

FRESH

# Searching for the Next Quinoa

BY ROSIE SCHWARTZ, RD

**Whole grains have definitely arrived and are no longer just the domain of health food stores.**

These products are taking over grocery shelves and kitchen tables.

They're also creating buzz at top restaurants across North America as leading chefs are focusing on fresh, whole foods and dishing up exciting new choices for patrons looking for creative taste experiences.

Quinoa, an ancient grain and relatively unknown to most people just five years ago, is becoming a menu staple from fine dining eateries to casual chain restaurants.

There was plenty of food for thought at a recent conference—Whole Grains Away from Home (Whole Grains in Foodservice, the Next Frontier)—in Chicago. The meeting was organized by the Oldways Whole Grains Council, a non-profit consumer advocacy group working to increase consumption of whole grains for better health and whose membership list includes grain-product companies, retailers and restaurants. The council brought together experts to inspire and educate foodservice operators about the potential for whole grains in delighting diners while benefiting the bottom line.

Scientific evidence showing the health benefits of whole grains, including the potential for defences against various common chronic diseases, has continued to accumulate. Planetary health has also become a concern as consumers are looking at the impact of their food choices on climate change. Plant-forward

**New data indicates whole grain consumption increased 79% from 1999 to 2012 due to a number of factors.**

The Whole Grains Council

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# Grain adoption cycle

diets, where fewer animal products are being consumed, are becoming more and more popular. Putting whole grains on the menu can not only meet consumer demand but can also reduce food costs. Changing menu options from the old standard of an 8-ounce steak to a 4-ounce serving of meat atop a bed of whole grains is a winning combination on all fronts. **M**



Mark DiDomenico, of Datassential, who has been following trends in the foodservice industry for 25 years, offered his insights. “The majority of consumers discover new food and beverage trends in restaurants and increasingly they are seeking new and interesting items and cuisine to explore.” He points to the whole grains and related items that are gaining in popularity in foodservice channels, and he speaks to how these grains may be featured in different menu items and cuisines. These trends follow a predictable life cycle which can help foodservice operators determine a trend’s current life stage, as well as its potential for future advancement. DiDomenico separates various grains into the four categories of this life cycle, based on how familiar both diners and chefs are with each.

**1 INCEPTION:** Trends start here. Inception-stage trends demonstrate originality in flavour, preparation, and presentation. These grains are usually found at fine dining restaurants and ethnic markets and include: Black rice, red wheat, amaranth, kamut, freekeh, teff, sorghum, spelt, millet and triticale

**2 ADOPTION:** Adoption-stage trends grow their base via lower price points and simpler prep methods. Still differentiated, these trends often feature premium and/or generally authentic ingredients. They’re usually found at fast-casual restaurants and specialty and gourmet food shops and include: Wheat berry, buckwheat, couscous, farro, bulgur, chia seeds, muesli, flaxseeds, barley, polenta, hominy

**3 PROLIFERATION:** Proliferation-stage trends are adjusted for mainstream appeal. They’re often combined with popular applications such as on a burger or used in pasta, for example. They can be found at casual chain and quick service restaurants and regular supermarkets and include: Grits, whole-grain, multi-grain, brown rice, steel-cut oats, quinoa, wild rice

**4 UBIQUITY:** Ubiquity-stage trends have reached maturity, and can be found across all sectors of the food industry. Though often diluted by this point, their inception-stage roots are still recognizable and include: Oat, cornmeal, rye, wheat, white rice

## TAKING OUR PULSES

Pulses, from a Latin word that means thick soup, are the edible seeds of leguminous vegetables. This family includes any plant species that have seed pods that split when they’re ripe. Green beans, fresh peas along with lentils, kidney beans and soybeans are all members. Putting pulses on the menu promotes sustainability—one of the major reasons for the UN bringing attention to these foods. We can’t talk about nutritious foods without considering the impact of our choices on future generations.

Consider that livestock production, especially factory farming, is one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gases and climate change. Livestock also use enormous amounts of fresh water. Pulses, on the

other hand, have a low carbon footprint and require just one-tenth to half of the water of other proteins. Livestock manure also increases water pollution due to various unwanted compounds—nitrogen, phosphate and illness-causing bacteria, to name a few—seeping into ground water. Pulses, however, do the opposite as they enrich the soil in which they are grown.

Pulses have been a traditional staple the world over as they are an inexpensive source of protein. Whole grains complement the nutrients of pulses and make for healthy everyday eats. In our multicultural society, as our culinary horizons have been broadened, ethnic dishes are known and sought after and pulses are versatile and

widely used in global cuisine. Pulses also provide economic advantages. Eating Canadian pulses supports our farmers and the economy. According to Pulse Canada—the national industry association representing growers, processors and traders of pulse crops in Canada—this country is the world’s largest producer and exporter of dry peas and lentils and a major supplier of pulses to over 150 countries around the world. Together with whole grains, pulses promote environmental sustainability and because they’re inexpensive, global food security as well.

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