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The European HEALTHGRAIN consortium developed a definition for whole grain

Cereal grain kernels consist of three main parts: endosperm, bran and germ. In Europe and world-wide most cereal products, like white bread, are based on kernels or flour after removal of bran and germ, the two parts containing most of the dietary fibre and other bioactive components. In the past decade consumers have been rediscovering whole grain based products. As a result consumption of whole grain products is growing world wide and in Europe also in countries where whole grain products were hardly known.

In a number of countries short definitions of whole grain exist stating, i.e. ”*Whole grain products include the entire germ, endosperm and bran. Grains that have been subjected to processing such as milling are also included.”* Recently more comprehensive definitions have been developed in the USA, Canada, UK and Denmark. These definitions include items such as a positive list of the grains included and specifications of allowed processes.

The HEALTHGRAIN consortium of the European Union has felt the need for developing a European definition of whole grain with the following scope:

- More comprehensive than current definitions in most EU countries
- One definition for Europe – when possible equal to definitions outside Europe
- Reflecting current industrial practices
- Useful in the context of nutritional guidelines and nutrition claims.

Such a definition could be used by industry, by EFSA and food inspection agencies and by organisations involved in nutritional guidelines and communication to consumers.

A committee with Nils-Georg Asp (Swedish Nutrition Foundation, Sweden), David Richardson (DPRNutrirtion, UK), Kaisa Poutanen (VTT and University of Eastern Finland) and Jan Willem van der Kamp (TNO, Netherlands) took care of guiding the discussions and formulating the definition.

Key statements in the definition are:

- Whole grains consist of intact, ground, cracked or flaked kernel after the removal of inedible parts such as the hull and husk. The principal anatomical components - the starchy endosperm, germ and bran - are present in the same relative proportions as they exist in the intact kernel.

- Temporary separation of whole grain constituents during processing for later recombination is acceptable.

The HEALTHGRAIN Forum will develop this definition further for covering labelling issues of products consisting completely or partially of whole grains.

The EU Integrated Project HEALTHGRAIN
The HEALTHGRAIN project has substantially strengthened the scientific basis for a new generation of cereal based products with enhanced health benefits. The project also has formed a network of research organizations, industries and organizations communicating to consumers that will continue as the HEALTHGRAIN Forum.

Results of the project will be presented in
the HEALTHGRAIN Conference on May 5-7 in Lund, Sweden:
www.healthgrain.org

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