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## Two factors influencing the ancient grains revival



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By [Donna Berry](#)

Everything old is new again. This maxim is a measurable consumer trend as food choices return to the basics in the baked foods market. And old is not just new. Ancient has been given a new lease on life.

Ancient grains have been feeding man since the beginning of civilization but were largely ignored by Western countries where selectively bred and refined grains provide an economic advantage. That's changing.

Flowers Foods is rolling out an ancient grain bun to the food service sector. Made with amaranth, buckwheat, khorasan, millet and spelt, one bun contains 7 grams of protein and 3 grams of fiber.

Einstein Bros. Bagels offers an ancient grain bagel described as “a fresh new take on the multigrain bagel.” It features amaranth, chia seeds, quinoa, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and flax.

Kirkland Ancient Crackers from Costco are made with amaranth, millet, quinoa and teff. Boulder Canyon Ancient Grains snack chips from Utz Quality Foods, Hanover, Pa., feature a combination of seven grains and seeds, including quinoa, millet, chia, amaranth, brown rice, brown teff and sorghum.

“Globally, there is a strong opportunity for ancient grains with half of shoppers interested and nearly 40% saying they use ancient grains at least once a week,” said Cali Amos, research manager for the research firm HealthFocus International. “And of those shoppers interested, more than 20% are willing to pay a premium for products that include ancient grains.”

## **Packing in the nutrition**

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Today's grain suppliers offer a plethora of whole ancient grains in varied formats. Their use in baked foods appeals to the growing number of health-and wellness-seeking shoppers.

Consumers see the consumption of alternative and ancient grains as a tactic for getting more fiber and naturally occurring protein in the diet, according to research firm The Hartman Group. The Hartman Group's Health and Wellness 2017 report found that 63% of consumers said they're seeking more fiber in their diet, 58% said the same about whole grains, and 32% said they are seeking plant-based proteins.

Barley and oats in particular are high in heart-healthy soluble fiber, while buckwheat has rutin, a unique antioxidant that supports cardiovascular health. Teff, a tiny grain from Africa, is high in iron and calcium.

“If the goal is working toward a balanced protein, amaranth and quinoa will be key as they are good sources of lysine, an essential amino acid that most grains have in short supply,” said Nicole Rees, product director, AB Mauri North America.

Bakers must remember that each ancient grain offers a unique nutritional composition. These benefits may often be claimed and help sell product.

“Ancient grains are also non-G.M.O. and many qualify for whole grain, fiber or gluten-free claims, depending on the finished application and forms used,” said Don Trouba, senior director, go-to-market, The Annex by Ardent Mills. “There is scientific evidence and approved health claims linking diets rich in fiber-containing grain products and the reduction in chronic diseases.”

## A story worth sharing

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Another appealing attribute of ancient grains is that many grow and thrive with lower levels of pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation. This makes them an attractive choice to consumers who choose to shop with their carbon footprint in mind.

“New quality distinctions found in whole and ancient grains leverage consumer beliefs about sustainability and wellness and are influencing progressive health and wellness consumers to delve deeper into good food stories that relate to grains,” said Laurie Demerit, chief executive officer of The Hartman Group.

Bakers can leverage farm-driven narratives that link to sustainability and wellness to highlight the quality distinctions of ancient grains. And while many ancient grains originate from varied regions from around the world, today most can be sourced domestically.

“They lend themselves to great stories of how they were brought to the U.S. and are cultivated in the same way as they were in ancient times,” said Colleen Zammer, senior director of marketing and product development, Bay State Milling. “Some are grown on smaller farms and are sourced and milled in smaller batches. This allows for ‘local’ claims, which resonate with consumers who like to know exactly where their food comes from.”

*This article is an excerpt from the February 2019 issue of Baking & Snack. To read the entire feature on ancient grains, [click here](#).*

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