

## *Marketing Rice For Its Nutritional Value*

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Consumer research showing nutrition as the number one driver in food purchases and a gap in consumer understanding of rice's nutrition benefits drove the rice industry to launch a major nutrition education program in 2004. The "Rice Fits" program reaches health professionals, media and consumers with science-based information drawn from expert sources such as *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans/MyPyramid* and research conducted by Iowa State University showing that rice eaters have healthier diets than non-rice eaters and eat more like the *Dietary Guidelines* recommend. The importance of grains and carbohydrates in the diet, brown rice as a 100% whole grain, and folic acid benefits are stressed, along with information that rice is free of trans fats, sodium and cholesterol, is gluten-free and low in calories and saturated fats. A key tactic is showing how rice helps consumers translate nutrition guidelines into meals, and helps increase consumption of other healthy foods. Registered dietitians serve as media spokespersons.

To remain competitive in the consumer marketplace, the rice industry must break new ground in nutrition messaging. Science-based health claims for rice should be explored in the short term since consumers look to this information to help guide purchases. In the long term, the rice industry must invest in a strategic research program to develop information showing consumers new health benefits of rice. A trends research report conducted for the rice industry in 2005 recommended that "Rice millers and marketers must maximize their health positioning to ensure strong sales in the consumer product and food service sectors in the years ahead. Interest in foods that help to prevent or treat a specific health condition is at an all time high and will continue to grow rapidly. Rice millers and marketers should pursue and promote rice varieties whose phytochemicals provide a natural health benefit, such as cholesterol-lowering, antioxidants, etc. Heart-health, anti-cancer, nutrients/antioxidants and weight loss/satiety, currently have the most appeal."