

16 November 2021

THE WHO AND FAO JOIN WITH THE WHOLE GRAIN INITIATIVE IN GLOBAL CALL FOR WHOLE GRAIN PROMOTION

In the third year of International Whole Grain Day, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food & Agricultural Organization (FAO) have joined forces with the Whole Grain Initiative to promote whole grain and its role in healthy and sustainable diets; with a call on governments to review their dietary guidance and support public policy initiatives aimed at increasing the consumption of whole grains.

As highlighted by the coverage of COP26, climate change and global population growth are at the forefront of most discussions about food policy and agriculture, and many consumers are eating more plant-based foods in an effort to make choices that are healthy for themselves and their planet. There is strong and consistent evidence that whole grains play a major role in healthy and sustainable dietary patterns, as highlighted in several recent meta-analyses¹, WHO and FAO publication², the EAT-Lancet Commission report³ and the Global Burden of Disease studies⁴. Yet, when it comes to plant-based eating, whole grains are sometimes forgotten or overlooked; and intake levels of whole grains remain staggeringly low globally⁴.

The Whole Grain Initiative (a partnership of leading experts and organisations dedicated to promoting whole grain) is asking governments to bring in a menu of policy measures – beyond sole dietary guidelines – which will help public understanding of the benefits and consumption of whole grain and incentivize food manufacturers to include more whole grain in their products. The three proposed measures are:

Consistent dietary guidelines emphasising whole grains

Worldwide, more than 100 countries have developed, or are currently developing, food-based dietary guidelines. Greater focus on whole grains is needed in both the guidelines and the supporting images or food guides.

Clear front-of-pack labels recognising contribution of whole grain

Front-of-pack labels have been proven to be effective tools to help consumers identify healthier food products and have been recommended by the WHO as a tool to help prevent non-communicable diseases⁵. An increasing number of countries are adopting front of pack labels to help consumers understand what they're eating. Supportive of this move, the WGI is calling for more governments to consider implementing front-of-pack labelling which includes whole grain in the algorithms.

Education and awareness-raising campaigns on the benefits of whole grain

A whole grain campaign run by the Danish Whole Grain Partnership in collaboration with the Danish government and other health non-profit organisations increased average whole grain intake from 32g to 82g/10MJ/day post campaign. The WGI supports the adoption of similar strategies in other countries and contexts as a path toward increasing whole grain intake.

As recently highlighted in the 2021 Whole Grain Summit by Francesco Branca from the WHO, the low intake of whole grains is a global concern in high-income and low-income countries and can play a role in increasing

¹ Aune et al. (2016), *BMJ*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.i2716>; Schwingshackl et al. (2017), *Amer Jour Clin Nutr*, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.117.153148>; Bechthold et al. (2019), *Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10408398.2017.1392288>; Reynolds et al. (2019), *Lancet*, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31809-9](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31809-9).

² FAO and WHO. 2019. Sustainable healthy diets – Guiding principles. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6640en/ca6640en.pdf>

³ Willett et al. (2019), *Lancet*, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31788-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4)

⁴ GBD 2017 Diet Collaborators (2019), *Lancet*, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(19\)30041-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(19)30041-8)

⁵ Manual to develop and implement front-of-pack nutrition labelling: guidance for countries on the selection and testing of evidence-informed front-of-pack nutrition labelling systems in the WHO European Region. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2020.

dietary fibre intake. Moreover, whole grains are a critical component of a sustainable healthy diet, which is increasingly important given the environmental impact of our diets and food system.

Jan de Vries from the Whole Grain Initiative added, “The Whole Grain Initiative brings together experts from around the world who share the same passion - to increase the global consumption of whole grain. Our work – such as a recently published global consensus definition of whole grain and the definition of whole grain foods – helps governments develop effective policies to increase whole grain consumption in their countries.”

All of these ideas will be discussed in more detail as part of the WGI’s global virtual meeting being held on International Whole Grain Day (16th November). Participants will hear from representatives from the FAO, WHO, as well as experts from a range of nutritional and health organizations from around the world. The event will serve as an incubator for exchanging inspiring whole grain best practices. It will bring together renowned academics and policy specialists to discuss the real-life application of initiatives and policies to build healthy, sustainable, and resilient food systems. The event will end with an open Q&A session.

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Notes to editors:

About the Whole Grain Initiative

The Whole Grain Initiative brings together key stakeholders from around the world, including Oldways Whole Grains Council, Grains & Legumes Council Australia, International Association for Cereal Science and Technology (ICC), European Breakfast Cereal Association (CEEREAL), ISEKI-FOOD ASSOCIATION, Health Grain Forum and many other NGOs, universities and associations.

On 16th November 2021, they will be hosting a global virtual meeting entitled “Whole Grain: It’s Time To Act For You And The Planet”. Speakers will include:

- Patrizia Fracassi, FAO
- Francesco Branca, WHO
- Amanda Wood, EAT-Lancet Commission and Stockholm Resilience Centre
- Manuel Moñino, European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians
- John Sevenpiper, University of Toronto
- Sheena Swanner, American Institute for Cancer Research
- Jemma O’Hanlon, Australian Heart Foundation
- Philip Calder, Southampton University
- Gitte Laub Hanssen, Danish Whole Grain Partnership
- Daniela Flores, Nutrición sin Etiquetar (México)
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