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**Whole-grain food consumption impacted by consumer skepticism and
lack of labeling standard**

New study published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior analyzes consumer knowledge and food industry practices related to whole-grain foods

Philadelphia, December 5, 2022 – Despite numerous health benefits and recommendations from dietary guidelines, whole-grain food intake remains low globally. A [research article](#) featured in the [Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior](#), published by Elsevier, studies consumer understanding of whole-grain food definitions and industry labeling practices.

"Without clear regulation and labeling standards, the benefits of educating consumers on how to increase whole-grain intake may be lost," says lead author Katrina R. Kisson, PhD, APD, School of Medical, Indigenous and Health Sciences, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW, Australia. "This study supports the need for a global whole-grain labeling system based on standardized definitions to help consumers make informed food purchases."

This study recruited consumers with flyers in community locations as well as through social media. The resulting ten focus groups were asked open-ended questions on four topics: grain food choices and whole-grain consumption; identification of whole-grain foods; perception of labeling; and opinions on hypothetical package labels. In addition, 17 food industry representatives, including dietitians, food scientists, marketers, and regulatory personnel, were recruited by direct email to examine awareness and understanding of whole-grain food definitions and regulations; hypothetical adoption of whole-grain food definitions by the food industry; and how definition adoption might impact consumers.

During focus group discussions, skepticism significantly impacted consumer understanding and consequently grain choices. The consumer focus groups expressed skepticism of grain food labeling, whole-grain content claims, symbols such as the Health Star Rating and marketing of products as healthy. Consumer comments included, “I don’t know how much whole grain a product has to have to get a label. Does it mean 5% or 3%?” and “I don’t have any idea what 16 grams of whole grain per serving means.”



Caption: New study published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* reports that consumer skepticism and confusion about package labeling impacts whole-grain food consumption (Credit: Lazy_Bear /stock.adobe.com).

When looking at hypothetical labels, consumers had a strong preference towards use of whole grain within the name of the product as opposed to a separate and generic whole-grain content claim not in the name of the product, e.g., “contains whole grain.” Industry representatives generally did not think consumers noticed that level of nuance in front of package labeling. A simple statement of the percentage of whole grain in a product was considered clear and easy to understand by consumers, and industry representatives agreed that the current percentages used by the Whole Grain Initiative definition were appropriate. Both consumers and food industry representatives identified problems with current labeling of whole-grain foods and highlighted the need for clear, consistent labeling.

“It was evident that limited consumer understanding and confusion related to whole-grain foods contributed to skepticism, perceptions of healthfulness, and buying decisions,” concludes Dr. KISSOCK. “Definitions, regulations and consumer education are strategies that could improve consumption of whole-grain foods.”

Notes for editors

The article is "Knowledge, Messaging, and Selection of Whole-Grain Foods: Consumer and Food Industry Perspectives," by Katrina R. Kissock, PhD, APD; Elizabeth P. Neale, PhD, AdvAPD; and Eleanor J. Beck, PhD, FDA (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2022.08.006>). It will appear in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, volume 54, issue 12 (December 2022), published by [Elsevier](#).

The article is openly available at [https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046\(22\)00486-9/fulltext](https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046(22)00486-9/fulltext).

Full text of the article is also available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Eileen Leahy at +1 732 238 3628 or jnebmmedia@elsevier.com to obtain a copy. To schedule an interview with the authors, please contact Dr. Kissock at katrina.kissockAPD@gmail.com.

An audio podcast featuring an interview with Dr. Kissock and other information for journalists are available at www.jneb.org/content/media. Excerpts from the podcast may be reproduced by the media with permission from Eileen Leahy.

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Advancing Research, Practice and Policy

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The *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* features articles that provide new insights and useful findings related to nutrition education research, practice, and policy. The content areas of JNEB reflect the diverse interests of health, nutrition, education, Cooperative Extension, and other professionals working in areas related to nutrition education and behavior. As the Society's official journal, JNEB also includes policy statements, issue perspectives, and member communications. www.jneb.org

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