

THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP) AND FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL ORGANISATION (FAO) JOIN THE WHOLE GRAIN INITIATIVE TO HIGHLIGHT THE IMPACT WHOLE GRAINS HAVE ON RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS

On the 15th November 2022, the Whole Grain Initiative (a partnership of leading experts and organisations dedicated to promoting whole grain) will be celebrating the 4th Annual International Whole Grain Day. As in previous years, experts in nutrition and sustainability will come together to discuss the importance of whole grain in creating healthier, more sustainable and resilient food systems, worldwide.

At the centre of the celebrations at 15h30 CET on the 15th November, the Whole Grain Initiative (WGI) will host a webinar entitled “Why do whole grains matter for the whole world.” The webinar will feature a keynote address from leading scientists on the role of wholegrain in the shift to healthier and more balanced diets. This will be followed with panel discussions on sustainability, food security, and consumer behaviour. Guests will include representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), and the European Food Information Council (EUFIC).

Professor Janne Martikainen from the University of Eastern Finland said “Research has shown diets low in whole grains are taking a heavy toll on lives through cardiovascular disease or type-2 diabetes – two diseases which could be prevented by even increasing modestly whole grain intake. As well as clear health benefits, consumption of whole grain may have a significant and positive impact on healthcare systems by reducing the cost burden associated with these diseases.”

Recent research and health economic analysis conducted in Finland, Australia and the US, have shown valuable savings can be made on healthcare expenses through a small shift in whole grain consumption.

- In Australia, increased whole grain consumption could lead to annual healthcare cost savings of up to 1.4 billion AU\$ by preventing cardiovascular disease and type-2 diabetes - enough to build five new hospitals.¹
- In Finland, it was estimated the country could save nearly 1 billion EUR over 10 years by preventing type-2 diabetes – or the cost of 7,000 new playgrounds.²
- In the US, by increasing whole grain consumption, the government could save up to USD 35.9 billion due to reduced cardiovascular and coronary heart diseases – the equivalent of 15,000 new high schools.³

Dr Patrizia Fracassi from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said “Although it is suggested we should eat around 50g of whole grain a day, globally we eat less than a quarter of that amount. To fill this gap, we need a multi-disciplinary, concerted effort between governments, food companies, producers, and academia. This isn’t something that any of these stakeholders can do on their own, especially if we want to ensure that whole grains are produced and consumed in a sustainable way.”

Kelly LeBlanc, MLA, RD, LDN from the Whole Grain Initiative added “The Whole Grain Initiative brings together experts from around the world who share the same passion – to promote the global consumption of whole grain. Discussions such as our webinar on November 15th helps give governments the information they need to develop effective policies to increase whole grain consumption in their countries.”

The Whole Grain Initiative, with the support of its 50 member organisations, has four key policy asks for governments:

- Improving consumer education programmes and marketing campaigns about whole grain – explaining what it is and why it’s important to eat more whole grain

¹ Abdullah MMH et al. Healthcare Cost Savings Associated with Increased Whole Grain Consumption among Australian Adults. *Nutrients* 2021, 13: 1855. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13061855>

² Martikainen J et al. Type 2 Diabetes-Related Health Economic Impact Associated with Increased Whole Grains Consumption among Adults in Finland. *Nutrients* 2021, 13:3583. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13103583>

³ Murphy MM & Schmier JK. Cardiovascular Healthcare Cost Savings Associated with Increased Whole Grains Consumption among Adults in the United States. *Nutrients* 2020, 12:2323. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12082323>

- Integrating quantified recommendations for whole grain intake into dietary guidelines as well as in the algorithms used to determine front of pack labelling schemes – the important contribution of whole grain to healthier diets should be recognised and communicated
- Helping people find whole grain in their diet through clear labelling – these labels should highlight both the health and environmental benefits of whole grain
- Developing new public-private partnerships to focus on mitigating the growing challenges of food security

All these policy asks will be discussed in more detail as part of the WGI’s global webinar. The event will serve as an incubator for exchanging inspiring whole grain best practices as well as the real-life application of initiatives and policies asked of governments to build healthier, more sustainable and resilient food systems.

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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 Whole Grains Council, Grains & Legumes Council Australia, EUFIC (The European Food Information Council), EPHA (European Public Health Alliance), European Cancer Leagues, Malaysia Nutrition Society, Health Grain Forum and many other NGOs, academics, and associations.

On 15th November 2022, they will be hosting a global virtual meeting entitled “Why do whole grains matter for the whole world?”. Speakers will include:

- Patrizia Fracassi, FAO
- Saskia de Pee, World Food Programme
- Professor Roberto Volpe, Italian Society for Cardiovascular Prevention (SIPREC) at the European Heart Network (EHN)
- Janne Martikainen, UEF House of Effectiveness
- Professor Eleanor Beck, University of Wollongong
- Kelly LeBlanc, Director of Nutrition, Whole Grains Council

The event will run from 15h30 – 17h00 CET.

You can register for the event on the Whole Grain Initiative website: www.wholegraininitiative.org

The webinar will be recorded, and all speakers will be available for media interviews.