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Going With the Grain:

Consumers Responding to New Dietary Guidelines

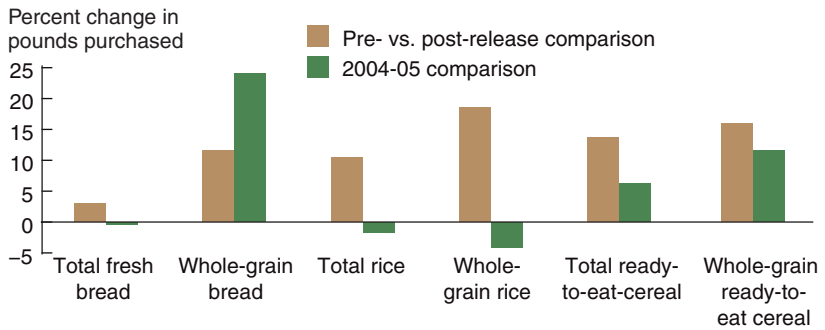
The 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, released in January, recommend that half of all daily grain servings come from whole-grain foods. These recommendations mark a significant departure from past recommendations, which made no distinction between whole and refined grains.

USDA has been providing dietary advice for over a century. Since 1980, however, recommendations on attaining adequate nutrition also included information about how and why to avoid overconsumption of nutrients like saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium, linked to chronic diseases. Consumption patterns during this period suggest that consumers modify their food choices in response to a variety of factors, including increased information about the links between diet and health. According to ERS food availability data between 1980 and 2003, Americans reduced their consumption of red meats, such as beef, in favor of leaner meats, such as chicken and turkey. They also more than doubled their intake of skim milk, while drinking half as much whole milk.

Early indications suggest that Americans may likewise be eating more whole grains. To gauge shoppers' initial response to the new *Guidelines*, ERS examined whole-grain purchases over an 8-week period immediately following the *Guidelines'* January 12 release. ERS compared the purchases with those over the previous 8 weeks, as well as with those over the same 8-week period in 2004 to control for seasonal spikes.

Although low-carbohydrate dieters may still shy away from certain grain products, the popularity of whole-grain products appears to be rising. In the 8 weeks after the release of the *Guidelines*, the average shopper purchased about 13 percent more pounds of whole-grain products than during the same period in 2004. When we compared the 8 weeks before and after the release, we found that shoppers bought nearly 12 percent more whole-grain breads, 19 percent more whole-grain rice, and 16 percent more whole-grain ready-to-eat breakfast cereals. These increases may be a result of changes in dietary awareness. In addition, shoppers now have more whole-grain foods from which to choose; in 2004 alone, nearly 100 new products touted their whole-grain formulations. Shoppers can now find a variety of whole-grain pastas at mainstream grocery stores, white breads made from whole-grain flour, and reformulated, whole-grain breakfast cereals.

Whole-grain purchases rise after release of 2005 *Dietary Guidelines*



Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service using ACNielsen Homescan data.

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This finding is drawn from . . .

Food Market Dynamics and USDA's New Dietary Guidelines, by Ephraim Leibtag and Lisa Mancino, EIB-5, USDA, Economic Research Service, September 2005, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib5/

U.S. Food Consumption Up 16 Percent Since 1970

America's growing girth has focused attention on what—and how much—we as a Nation have been eating. The ERS food consumption (per capita) data series, one of the few series tracking long-term consumption, suggests that Americans are eating more food every year. The total amount of food available for each person to eat increased 16 percent from 1,675 pounds in 1970 to 1,950 pounds in 2003. This increase was not isolated to a few food groups. Fruits and vegetables also showed an increase.

The increase in food available for consumption resulted in a corresponding jump in calories, from 2,234 calories per person per day in 1970 to 2,757 calories in 2003 (after adjusting for plate waste, spoilage, and other food losses). Per capita consumption of fats and oils, grains, vegetables, and sugars/sweeteners led the way. Between 1970 and 2003, total per capita consumption of added fats and oils rose by 63 percent, grain consumption by 43 percent, vegetable consumption by 24 percent, and sugar and sweetener consumption by 19 percent. Annual corn sweetener consumption increased to 79 pounds in 2003, up 400 percent from 1970. This steep rise in corn sweetener consumption is largely due to high-fructose corn syrup, a low-cost substitute for sugar in beverages.

Even with the mid-1990s push to cut dietary fat, added fats and oils accounted for an extra 216 calories per person per day—or 42 percent of the 523-calorie increase between 1970 and 2003. Grains and sugars contributed 188 and 76 added calories. Only in dairy products did daily calories decline (11 calories), partly due to the switch from whole to low-fat milk.

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For more information . . .

The ERS Food Consumption (Per Capita) Data System, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/data/foodconsumption/

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Average daily calorie intake grew by 523 calories

Commodity group	Per capita consumption 1970	2003	Increase in pounds, 1970-2003	Increase in daily calories, 1970-2003
	Pounds		*Percent*	*Number*
Fats and oils	53	86	63	216
Grains	136	194	43	188
Sugar and sweeteners	119	142	19	76
Meat, eggs, and nuts	226	242	7	24
Vegetables	337	418	24	16
Fruits	242	275	12	14
Dairy	564	594	5	-11
Total	1,675	1,950	16	523

The ERS per capita data represent the amount of food and calories available for consumption after adjusting for spoilage, plate waste, and other losses in the home or marketing system.