

Whole Grains' Popularity Surges

By ROSEANNE HARPER

BOSTON — Whole grains have gained tremendously in popularity, experts said at the "Just Ask for Whole Grains" conference in Kansas City this month.

The fourth annual conference organized by the Whole Grains Council and Oldways Preservation Trust, based here, featured speakers who presented positive statistics from just about every segment of the food industry.

"Some of the data presented by our speakers was so good it even surprised us," said Cynthia Harriman, director, food and nutrition strategies, Whole Grains Council and Oldways. "It was obvious people are eating whole grains not just because they're good for them, but because they

like them," she told *SN*.

In fact, the 2007 Food and Health Survey by the International Food Information Council found that 71% of Americans are trying to consume more whole grains.

Whole grain products grew 18% in 2005, after growing at less than 1% annually in 2001-2004, according to keynote speaker Robert Post, deputy director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

Data from Chicago-based Mintel's global new product database underscored that fact. Mintel's figures show whole-grain product launches doubling from 2005 to 2006.

"The past few years have been a remarkable experiment in changing eating patterns,"

said Oldways President K. Dun Gifford.

For example, one national food-service company that supplies schools, workplaces, nursing homes and other institutions has begun offering whole-grain versions of many items, and it was reported at the conference that nine out of 10 customers say 'yes' to the whole-grain version.

And, 85.1% of U.S. schools say they've added whole-grain versions of many products.

More suppliers, food-service operators and retailers have joined the Whole Grains Council, Harriman said, bringing membership to 180. Retailer members include Whole Foods Market, Austin, Texas; Martin's Supermarkets, South Bend, Ind.; and Issaquah, Wash.-based Costco.