

Wheat: What Are We Really Eating?

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

Wheat: What Are We Really Eating?

Kari Imberg, Associate Editor, Food Manufacturing



What would a plate of scrambled eggs be without toast, a BLT sandwich be without bread or a morning coffee be without a warm muffin?

Wheat, more so than any other ingredient, is stitched into the American diet. From white bread, whole wheat bread, oat bread, pita bread — among many others — to breakfast cereals, pasta, crackers and pretzels, this foodstuff has become such a ubiquitous part of our lifestyles that it's near impossible to not allow wheat to dominate our diets.

After all, [there's barely a shelf in the store that doesn't contain wheat products](#) [1].

But then, why has this seemingly benign plant that has undergone the many generations of humans turned on us?

Wheat today is not the same grain our forebears ground into their daily bread. [While wheat has naturally evolved over the centuries](#) [2], the drastic changes have come in the past 50 or so years under the influence of agricultural scientists.

[Genetic changes have been induced](#) [3] to increase the amount of yields per acre.

Bread and other food made from wheat have sustained humans for thousands of years, but still modern commercial wheat in our meals today is not the same as that of our ancestors.

So, how did we get here?

As far back as 8500 B.C., [the Natufians harvested the ancestor of modern wheat:](#)

Wheat: What Are We Really Eating?

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

[Einkorn](#) [4]. According to research, it was around this time that humans began understanding that we could also grow and harvest our food, instead of just hunt.

From the original strains of wild grass that was harvested by humans, wheat has since exploded to [more than 25,000 varieties](#) [5]. Nearly all of them, though, are a result of human intervention.

During the thousands of years that the crop has occupied a prominent place in humans' lives, little has changed. That is, until the latter part of the 20th century when an upheaval in hybridization methods transformed the grain.

Wheat has since undergone drastic transformations. The wheat of today is intent on delivering increased yields while decreasing production costs.



With all the hybridization, crossbreeding and introgression of wheat strains to make the wheat plant resistant to environmental conditions, has no one stopped to ask about whether these features are compatible with human health?

Trust me when I say, this is not some shameless promotion to push gluten-free products on anyone, but a true concern for the people.

Ask anyone who has been around long enough to remember the [“amber waves of grain”](#) [6] of yesteryear and I'm sure they'd back me up in saying our bread or pancakes or biscuits of today are much different than its counterparts of 1,000, 500 or even as little as 50 years ago.

While they may look and taste much the same, there are biochemical differences that I'm not so sure our bodies can handle.

The idea that a main ingredient, one so deeply ingrained — pun intended — in our lives, could be bad for us goes against all cultural views of wheat and bread.

Wheat: What Are We Really Eating?

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

It's even in the [Bible](#) [7], after all.

So, I continue to wonder. To poke my head perhaps where it doesn't belong.

Wheat is in everything. So, naturally the demand for wheat will continue to go up. Which, in turn, makes the need even greater.

Where do you think wheat will be in another 50 years? Please leave your comments below, as I'd love to hear your input.

Source URL (retrieved on 02/28/2015 - 9:44am):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/blogs/2014/08/wheat-what-are-we-really-eating>

Links:

[1] <http://www.wheatbellyblog.com/faqs/>

[2] <http://www.nas.edu/evolution/EvolutioninAgriculture.html>

[3] <http://www.grainstorm.com/pages/rant>

[4] <http://teachmiddleeast.lib.uchicago.edu/foundations/origins-of-civilization/essay/essay-02.html>

[5] <http://jxb.oxfordjournals.org/content/60/6/1537.full.Pdf>

[6] <http://www.usa-flag-site.org/song-lyrics/america.shtml>

[7] <http://biblehub.com/matthew/6-11.htm>