

## In conversation with... David Clark

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Interviews

We passionately believe in the power of whole grain, but it's up to all of us to make sure it's part of our daily diet, argues Cereal Partners Worldwide's Chief Executive Officer, David Clark.



David Clarke | Photo Credit: Cereal Partners Worldwide (CPW)

### Why is whole grain important?

Whole grain is the powerhouse of the nutrition world. Nature has filled grains with vitamins, minerals, fibres, and antioxidants which act together to bring about many health benefits.

There's a strong (and growing) body of scientific evidence that connects whole grain with a reduced risk of many non-communicable diseases – including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and some cancers.

Public health authorities, nutritionists, and health organisations, including the WHO, all recommend

we eat whole grains over refined grains.

The recent Global Burden of Diseases report has shown that a poor diet is responsible for more deaths globally than tobacco, high blood pressure, or any other health risk.

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Despite this, the consumption of whole grain remains worryingly low. In fact, studies from the EU suggest the majority of Europeans eats less than one serving of whole grain per day. As a leading breakfast cereal manufacturer, we know we need to do our part.

That's why following more than 10 years of continuous reformulation, whole grain is now the main ingredient in over 80 percent of our recipes. By the end of 2020, all our cereals will be a great source of whole grain.

However, we can't solve this problem alone. That's why we've teamed up with International Whole Grain Day and are calling on EU Member States to take whole grain seriously.

"While many EU Member States already encourage the general public to eat more whole grain, I think we need to be more specific and more targeted"

#### **What can EU policymakers do to increase whole grain consumption?**

We know that citizen health is a top priority for all EU Member States. In parallel, consumers are also becoming more conscious about what they eat and its impact on their health and the planet.

Whole grain could be part of the solution - it's been proven to be not only beneficial for health, but also less resource-intensive in its production.

Unfortunately, the problem we now face is there's a lack of understanding on what whole grain is, where to find it, and how much we should eat a day.

I believe we can work together to solve some of these challenges.

Firstly, we need to have a harmonised approach to whole grain recommendations.

While many EU Member States already encourage the general public to eat more whole grain, I think we need to be more specific and more targeted.

We should have a set of unified guidelines which sets out a definition of whole grain, intake recommendations, and labelling criteria.

I think this approach, complemented by awareness and education campaigns, will help consumers identify whole grain, and make sure they eat enough of it each day.

"By having a streamlined approach to what whole grain is, clearly labelling products that contain it and guidelines on how much we should eat each day, we can clear up confusion for consumers, health authorities and manufacturers"

### **Why aren't people eating enough whole grain at the moment?**

Our own studies show the main reason people aren't eating enough whole grain is simply that they don't know where they can find it.

When we surveyed 16,000 people across the globe, 18 percent thought they could find whole grain in white bread, nearly a third thought they could find it in seeds and, surprisingly, one in ten thought bananas contained whole grain.

In fact, whole grain is most commonly found in brown rice, wholemeal bread, and whole grain breakfast cereals. There seems to be a bit of a stigma around whole grain.

People are frustrated by the lack of choice of whole grain options, don't like the taste, or find adding whole grain into their diet inconvenient. Only a few countries have adopted clear guidelines on whole grain.

By having a streamlined approach to what whole grain is, clearly labelling products that contain it and guidelines on how much we should eat each day, we can clear up confusion for consumers, health authorities and manufacturers.

### **Despite the whole grain in breakfast cereals, these products have a reputation of being high in sugar and salt - what are you doing to change this?**

We want to keep making breakfast better for our consumers. Over the last 15 years we've been gradually improving our recipes - reducing the amount of sugar and salt and increasing the amount of whole grain and fibre.

We want to provide the healthiest choice we can in both our new and existing products but it's also important our consumers continue to like and buy our cereals.

So far, we've lowered the amount of sugar in our cereals by 20 percent, lowered salt by 25 percent and increased whole grain by 50 percent, all while keeping the same great taste our consumers love.

We know people are concerned about the rise of obesity and the sugar content in their favourite products. However, we believe nutrition is more than just lower sugar, and the key to a healthy lifestyle is balance.

By the end of 2020, almost all our products will have whole grain as their number one ingredient and contain less than 25 percent sugar. We're committed to continue working on these innovations to make breakfast even better.

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