

# Consumer Trends: Universities Prepare for Gluten-Free Requests

AMBLER, Pa. (PRNewswire) — Students choose their college or university based on a number of factors. Their ability to find a meal on campus shouldn't be one of them.

According to the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA), an estimated 1 in 141 Americans is affected by celiac disease. These individuals require a strict, lifelong gluten-free diet — including when they're at college.

"Students are coming home on break to find they have elevated blood levels or have lost significant weight because they're not getting the gluten-free nutrition they need," explains Alice Bast, founder and president of NFCA. "It's a serious threat to their health, and it's time the schools paid attention."

A [recent settlement](#) [1] involving Lesley University revealed just how challenging it can be for college students with celiac disease and food allergies to find food that meets their dietary needs. In releasing the settlement, the U.S. Department of Justice stated that food allergies may constitute a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and entered into a settlement agreement with the University to require that all meal plans at the University are inclusive of students with celiac disease and food allergies. The University also agreed to pay a fine of \$50,000.

According to US Foods, one of America's largest food companies and a leading distributor, demand for gluten-free foods has increased by 200 percent since 2009. The NFCA has been working with college and university dining services nationwide to help meet that demand and help the staff provide safe gluten-free options for students with celiac disease and other gluten-related disorders. Through NFCA's [GREAT Schools, Colleges and Camps](#) [2], managers and staff learn how to identify gluten-free ingredients, avoid cross-contamination and communicate effectively with students and faculty who make gluten-free requests.

"Gluten exposure is detrimental for students with celiac disease because it causes malabsorption," explains Dr. Ritu Verma, section chief of Gastroenterology for The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "When gluten-free students don't get the nutrition they need, it can impact their studies, decreasing their ability to focus and leading to overall poor health. In extreme cases, the students could wind up in the hospital. We have seen repeated instances where gluten exposures in dining halls have impacted our patients' ability to function effectively in school. This is especially important at a time when many students are taking responsibility for their own health for the very first time."

Pam Edwards, assistant director of dining services at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, continues this sentiment. "All students should have food available to them

## Consumer Trends: Universities Prepare for Gluten-Free Requests

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

---

to meet their nutritional needs," Edwards said. "After undergoing the GREAT Schools training program through NFCA, we have a better understanding of the importance of offering gluten-free menu items to our students with celiac disease or gluten sensitivities, as well as the proper ways to prepare these items. By providing gluten-free menu items to these students, we can have a positive impact on their health and their total academic experience."

Lesley University students aren't the only ones who can benefit from the settlement. NFCA recommends that all colleges and universities consider adopting gluten-free and allergen-free accommodations similar to those outlined in the agreement. Bast continues, "All students deserve to eat without fear or consequence. It's our goal to provide that."

### About the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness

Through empowerment, education and advocacy, the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA) drives diagnoses of celiac disease and other gluten-related disorders and improves the quality of life for those on a lifelong gluten-free diet. For more information about GREAT Schools and gluten-free needs on campus, visit [www.CeliacCentral.org/college](http://www.CeliacCentral.org/college) [3].

### Source URL (retrieved on 07/31/2014 - 6:48pm):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2013/01/consumer-trends-universities-prepare-gluten-free-requests>

### Links:

[1] <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2012/December/12-crt-1538.html>

[2] <http://www.celiaccentral.org/great>

[3] <http://www.celiaccentral.org/college>