



## Defining Dietary Fiber — A Progress Report

It has been a productive few months since my last message (CEREAL FOODS WORLD February 1999) regarding our association's efforts to begin a discussion on the definition of dietary fiber. The members of the Committee to Define Dietary Fiber, through their diligence and extra efforts, are responsible for the accomplishments of the last few months. In this issue of CEREAL FOODS WORLD, four committee members provide you with an historical perspective on the research leading up to the current definition of dietary fiber: **"Dietary fiber consists of the remnants of edible plant cell, polysaccharides, lignin, and associated substances resistant to (hydrolysis) digestion by the alimentary enzymes of humans."** *My most important message to you now is to become involved in these further discussions.* Is this definition complete? Does this definition satisfy the consumer, food and health professionals, food processors and ingredient suppliers, and regulatory agencies?

Irrespective of one recent article indicating no correlation between dietary fiber intake and colorectal cancer, the scientific data on the many different and positive benefits of dietary fiber continue to accumulate. One criticism of this recent study asked what was the dietary fiber in the study. How was dietary fiber defined? Years ago dietary fiber was only "roughage" with no nutritional value. Today we know that many compounds not measured as dietary fiber and not included in the roughage definition have been shown to be highly beneficial in maintaining a healthy gut microflora. This information may constitute one of the most important and practical pieces of nutrition information to be publicized in the next decade. Recent surveys show that scientists in the area of dietary fiber favor the inclusion of oligosaccharides, which are not recovered with the current AOAC method for measuring total dietary fiber, in the definition. Many things about dietary fiber will be better understood as we move towards a consensus definition.

These developments prompt new questions: How should synthetic polymers be considered in any new and updated definition of dietary fiber? Is dietary fiber only obtained from edible plant cells? Should the definition include both a chemical and physiological component?

What do you think? *Again, the most important part of my message is that you must take a position and let your views be known.* Thanks to the rigorous and timely efforts of committee members, the AACC and the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) agreed to organize a joint meeting-workshop for June 2-3, 1999. Invited speakers will attempt to refine the definition for dietary fiber. This limited attendance workshop will be followed by an open forum to be held in conjunction with the Institute of Food Technologists meeting in Chicago on July 24-28, 1999. Final details are being arranged. In communications with the Food and Drug Administration, a debate still exists between whether there should be a chemical versus a physiological definition for dietary fiber. A forum on the issue of labeling for dietary fiber is being planned for two days in early September. The final discussion period on this project will be held in conjunction with the AACC meeting in Seattle October 31-November 3, 1999.

Contact the AACC through its Web site [www.scisoc.org/aacc](http://www.scisoc.org/aacc) to obtain additional information on future activities for this effort. Please send your e-mail messages and inquiries to this Web site. Additional information will appear in future editorials of CEREAL FOODS WORLD and other periodicals.

The term "dietary fiber" may remain but what the term represents may change. Do you have an opinion?

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to Define Dietary Fiber