New ISO Standard Lays the Groundwork for a Whole Grain Generation
[17th June 2026]

The publication of a new **ISO International Standard defining whole grain as an ingredient and setting technical criteria for labelling whole-grain content in foods** (ISO 20810:2026, *"Whole grain — Definition and technical criteria)* marks a major milestone for public health, nutrition policy and consumer transparency worldwide.
For the first time, a **globally harmonized, science-based reference** brings clarity to what "whole grain" means, how whole-grain content should be calculated, and how it can be communicated clearly and credibly on food labels. This standard provides a shared foundation for governments, health authorities, schools, food manufacturers, retailers and consumers. The ICC Whole Grain Initiative played a decisive role as a partner in achieving this milestone.

Why It Matters

Decades of research show that regular whole-grain consumption significantly reduces the risk of chronic diseases. Daily consumption of 50g of whole grains is linked to a reduction in the risk of type 2 diabetes by a quarter and a reduction in the risk of cardiovascular/ mortality by one fifth.
However, even if this seems relatively easy to reach the recommended level of daily whole grain consumption, it is still far from being met around the globe. Considering also the current recommendations for sustainable dietary guidelines in 2050- including a total shift from refined to whole grains- increasing whole grain intake is a challenge.
Increased consumption of dietary fibre and proteins is currently emphasized. Many whole grain products are an important source of these components and can be communicated as being a *source of protein* and a *source of fibre* or *high fibre*
Eating habits formed early in life tend to persist into adulthood. Introducing whole grains from childhood supports healthier, more sustainable diets, reduces obesity risk, improves long-term health outcomes, and helps lower future healthcare costs. Increasing whole-grain consumption should therefore be a public-health, equity and sustainability priority.
Three servings of whole grain a day would help more consumers achieve associated health benefits. A variety of whole grain foods are available to help make this happen, including 1 slice of bread, a 30g portion of whole grain breakfast cereals, 5 wholewheat crackers or 80g cooked whole grain pasta (eq. 1 serving).
Regular whole-grain consumption significantly reduces the risk of chronic diseases. Just 50g whole grain per day can lower the risk of type 2 diabetes by 25% and cardiovascular disease and mortality by 20%. Yet, global intake remains far below recommendations, despite clear guidance to shift from refined to whole grains by 2050.
Acting early is key. Establishing whole-grain habits in childhood supports lifelong health, reduces obesity risk, and lowers future healthcare costs—making it a public health, equity, and sustainability priority.

From Global Standard to Real-World Impact

The new ISO standard removes long-standing barriers caused by inconsistent definitions and labelling rules across countries. It recognizes that processing is necessary to make whole grains edible and palatable, while preserving their health benefits.
To translate this technical milestone into meaningful population-level impact, coordinated action is now needed:

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1. Integrate the ISO Standard into National Dietary Policies

Governments are encouraged to adopt the ISO definition and labelling criteria in dietary guidelines and nutrition policies, supporting clear recommendations —and public-health messaging consistent with the evidence showing benefits from intakes of at least 50 g per day.

2. Strengthen Labelling and Support Reformulation

Using the ISO standard as a reference, policymakers can improve front-of-pack labelling systems and nutrient-profiling frameworks with whole grain criteria, helping consumers identify whole-grain foods easily while supporting manufacturers to increase whole-grain content through reformulation.

3. Build Public-Private Partnerships

Successful national initiatives, including in Denmark and more recently in China and Sweden, show that collaboration between governments, health organizations, educators, industry and retailers is key to increasing whole-grain intake.

4. Make Whole Grains a Pillar of School Meals and Public Procurement

Evidence consistently shows that including whole-grain criteria in school meals and public food procurement increases consumption, improves equity, and moves diets closer to national recommendations, especially for children.

A Call to Action

On the occasion of a yearly event, the **International Whole Grain Day (19 November)**, organized by the ICC Whole Grain Initiative, experts and stakeholders regroup at the European Parliament and call for stronger, coordinated action to build whole grain generations. The 2026 session will announce the ISO STANDARD release. By aligning science, policy and practice, it offers a clear pathway to make whole grains more visible, accessible and appealing—so that their proven health benefits can reach everyone, from early childhood onward.

In Australia, Grains and Legumes Nutrition Council (GLNC) will celebrate Whole Grains week 16th November where they will focus on the importance of an aligned Whole Grain definition for better health. Many other celebrations will occur across the world to celebrate the **Whole Grain Day**.

The **ICC Whole Grain Initiative**, together with its members and co-signatories, stands ready to support policymakers and stakeholders worldwide in implementing this standard and accelerating progress toward healthier populations.

More information on whole grain benefits are available on the ICC Whole Grain Initiative website: ICC Whole Grain Initiative.