

# WHOLE NEW WORLD

It's not the same whole wheat bread of childhood anymore. Gone are the days of dark, crumbly, dry brown bread dutifully eaten but not enjoyed.

Thanks to a new technology in milling and wheat processing, whole wheat has been given a facelift, and the resulting bread products are akin to the softer, whiter breads that consumers prefer. ConAgra is leading the charge, having developed a technology that produces a finer particle size and whiter wheat flour.

The resulting ConAgra Mills product — Ultragrain — has now made its way into two venues. One is in foodservice programs in schools across the country, and the other is in Sara Lee's new Soft and Smooth Made with Whole Grain White Bread. Both the foodservice channel and the retail market debut of Ultragrain demonstrate how this newly created whole wheat flour may revolutionize the manner in which consumers embrace whole grains.

#### Technical innovations

Ultragrain was first available to the food industry in August of 2004, although ConAgra Mills began development of the product years ago, investing significant resources in the project to create milling technologies that would yield a new whole wheat flour. Compared to traditional whole wheat flour,



**CONAGRA** Ultragrain whole wheat flour opens doors for healthy baked products

Ultragrain is softer and whiter, and consumers find products that incorporate Ultragrain more acceptable in texture and taste than traditional whole wheat breads.

"ConAgra Mills has spent millions of dollars over the past several years developing Ultragrain," says Mike Veal, director of marketing at ConAgra Mills, Omaha. "Getting to the refined flour particle size was a resource-intensive development that required the application of new wheat milling techniques and equipment."

A specifically grown variety of wheat is used for Ultragrain which has a sweeter, milder taste and lighter color than conventional hard wheat. The milling and processing technology then grinds the wheat grain to a particle size that is ultra-fine, comparable to refined flour.

"Our patent pending milling technique retains whole-grain nutrients like fiber, B vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients, while delivering the finer granulation and texture similar to traditional refined white flours," says Bill Bonner, director of research and development at ConAgra Mills.

Yet unlike those refined white flours, Ultragrain delivers the nutritional punch equivalent to whole grains. The proprietary milling process preserves the whole grain nutrients found in the wheat bran and wheat germ, so that Ultragrain has increased antioxidants, phytonutrients, minerals and vitamins in comparison to unenriched refined white flour. Ultragrain includes increased levels of fiber, vitamin E, vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, riboflavin, increased folate, potassium, phosphorous, magnesium, calcium iron, magnesium, zinc, copper and selenium.

Last spring, ConAgra Foodservice put Ultragrain to the test in an elementary school lunchroom in Hopkins, Minn., developing several

products that used a proportion of Ultragrain in formulation. Over a period of three months at Eisenhower Elementary School, trials were conducted with students in grades one through six to determine whether they demonstrated any taste preference for products that were 100 percent refined white wheat flour over products that contained a percentage of Ultragrain.

Several products appeared on the school menu, including fajita wraps, bread sticks and pizza. The most popular product was the pizza, which was a partial whole grain crust, made of 50 percent refined white wheat flour and 50 percent Ultragrain.

Taste tests concluded that children ate the 50/50 pizzas with the same liking and enthusiasm as pizzas that were solely composed of a refined white wheat flour crust.

These tests were significant for a few reasons. For one, the students' lack of preference demonstrates that ConAgra Mills has met the goal of emulating the taste and texture of refined white flour.

But more importantly, particularly in light of childhood nutrition and health issues, the tests indicated how incorporating Ultragrain into products that are served in school cafeterias can make a significant contribution to increasing children's whole grain intake. The pizza prototype had a nutritional composition that includes three to five grams of fiber, plus antioxidants, phytonutrients, minerals and vitamins.

The school foodservice project last spring has now paved the way for two products which use ConAgra



**ConAgra's new The Max cheese and pepperoni pizza for school foodservice features 50 percent Ultragrain wheat crust, which contains more fiber and nutrients than white flour crust alone.**

Mills Ultragrain to be offered in 2,600 schools this fall. A cheese and pepperoni pizza called the Max, with the crust of 50 percent Ultragrain and 50 percent refined white wheat flour is appearing on school menus. The other product is a line of burritos under the trademark El eXtremo, which uses 50 percent Ultragrain in the tortilla. Schools in the program are opting for one or both of the two ConAgra Foodservice products.

#### **Retail appearance**

Ultragrain has made its way into many product formulations, from cookies and crackers to pastas, frozen pizzas and fresh breads that consumers can buy from local retailers.

The other debut of Ultragrain is in Sara Lee's new Soft and Smooth Made with Whole Grain White Bread, which appeared on store shelves in July. Although whole grain bread sales have increased in the past few years, sales of enriched white bread remain significantly higher in the industry overall. Sara Lee, Chicago,

*continued on page 32*

# [New Product Profile]



**Sara Lee's Soft and Smooth Made with Whole Grain White Bread delivers whole grain nutrition but with the taste and texture of white bread.**

positions the new bread as delivering whole grain nutrition but with the taste and texture that white-bread lovers enjoy.

"Health experts are calling for more whole-grain consumption, but we know more Americans eat white bread than any other kind of packaged bread and won't sacrifice that taste and texture," said Bill Nictakis, president of the Fresh Bakery unit at Sara Lee in a press release. "Using a flour blend to ensure the taste and appearance of white bread is

**"You can talk about whole grains until you're blue in the face, but [consumers] like white bread."**

— MATT HALL, SARA LEE SPOKESMAN

the best way to reach a large cross-section of white-bread consumers and really drive whole-grain consumption."

Two slices of Sara Lee's Soft and Smooth bread delivers 8 grams of whole grains, 3 grams of fiber and significant levels of nutrients including vitamin D, vitamin B, folic acid and calcium.

The composition of Sara Lee Soft

and Smooth is 70 percent enriched white flour and 30 percent whole grain flour. This ratio was determined through taste tests conducted by Sara Lee, wherein bread prototypes that used 30 percent of the whole grain flour demonstrated the highest consumer acceptance rates.

"The Ultragrain is really what makes [Soft and Smooth] work," said Sara Lee spokesperson Matt Hall. "You can talk about whole grains until you're blue in the face, but [consumers] like white bread."

The newly released Dietary Guidelines and restructured Food Guide Pyramid have clearly informed consumers that increased consumption of whole grains is recommended for better nutrition and health. Yet, until now, color, taste and texture obstacles have often prohibited consumers from realizing recommended intake levels of whole grains in bread and bakery products.

"The ever increasing scientific research that documented the health

and nutritional value of whole grains was a major factor driving our increased focus. But the broad-based consumer appeal of white bread relative to conventional whole wheat based bread was the key factor in the development of Ultragrain," says Bonner. "Ultragrain was designed as a whole grain product that would appeal to consumers who preferred the taste, texture and color of

products made with refined flour."

Sara Lee has planned an extensive marketing and public relations campaign to accompany the new Soft and Smooth Made with Whole Grain White Bread to market, which includes national television and print advertising, coupons in newspaper inserts, point-of-purchase, and in-store marketing.

"With the USDA's recent recommendation for Americans to make half their grains whole, many consumers are searching for a way to do just that, but without sacrificing great taste," Frances Coletta, director of product nutrition for Sara Lee Food and Beverage, said in a press release. "Sara Lee Soft and Smooth Made with Whole Grain White Bread can help many consumers make the transition to whole grains without shocking their taste expectations."

## **Gains for grains**

The development of Ultragrain and its increasing use may be revolutionizing the food industry. The timing is auspicious — at the same time consumers are eager to eat healthier, and are hyper aware of the nutritional advantages of whole grains, Ultragrain makes possible bread and bakery products that deliver whole grain without taste compromises.

"We believe that Ultragrain has created a paradigm shift in how the industry thinks about whole grain products and the potential applications. We are helping customers develop products with our Ultragrain White Whole Wheat in applications where whole grain was not previously viewed as an option," says Veal. "The smooth texture and milder flavor of Ultragrain has opened up new doors for the baking industry to combine great taste with great nutrition. We are proud to be part of the process of delivering better nutrition to the American consumer." ■