

## Turning — or is that texting? — Gen Z on to whole grains



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By

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SEATTLE — Exhibit A in potential ways to increase whole grain consumption could be Generation Z.

“I feel like we’re really poised as whole grains people to take advantage of this generation,” Coleen Donnelly, corporate chef for the K-12 education segment for InHarvest, said Nov. 4 at the Whole Grains Council Conference in Seattle. “They are ready for us, and we are ready for them.”

Melissa Abbott, vice-president of culinary insights for the Hartman Group, said she considered Generation Z to include people from birth to age 20.

“They cook so much more than any other generation,” she said. “They know so much more about food than any other generation.”

Their cooking choices may be adventurous. Generation Z is the most ethnically diverse generation ever, Ms. Donnelly said.

“They are curious about the new foods based on their surroundings,” she said. “Their friends have different ethnic backgrounds. They go over to each other’s homes, and they see these different things, and they are curious: ‘Well, that kid seems to like it. So I’m going to try it.’”

“Generation Z, you can actually say, ‘It’s good for you,’ and they don’t turn their nose up. That was a light bulb moment for me. The kids say, ‘Oh, it’s good for you?’ I was like, when did this happen? What year is this?” – Coleen Donnelly, InHarvest

Nutrition is important to them. They might even take a few moments to hear about the cardiovascular benefits of whole grains.

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Those in Generation Z are food brand agnostic, Ms. Abbott said. They have grown up with store brands such as Trader Joe’s and Kroger’s Simple Truth.

“To them, it doesn’t mean lower quality,” Ms. Abbott said. “It can mean a better value.”

Both Ms. Abbott and Ms. Donnelly stressed the importance of the cell phone to Generation Z. Millennials quickly became a digital generation, but Generation Z has never known a world without the multiple ways to connect on the cell phone.

“They are always taking snapshots,” Ms. Donnelly said. “They are always looking for that fun flavor combination that really is going to resonate with them and therefore their friends.”

When they search for new food ideas, they scroll on BuzzFeed, Tasty or Delish instead of recipe web sites or cookbooks, Ms. Abbott said.

“The younger consumer is so much more interested in visual, not the words,” she said.

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