

The Use of CSFII Data by Food Manufacturers To Measure Food and Nutrient Intake

Ann M. Albertson, General Mills, Inc.¹

General Mills is a consumer foods company committed to providing quality, convenience and value in their products. This company, which started as a flourmill in the late 1880's, now markets such well known brands as Cheerios, Wheaties, Betty Crocker Dessert Products, Bisquick, and Gold Medal flour through-out the world.

General Mills is also committed to providing healthy food products and contributing to consumer understanding of health and nutrition. The General Mills Institute for Health and Nutrition supports marketing efforts related to nutrition and is responsible for nutrition labeling of all consumer and foodservice products. This group of nutrition professionals also researches and documents all health and nutrient content claims, conducts nutrition education programs and tracks consumer trends in health and nutrition attitudes and intakes.

As the diet-disease relationships of heart disease, cancer, obesity, osteoporosis, diabetes and others become clearer, dietary concerns of consumers have begun to shift away from a diet of avoidance to a more positive dietary approach. The data provided in the CSFII, Pyramid Serving Study and Diet and Health Knowledge Survey helps food manufacturers to understand the shifts in food and nutrient intake that result. For example, data suggest the majority of adult females recognize the importance of eating a variety of foods including plenty of fruits and vegetables however, current intake of these food groups is at or below the minimal level. Grain consumption for this population is currently 5.3 servings and less than 1 serving of whole grain. Recommendations suggest 6-11 servings of grain, several being whole grain. As a manufacturer of primarily grain products, this suggests an opportunity to help Americans increase grain and whole grain consumption to help improve the overall profile of the diet.

The CSFII is invaluable in providing both the public and the private sectors with current measures of both food and nutrient intakes for the U.S. population. This continuous monitoring is increasingly more important as the food supply continues to change a rapid pace and the U.S. population and related food patterns become more diverse.

The CSFII provides data with practical utility for food manufacturers with primary applications in developing and evaluating fortification policies (needs/risk assessment), serving size assessment, targeting food products for specific populations, developing nutrition communications (packaging and otherwise) and evaluating food use for new product opportunities. This data set is also used for the validation of private nutrient intake research conducted at General Mills.

The advent of the USDA Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center/ Food Surveys Research Group Web Site has been of enormous value in making the CSFII data and related research more timely, accessible and affordable. General Mills applauds and supports efforts to further develop this valuable communication vehicle.

The CSFII data was also instrumental in identifying the nutrient needs of the aging population in America and the importance of a good breakfast for this population to reach optimum intakes. The Morning Meal on Wheels program is the result of an alliance between Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging and General Mills Foodservice to provide breakfast to selected homebound elders at risk of isolation and health problems, malnutrition related to nutritional intake.

Future challenges for consumer foods companies include the growing diversity of the American population that is driving the need for more customization of food products, especially related to health. Faster response required by industry to stay competitive results in the need for even faster access to relevant data needed for decision making. And the global marketplace is resulting in a growing complexity of consumer needs. The USDA should be encouraged to share their expertise in the area of food and nutrient intake collection with other countries that are struggling to define the nutrient needs of their populations.

Endnotes

1. Nutrition Research Analyst, Number One General Mills Blvd. Minneapolis, MN 55426