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## **Consumer Attitudes to Whole Grain Wheat and Other Beneficial Components of Wheat Products**

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To date, a choice experiment, mail survey has been designed and administered in a pretest in Manhattan, Kansas, and in its final form to households in Topeka, Kansas. A literature review of related economic research has also been completed. Information concerning consumer perceptions of the nutritional benefits of whole grain foods is being collected, synthesized and summarized from the final survey. Specifically, the survey elicits consumer willingness to pay for information for conventionally processed versus whole grain rice, bread and pasta products.

Controlling for respondent characteristics, including education, income, knowledge of health benefits of whole grains, general knowledge of nutrition, shopping habits, and various food preferences, the mail survey elicits whether increased information about whole grain products can change buying habits. We also collected information that will allow us to construct body-mass indices for the respondents, as well as body perception, in order to determine how one's actual and perceived health might affect the preference responses. In addition, questions relating to consumer eating habits and consumer demographics were collected. The survey was pretested, modified, revised and re-administered.

The initial test (pretest) was conducted in Manhattan, Kansas. 100 people received mailed questionnaires. After examining the responses of the pretest, clarifying questions and other edits, a second testing was conducted in Topeka, Kansas. In this second mailed survey, 200 people received questionnaires. At this writing, 64 surveys have been returned.

There were two versions of the questionnaire; each version with five subsets of questions. Responses were elicited for willingness-to-pay (WTP) for three whole grain products: bread, rice and pasta. Consumers were asked to choose between whole grain varieties and enriched varieties of each product, brands being equal. Base prices were established for the enriched varieties of each product in every subset and each version. Consumers were then faced with choices of either discounts or premia for the whole grain varieties of the three products. The only difference between the two versions of the survey was that one version contained health information related to whole grain products, while the other version contained no additional health information.

Our results will not only help grain processors devise appropriate product differentiation and marketing strategies but will also help public officials identify effective education strategies to promote healthier eating habits. Analysis of the survey results is currently underway. Data are being entered and cleaned as responses are returned, and formal analysis will begin in the coming weeks, with an expected completion of the project by Summer 2008.