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Whole Grains at Play in the Realm of Health and Wellness

Trends are often born with dual personalities. It is not that they are two sides of the same coin—they don't typically oppose each other like Jekyll and Hyde. Instead, the most successful trends are those that have complementary sides to their personalities or sides that fulfill a variety of needs. While conflict within a trend can make for exciting headlines, it also serves to shorten a trend's lifecycle.

The megatrend of health and wellness itself has a subtle duality, with health referring to the body and wellness referring to the mind. Any food or flavor trend that expresses a duality of its own and can play in both health and wellness is set up to be quite powerful. The few trends possessing the necessary duality and the capability of playing both sides of health and wellness not only have long lifecycles but rarely have an adversarial trend that is powerful enough to bring it down and render it powerless. Such a potent trend will more likely exhibit morphing behavior. Think of a morph as a cousin born from the original trend that is simply capturing more of the spotlight for the moment without any serious harm to its older cousin. The whole-grain trend is the poster child for a morph pattern.

The whole-grain trend is not, however, the birth of the morph in this case. It actually is a cousin to the whole-wheat trend and has since given birth to the single-grain and then the ancient-grain phenomena. You can tell you are dealing with a morph (versus a death) if you can still play in all the spaces inhabited by the cousins. For instance, a company could launch products simultaneously in whole wheat, whole grain, single grain, or ancient grain if they chose. If you are dealing with a death, then only one cousin would be left standing, and the others would have been killed off. That is the beauty of understanding how a morph operates—it allows you to continue to play in the trend instead of exiting it.

With whole grains, one side of their dual nature is that they are the great "interpreters" of the food world. Whole grains, particularly single and ancient grains, can be used as translators that can be used to introduce global flavors to consumers in a nonthreatening way. Take regional breads from around the world such as Kurdish *nane silli*, Mexican tortillas, Ethiopian *injera*, or Finnish *ohrarieska*. Many times bread turns out to be the least intimidating item in an unfamiliar meal. The bread, therefore, can act as a gateway to introduce new flavors and foods to consumers. It is a bridge to new food experiences—the interpreter or translator if you will. This is the calming, nurturing side of whole grains.

The other face of whole grains is that of luxury, exploration, and decadence. Here grains play in the world of desserts, but they are usually so well masked by their more vocal counterparts

in the product, any health benefits are overlooked. Guilt by association is their only crime. Here they behave as evil tempters, luring you with guilty pleasure instead of tenderly holding your hand as they do when acting as an interpreter.

Whole grains also fit into both health and wellness. Leading first with health, it is common knowledge that whole grains are key to healthy digestion, but look beyond these headlines. Whole grains are also key to promoting lower cholesterol rates, cancer incidence, diabetes rates and onset, and increased weight loss and satiety. Whole grains are also linked to health through the product they are used in—guilt by association, but in a good way. Think of the ties whole grains have to breakfast, a current rock star in obesity research, with ready-to-eat cereal products leading the way but followed closely by breakfast sandwiches and breads. Grains are also the largest group included in the USDA Food Guide Pyramid, and government support for a trend is nothing to minimize since such support is hard to come by.

Regarding wellness, whole grain ties are slightly more indirect or related to causal relationships. Consumers associate whole grains with health, and therefore, the consumption of whole grains can produce a feeling of wellness. Grains also have strong ties to cognitive function research and the subcategory of "mood" foods. Grains have been credited with improved focus and memory in the elderly and generations Y and Z and have also been found to improve the mood of teenaged boys in particular, decreasing aggression specifically. Folate, itself a component of whole and fortified grains, has been shown to effectively elevate mood. Liverpool University found that consuming cereals improved mood, weight, and body satisfaction—the health and wellness trifecta. Mood is vastly more complex than is typically thought, however, because mood disorders have ties to other disease states. For instance, those who suffer from depression are at higher risk for obesity, diabetes, anxiety, heart disease, dementia, and chronic pain. Think about that—your state of mind can actually create a cascade of physical ailments that can then shorten your life or increase the number of infirm years you have ahead of you.

Looking ahead, in 2011 there is a dichotomy setting up that could be worrisome. This is where the tempter side of whole grains comes into play. As consumers and corporations come out of the recession, both mentally and financially, they are naturally swinging back toward adventure, risk taking, experimentation, and luxury. Luxury, for some, can simply mean ordering a dessert that was previously passed over due to poor finances. Food portions also are growing again (ironically alongside the reduced-calorie options on menus), and restaurant foot traffic is up, as is behavioral research indicating consumers are saying one thing about their diet and doing another. When this swing toward adventure happens, typically at the end of a war or

economic slump, there is the risk of caution being thrown to the wind in other areas of a consumer's life. Excess and celebratory calorie intake is among these worrisome behaviors.

The hope I leave you with is that any new disposable income is spent on a gym membership, dance lessons, or training for some extreme travel instead of the latest sedentary video games or a fantastic, overly indulgent, high-calorie food you can never eat just one of. I personally am planning on spending a bit on extreme travel myself. I'm thinking a bit of shipwreck snuba (yes, snuba is an actual thing) in the eastern Caribbean should do it. Believe me, nothing gets you to put a fork down faster than picturing yourself in a bathing suit my friend.

Suzy Badaracco, president, Culinary Tides Inc., is a toxicologist, chef, and registered dietitian. She holds a B.S. degree in criminalistics, an associates degree in culinary arts, and an M.S. degree in human nutrition. Badaracco has worked as an analytical chemist, corporate chef, nutrition specialist, trainer, knowledge manager, and trends forecaster for food industry clients since 1992. She has been trained in military intelligence, chaos theory, and predictive analysis techniques used by both corporate and government bodies and has been practicing competitor intelligence and predictive forecasting for more than 13 years. Using these techniques she has been able to successfully predict and profile food, flavor, consumer, packaging, and health trends in the United States and research, technology, and government trends internationally for all areas of the food industry. Badaracco can be reached at sbadaracco@culinarytides.com.



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