



## Staking Health Claims with Whole Grains

These days, savvy product designers are going with the grain. Who would've thought that just a few years beyond the no-and low-carb craze, the next big development to grab consumer nutrition headlines would be a return to the goodness of grains? Yet what sets the current interest in whole grains apart from a passing food fad is the timeless good sense behind it. Whole grains contain natural fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients—all of which consumers are looking for today, and none of which will be out of style tomorrow.

Selling mainstream consumers on the promise of whole grains requires an element of formulation finesse. One proven way to convince the skeptical shopper of a product's appeal is through clear and legitimate health claims. That's one area in which whole grain foods have a distinct advantage.

While some regulatory ambiguity still hangs over the characterization of the whole grain content of foods, FDA's current draft guidance allows manufacturers to make factual statements about the whole grain content on labels, such as "10 grams of whole grains per serving" or "per x grams." And because some foods high in whole grains may qualify for existing fiber and whole grain health claims, it also behooves manufacturers to know that they can legally label a whole grain product a "good source" of fiber if it contains 2.5 grams of fiber per serving, and an "excellent source" or "high fiber" if it has at least 5 grams per serving.

Treading further along the fiber front, FDA allows a low-fat grain product that provides a good source of dietary fiber to flag its ability to "reduce the risk of some types of cancer." Products with sufficient levels of soluble beta-glucan fiber from oats and barley can also carry a label that discusses reduced risk of coronary heart disease. Foods with at least 51% whole grain and an eligible fatty acid profile can mention a decreased risk of heart disease and certain cancers on their labels. (Visit <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/flg-6c.html> and <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/flragui.html> for more details on these claims.)

Targeting a specific label for a whole grain product is only the start. Elizabeth Arndt, manager, product development, ConAgra Foods, Inc, Omaha, NE, notes, "It's necessary to consider the whole grain source, because different whole grains have different fiber levels. Those levels can range from 3.5% in brown rice, to approximately 15% in regular pearled barley and rye, to more than 30% in ConAgra Mills' Sustagrain® Barley, a natural, waxy, hullless variety. So, given that a 100% whole wheat bagel, for example, delivers 4 grams of fiber on the reference amount—just shy of that excellent claim—in a 55 gram bagel, "replacing some of that wheat with Sustagrain® Barley will get us to the excellent source of fiber level," she says.

It's always wise to remember that whether making snack cakes, ravioli or muffins, product developers need to understand their intended customers. "We've found that it's important to tailor the amount of whole grains to a particular market, whether that market is the crunchy-granola set which seeks out whole grains or the white-bread contingent which prefers their healthy ingredients without any compromise on taste and texture," says Arndt. Nevertheless, notes Harold Ward, manager of technical services, ConAgra Mills, "There's a variety of different whole grains--whether a coarse flake of Sustagrain or a whole grain flour that looks, bakes and tastes like white flour, such as Ultragrain®—which means it's possible to please almost everyone."

That variety means that it's also more possible than ever to make good on those whole grain health claims, which will cast a distinct spotlight on a product on a very crowded shelf. When food manufacturers tap into the right whole grain ingredients in the right combinations, they give consumers not only a positive label to read, but products whose whole grain appeal will keep them coming back for more.