Experts Push to Increase Whole Grain Intake Among Low-Income Mothers and Children

A new Cereal Chemistry paper describes the benefits and implications of increasing whole grains in WIC food packages, based on an expert roundtable discussion.

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EAGAN, MINNESOTA, USA, November 17, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On a brisk January day in Kentucky, 1974, the first WIC (Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) site opened its physical and metaphorical doors to foster food access among persons at key developmental stages. The number of WIC participants has since skyrocketed from 88,000 per month to more than six million per month, and 43% of children in the U.S. now receive WIC benefits. This breadth of support, especially for those at greater nutritional risk, compounds the urgency to ensure that the foods provided in this program help meet nutritional needs, such as improving whole grain intake.

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> *Amy Hope, CEO of Cereals & Grains Association*

Cereals & Grains Association, in partnership with General Mills, Inc., convened a roundtable of experts on whole grains and maternal and child health in April 2022 to discuss the benefits and potential implications of increasing whole grains in WIC food packages. CEO of Cereals & Grains Association Amy Hope comments, “Partnering with General Mills to assemble this panel of experts informed our science agenda and messaging on this topic. This collaboration is key to enriching our community in a tangible and equitable way, and our end goal is to provide information that allows consumers to make healthier choices with their diet.”

The experts’ discussion is newly reported in Cereal Chemistry by Joanne L. Slavin, Lisa M.

Sanders, and Virginia A. Stallings. Their paper highlights several of the key recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report in 2017, such as adopting a whole grain-rich definition for breakfast cereals and providing only whole grain-rich cereals in WIC food packages.

Increasing whole grain consumption is critical, as 93% of children and 100% of women in the WIC program do not meet the recommended intake of whole grains (NASEM 2017), and WIC food packages currently require only half of the breakfast cereals to be whole grain. Despite these statistics, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS) has not yet updated WIC food packages in response to the NASEM recommendations, although it is expected they will release an update soon.

Additionally, the paper suggests that adopting the definition of whole grain-rich already used in other federal feeding programs, such as the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program, will increase consistency for consumers and food manufacturers.

As noted in the NASEM report, whole grain intake in children participating in the school lunch and breakfast programs has improved since these programs required more whole grain-rich foods, so it is anticipated that similar requirements for WIC would also improve intake.
The experts raised concern about whether a requirement allowing only whole grain cereals would limit the availability of culturally relevant cereals, like corn and rice cereals, but concluded that implementing the whole grain-rich definition will better enable the inclusion of whole grain corn and rice cereals in WIC food packages.

They also discussed how a shift to all whole grain-rich cereals could possibly impact the cost of WIC food packages. While they agreed that the cost of WIC food packages may slightly increase, the potential healthcare savings that could result from increasing whole grain intake may more than offset the price increase, according to health economic research discussed at the roundtable.

This paper demonstrates the potential impact of public policy on nutrient intake in populations at greater nutritional risk, such as low-income mothers and children, emphasizing that NASEM's whole grain recommendations can help improve accessibility to nutritious food.

For further details, read the full article published in Cereal Chemistry by Cereals & Grains Association and Wiley.

Cereal Chemistry®, an international journal for grain science research since 1924, publishes high-quality papers reporting novel research and significant conceptual advances in genetics, biotechnology, composition, processing, and utilization of cereal grains (barley, maize, millet, oats, rice, rye, sorghum, triticale, and wheat), pulses (beans, lentils, peas, etc.), oil-seeds, and specialty crops (amaranth, flax, quinoa, etc.). Research that advances the fields of instrumentation, analysis, and methodology are covered, as well as utilization of grains relative

to human and animal health or nutrition.

Kyleen Russell
Cereals & Grains Association
+1 651-994-3832
krussell@scisoc.org
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