United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service
Mountain Plains Region
1244 Speer Boulevard
Denver, CO
80204-2581

Reply to Attn of: SFSP-506
CACFP-741
SP 05-01

OCT 29 2004

Subject: Procurement and Service of Whole Grain Products

To: STATE AGENCY DIRECTORS - (Special Nutrition Programs)
Colorado ED, Colorado DPHE, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri ED, Missouri DH, Montana OPI, Montana DPHHS, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming

Eating whole grain products has long been advocated by health and nutrition experts. The current Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend daily consumption of foods with whole grains as their primary ingredient as a means to protect against many chronic diseases. Increasing the consumption of fiber rich carbohydrates over those found in highly processed products may also be an important step in fighting our national obesity epidemic.

As you know, Congress endorsed the consumption of foods consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, such as whole grains, by including a new provision in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. The provision requires the Secretary of Agriculture to issue guidance to States and school food authorities to increase the consumption of foods and food ingredients that are recommended in the most recent Dietary Guidelines. Choosing a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains, is one of the recommendations applicable to the school meal programs. Once the new Dietary Guidelines are issued, additional information on how to incorporate those recommendations in the school meals programs will be provided.

The importance of whole grains in the diet is now being recognized by food manufacturers and food processors. Recently, a major cereal manufacturer has made a decision to reformulate its product line using only whole grains. We encourage school food authorities to inquire about the availability of whole grain products when developing product specifications and making their procurement plans next year. We would also like for schools participating in the school meals programs to consider purchasing and offering whole grains whenever possible as part of their efforts to promote healthy eating and improving nutritional well-being.

For your reference, the section of the Dietary Guidelines that discusses whole grains is attached. Thank you for your continuing efforts to support schools in planning and offering nutritious meals to our Nation's school children. If there are any questions please contact Gina O'Brian of my staff at (303) 844-0354.

Sincerely,

Darlene Sanchez

DARLENE SANCHEZ
Regional Director
Special Nutrition Programs

Attachment

Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains

Foods made from grains (like wheat, rice, and oats) help form the foundation of a nutritious diet. They provide vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates (starch and dietary fiber), and other substances that are important for good health. Grain products are low in fat, unless fat is added in processing, in preparation, or at the table. Whole grains differ from refined grains in the amount of fiber and nutrients they provide, and different whole grain foods differ in nutrient content, so choose a variety of whole and enriched grains. Eating plenty of whole grains, such as whole wheat bread or oatmeal (see box 11), as part of the healthful eating patterns described by these guidelines, may help protect you against many chronic diseases. Aim for at least 6 servings of grain products per day—more if you are an older child or teenager, an adult man, or an active woman (see box 7)—and include several servings of whole grain foods. See box 8 for serving sizes.

Why choose whole grain foods?

Vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other protective substances in whole grain foods contribute to the health benefits of whole grains. Refined grains are low in fiber and in the protective substances that accompany fiber. Eating plenty of fiber-containing foods, such as whole grains (and also many fruits and vegetables) promotes proper bowel function. The high fiber content of many whole grains may also help you to feel full with fewer calories. Fiber is best obtained from foods like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables rather than from fiber supplements for several reasons: there are many types of fiber, the composition of fiber is poorly understood, and other protective substances accompany fiber in foods. Use the Nutrition Facts Label to help choose grains that are rich in fiber and low in saturated fat and sodium.

Box 11

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR INTAKE OF WHOLE GRAIN FOODS

Choose foods that name one of the following ingredients *first* on the label's ingredient list (see sample in figure 4).

- brown rice
- bulgur (cracked wheat)
- graham flour
- whole grain corn
- oatmeal
- popcorn
- pearl barley
- whole oats
- whole rye
- whole wheat

Try some of these whole grain foods: whole wheat bread, whole grain ready-to-eat cereal, low-fat whole wheat crackers, oatmeal, whole wheat pasta, whole barley in soup, tabouli salad.

NOTE: "Wheat flour," "enriched flour," and "degerminated corn meal" are not whole grains.

Figure 4

SAMPLE INGREDIENT LIST FOR A WHOLE GRAIN FOOD

INGREDIENTS: WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR, WATER, HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP, WHEAT GLUTEN, SOYBEAN AND/OR CANOLA OIL, YEAST, SALT, HONEY.

Enriched grains are a new source of folic acid

Folic acid, a form of folate, is now added to all enriched grain products (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and iron have been added to enriched grains for many years). Folate is a B vitamin that reduces the risk of some serious types of birth defects when consumed before and during early pregnancy. Studies are underway to clarify whether it decreases risk for coronary heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer. Whole grain foods naturally contain some folate, but only a few (mainly ready-to-eat breakfast cereals) contain added folic acid as well. Read the ingredient label to find out if folic acid and other nutrients have been added, and check the Nutrition Facts Label to compare the nutrient content of foods like breakfast cereals.

ADVICE FOR TODAY

- Build a healthy base by making a variety of grain products a foundation of your diet.
- Eat 6 or more servings of grain products daily (whole grain and refined breads, cereals, pasta, and rice). Include several servings of whole grain foods daily for their good taste and their health benefits. If your calorie needs are low, have only 6 servings of a sensible size daily (see box 8 for examples of serving sizes).
- Eat foods made from a variety of whole grains—such as whole wheat, brown rice, oats, and whole grain corn—every day.
- Combine whole grains with other tasty, nutritious foods in mixed dishes.
- Prepare or choose grain products with little added saturated fat and a moderate or low amount of added sugars. Also, check the sodium content on the Nutrition Facts Label.