole grains are everywhere. Every major bread maker offers a whole grain variety, and smaller craft bakeries provide consumers with specific whole grain choices. Snack food companies across the category have invested resources to develop whole grain variations of chips and crackers that still meet consumer taste expectations. And confectioners aren't far behind with whole grain pie crusts and inclusions for cakes and candy bars.

In January, the Whole Grains Council reported that more than 1,000 food packages don the Whole Grain Stamp, an eye-catching black and gold symbol created by the Council to help consumers quickly and easily find whole grain products.

Products must contain a half serving (8 grams) or more of whole

grains per serving, in order to qualify for the Whole Grain Stamp. In fact, 76 percent of the products currently using the Stamp contain a full serving or more of whole grains. In addition to entrées, breads and snacks, Stamped products available nationwide also

include pasta, cereals, tortillas, cookies, waffles, soups, side dishes and crackers.

On the shelf

Rice products, which lend themselves well to new whole grain formulations, have experienced a surge of new whole grain varieties.

Uncle Ben's introduced three varieties of Ready Whole Grain Medley products: Vegetable Harvest, Brown & Wild and Santa Fe. Each pouch is

made with 100 percent whole grains and natural flavors, and is ready to serve in 90 seconds.

Each cup serving contains about three servings of whole grains — meeting the daily USDA Dietary Guidelines recommendation. The three new Ready Whole Grain Medley products can be used as a side dish to a mid-week meal on the

go, or mixed up in a skillet with other healthy foods such as vegetables, chicken or fish to create a delicious stir-fry.

From the snack category, Snyder's of Hanover introduced a line of multi grain chips and pretzels. The MultiGrain line of snacks contain up to 20 grams of whole grains per serving and zero grams of trans fat. In all, the new line includes 13 varieties of sunflower chips, tortilla chips, pretzels and cheese snacks.

Snyder's of Hanover MultiGrain Tortilla Chips, for example, is all natural with no trans fats, and contains 33 percent less fat than regular tortilla chips.

The newly revised dietary guidelines recommend three to five servings of whole grains daily. Snyder's of Hanover's new MultiGrain Tortilla Chips provide 8 grams of whole grains per 1-ounce serving (about 15 chips).

Whole grains in schools

Tyson Foodservice developed a whole grain product for its chicken nuggets in school lunch programs. The product — Whole Grain Chicken Nuggets — is made with Ultragrain from ConAgra Food Ingredients. Ultragrain is an all-natural whole-wheat flour that combines the nutritional benefits of whole grains with a taste and texture similar to traditional refined white flour products.

"The core reason to use Ultragrain in our products was nutrition," says

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Barbara Jirka, marketing manager for Tyson Foodservice. "Customers were wanting products that met the new dietary guidelines on increased fiber. This product was one that met both the nutrition and taste profile that we needed."

With the finicky tastes of children to overcome, Tyson made certain Ultragrain would perform properly.

"We have a process with our school products called Kid-tested, Kid-approved," says Jirka. "It's a proprietary process Tyson uses to test its school products with school children."

"It has to reach an 80 percent or greater approval rating with students in order to earn the Kid-tested, Kid-approved seal. The whole grain nugget had a 96 percent approval rating for taste."

The company tested several types of whole grain products and batter breadings. Researchers wanted to see how long the product would hold; if it would dry out, would it have graininess and what the ultimate flavor was like.

"In foodservice, we don't always have optimum conditions and this whole grain product really passed the test," Jirka. "And although the foodservice director and the parents being the gatekeepers want whole

grain, it's the kids that really have to approve the taste of it."

Ultragrain helped Tyson reach its goal because of its texture and taste. As Jirka points out, taste is pivotal for success even in a healthier alternative.

"It's not a nutritious product if the kids don't eat it," she says.

On the breakfast side of school foodservice programs, Ralcorp Frozen Bakery Products used Ultragrain to develop a new line of pancakes and waffles. The product will be available in school foodservice initially but will branch into other areas of foodservice such as hospitals and colleges/universities.

"We're one of the experts in pancakes and waffles and the two items naturally lend themselves to whole grain formulas," says Alison Kovaleski, foodservice marketing manager of Ralcorp Frozen Bakery Products. "And so the Ultragrain flour helped us make those products tasty as well as nutritious. They are much more palatable."

The No. 1 reason for developing the products was that customers were requesting it. Foodservice directors started indicating they needed to provide whole grain options for kids. Once the demand



EAT 48g OR MORE OF WHOLE GRAINS DAILY



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More than 1,000 food packages use the Whole Grain Stamp, which helps consumers identify whole grain products. The Stamp details a product's whole grain content in grams.

was established, Ralcorp went to work on formulations.

The product is currently rolling out nationwide, and Kovaleski sees it as being able to make a positive impact on a child's ability to learn.

"More schools are serving breakfast, and I think most schools realize that if they don't offer breakfast kids are not going to eat," says Kovaleski. "Schools realize that a lack of nutrition in the morning negatively affects [students'] performance."

From kids to adults, whole grains are finding a way into daily diets. And thanks to new formulations and technologies, consumers can actually enjoy healthier whole grain eating. ■

Whole Grain Growth 2000-2006

	Whole Grain Launches	Increase since 2000	Increase from previous year
2000	154	—	—
2001	244	58%	58%
2002	302	96%	24%
2003	386	151%	28%
2004	609	295%	58%
2005	704	357%	16%
2006	1,387	801%	97%

Source: Whole Grains Council

New product launches of foods making a "whole grain" claim have grown sharply since 2000. According to the Mintel Global New Products Database, in 2006 almost 10 times as many new whole grain products were introduced as in the year 2000.