



WHITE PAPER | **The Gluten-Free Trend: Here to Stay**

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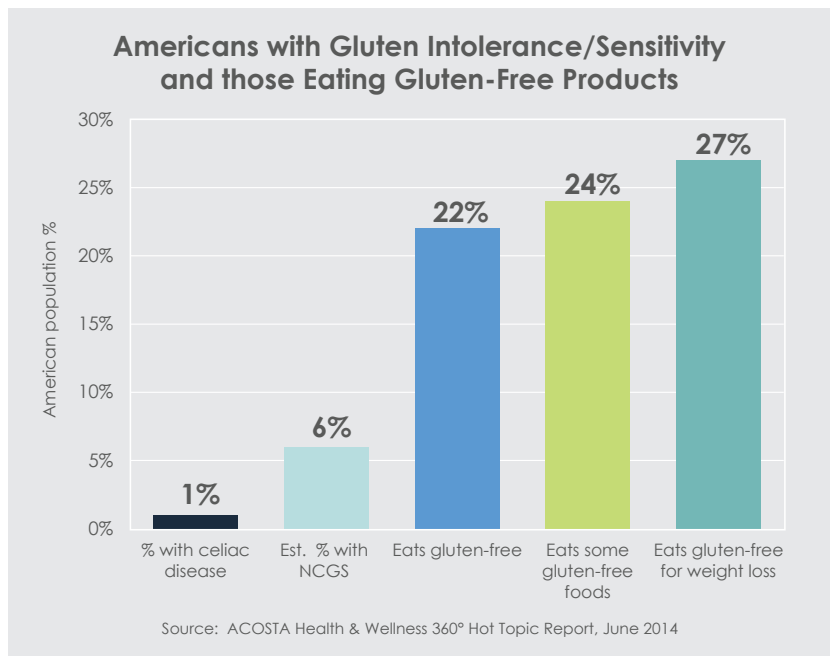


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Whether or not contract foodservice companies are prepared to embrace the trend, the increasing demand for gluten-free foods shows no signs of abating. A 2014 Acosta Health and Wellness 360 report found that gluten-free products are a huge trend in the health and wellness arena, and show strong potential for continued growth in the consumer packaged goods marketplace.

“*Sales of gluten-free foods have grown 44% between 2011 and 2013, to an estimated total of \$10.5 billion. Acosta suggests that sales will continue to grow an additional 48% from 2014 through 2016, to reach sales of over \$15.6 billion.*”

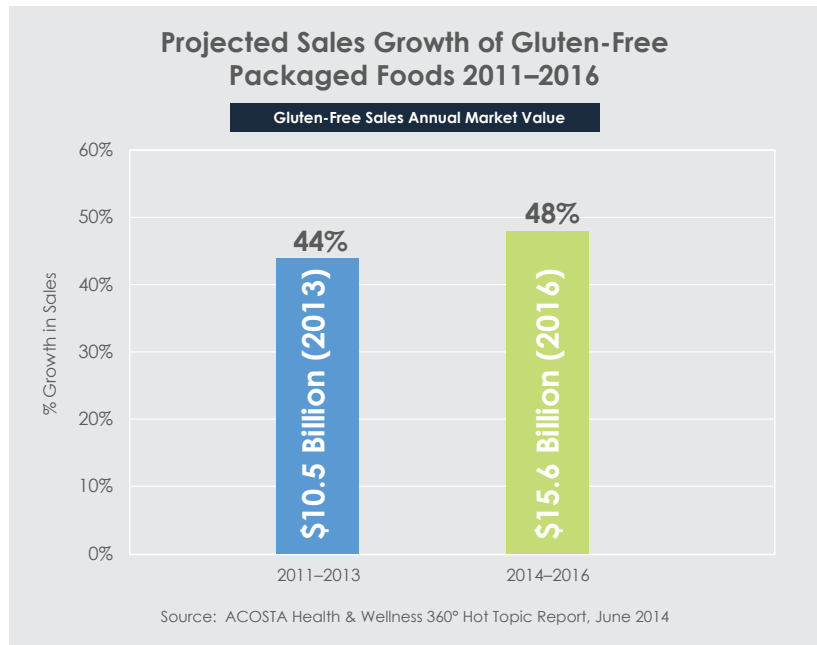


According to the 2014 Acosta report, 24% of Americans reported they or someone in their household currently eats gluten-free versions of foods that typically contain gluten, and 22% of all adults in the US are trying to eat gluten-free.

More than half (65%) of Americans who eat gluten-free foods for reasons other than intolerance or sensitivity are choosing them because they believe them to be healthier alternatives.

Given this explosion in the marketplace—based on popular demand—it’s hard to navigate a path through the facts and the fiction about the medicinal need for gluten-free foods.

According to the National Wheat Improvement Committee, wheat—one of the major grains that contains gluten—provides 21% of the calories for the world. In the US, it’s estimated that vital wheat gluten intake has tripled over the last 40 years. Wheat gluten is used as an additive in many processed foods—primarily baked goods, candies, cold cuts, soy sauce, and soups.



Wheat gluten strengthens doughs and stabilizes or thickens many food products. There is a growing concern that this increased exposure to gluten in the food supply may be leading to more gluten-related disease. In a finding that mirrors this emerging problem, the CDC has reported that childhood food allergies increased more than 18% from 1997 to 2007. A total of 8 foods account for 90% of food allergies: wheat, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, and soybeans.

History and Prevalence of Celiac Disease

The first notation in the historical record regarding a gluten or wheat sensitivity was found in a written account from first century Greece. Scientists generally state that true gluten intolerance (or celiac disease, CD), is present in approximately 1% of the world population, although there are reports of rates as high as 5.8% of the population in some North African countries. Finland has reported a doubling in the prevalence of celiac disease over the past 30 years, and persons with Irish, Italian, or Swedish heritage may carry higher risks than the population at large. Although CD is considered a true autoimmune disease, there is growing concern that more people are developing what appear to be gluten intolerance syndromes with unknown causation.

Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity (NCGS): Symptoms and Theories

Up to 6% of the American population—around 18 million people—is estimated to be affected by NCGS. According to Beyond Celiac (BeyondCeliac.org), non-celiac gluten sensitivity is a nonspecific immune response that has been clinically recognized as less severe than celiac disease. It may cause some intestinal damage, which recedes with a gluten-free diet. Symptoms overlap with those of celiac disease, but often, intestinal symptoms predominate. Currently, diagnosis is a process of exclusion. In a 2013 WebMD news article, Douglas Seiner, MD, director of the Center for Human Nutrition at Vanderbilt University, was quoted as stating that, in spite of the condition's name, "gluten may not be the only dietary compound in wheat" that leads to NCGS.

One popular hypothesis to explain the apparent increase in food allergies and sensitivities is the "hygiene hypothesis," which proposes that in our desire for cleanliness we have compromised the immune system's ability to discern true immune threats, like viruses and bacterial infections, from ingested proteins like gluten.

Another newer premise is that some people have enhanced sensitivity to FODMAPS—which stands for fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols—in the diet, some of which are also present in wheat. These are poorly absorbed carbohydrates (sugars) in the diet that ferment in the gut and can cause gas, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and constipation—symptoms very similar to those for CD and for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). The most common sources of FODMAPS in the diet are fructose (found in honey, fruit, and high-fructose corn syrup), fructans (found in wheat, garlic, and onions), galactans (found in legumes), and polyols (found in sweeteners, stone fruits, and avocados). A common treatment to manage the symptoms of IBS is to eliminate all FODMAPS from the diet. It's easy to understand how people without celiac disease report similar symptoms to celiac disease—particularly since wheat-containing foods can contribute to symptoms in both groups. In recent studies of FODMAP restriction, one third of patients with IBS reported symptom reduction when wheat and other FODMAPS were removed from their diets. Clearly, there is more going on with gluten (or gluten-attributed) sensitivities than meets the eye.

Preparing Gluten-Free Foods in the Commercial Foodservice Setting

The challenges of isolating gluten-free food preparation in the commercial foodservice setting have been poorly addressed by many providers. First, most foodservice organizations will not become totally gluten-free environments. Short of gluten-free certification for your facilities, what steps can be taken to increase safety of diners or patients who need to avoid gluten? There are some simple steps you can take to maintain the safety of your customers.



It's often hard for consumers to choose foods that are safe to consume vs. those that are not. This may be due to a lack of labeling or identification, kitchen-to-front-of-house communication issues, inconsistent preparation procedures, or accidental contamination. Every failure to address this issue results in lost sales, and new opportunities to serve the customers walking into your operations today. You can take some simple steps to limit gluten contamination of gluten-free foods in your operations.

Training and Facilities

1. Step one is assuring that every employee that prepares and serves food in your facilities has documented training in allergen safety. Food allergies can be life threatening (and they often do result in loss of life). This must be a priority for the safety of every customer you serve—by every person involved in food preparation, food display, stocking, and customer service areas.
2. Every item you purchase for your sites and every product you produce for sale should have both ingredient and allergen information readily accessible. Not only is this the law in many locales, but it's the right thing to do.
3. Adding allergens to previously developed recipes and processes should be done ONLY after assuring that all communications and labeling on the ingredients and allergens have been updated.
4. Use separately marked and differently colored utensils and equipment to protect against cross-contamination. For example, use a separate fryer and all different colored utensils for gluten-free items.
5. Make sure your messaging around gluten-free items is accurate. Most commercial kitchens and operations are not technically gluten-free, but you can take steps to provide a safe environment for those who need to avoid gluten on a daily basis by implementing some of the suggestions above. The best approach is to communicate to your staff and management about all the steps that must be taken to keep the customer safe—and have a transparent policy on all allergen issues in your operations.

The Gluten-free movement is here to stay. Instead of ignoring it, your operation can gain customers, revenue and trust by embracing some of these simple approaches to providing safe gluten-friendly alternatives at your locations.

Recipes and Menu Offerings for Gluten-Free Customers

Every food business should be asking one basic question: *How can we minimize gluten contamination of gluten-free foods in our operations?* Develop approaches for re-working recipes to reduce exposure, and implement those changes.

Some Simple Strategies

Cooking from scratch: many pre-prepared foods and processed food ingredients contain hidden gluten as thickeners, stabilizers, etc. Cooking from scratch allows better control over ingredients, and gluten-containing recipes can often be made gluten-free with simple substitutions.

Scratch-made soups: if thickened with flour, try an alternative starch to remove gluten from the recipe. Stocks and cream soups can be thickened with potatoes, cornstarch, or gluten-free flours. Most culinary specialists possess the skills to do this without impacting flavor or quality.

House-made salad dressings: Can they be made without gluten? Gluten-free soy sauce, blue cheese, and herbs and spices can be sourced to make great salad dressings without compromising flavor or enjoyment.

Use gluten-free soy sauces to create great stir-fry dishes, teriyaki sauces, and Asian dressings for salads. If P.F. Chang's and Pei Wei can do it, so can your operation!

Use pasta made with quinoa, brown rice, corn, or legumes to provide a full line of pasta dishes for your customers. Can you make both red sauces and Alfredo sauces without added gluten? You can bet Italian mothers never added flour to their Alfredo sauce, and neither should you.

Make good quality gravies without gluten for comfort foods. Chefs with great food skills can create reductions and use thickeners other than wheat flour to produce great taste, appeal, and appearance. Additionally, gluten-free oats can be added to meatloaf and meatball recipes in place of bread crumbs to enhance moisture and texture without adding gluten.

Choose good quality gluten-free bread options such as tortillas, wraps, and snack foods. Most of these items have long shelf lives or can be kept frozen until they need to be stocked or used. Try to find the best quality options to meet these needs vs. products that lack flavor or texture. There are more options for gluten-free deliciousness than ever before.

Gluten-free baked goods tend to be the highest-grossing packaged food category in the entire gluten-free market. Gluten-free consumers spend 30% more on grocery items and are less price-sensitive than other consumers, yet 77% report it's hard to find good gluten-free foods. Product selection is the number one driver for gluten-free buyers, followed by price, service, and knowledgeable staff. Can you produce some excellent gluten-free products in your operation to meet the needs of this group? Success stories abound in this category, with the use of flourless cake recipes, gluten-free flour mixes, use of gluten-free oats and oat flour. If Trader Joe's can produce and sell great gluten-free baked goods, so can you.

The gluten-free movement is here to stay. Instead of ignoring it, your operation can gain customers, revenue, and trust by embracing some of these simple approaches to providing safe gluten-free alternatives in your operations.

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