



# Going Gluten-Free

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**T**he gluten-free food sector is gaining mainstream momentum and is expected to hit \$6 billion by 2015, as more consumers embrace the gluten-free lifestyle out of medical necessity or from thinking it is somehow healthier.

According to the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE), Oak Brook, IL, celiac disease affects approximately 1 in 133 people, or approximately 2 million people in the United States. And the sector is poised for explosive growth based on increased diagnosis of digestive-health conditions, growing interest for wheat-free and gluten-free diets, improved labeling regulations, and tastier innovations in the category.

According to "Gluten-Free Foods and Beverages in the U.S., 3rd Edition," a report from Packaged Facts, Rockville, MD, the U.S. gluten-free food market reached an estimated \$2.6 billion in retail sales in 2010, and the market experienced a CAGR of 30% from 2006 to 2010.

Further, gluten-free foods represent the fastest-growing segment of the global food-allergy and food-intolerance products market, which is projected to exceed \$26 billion by 2017, according to the recent "Food Allergy and Intolerance Products: A Global Strategic Business Report" from market researcher companiesandmarkets.com, London.

While gluten-free foods have been targeted to celiac sufferers who must avoid gluten to lead a healthy life, the products also are embraced by people who think a gluten-free diet can help treat disorders such as joint pain, osteoporosis or osteopenia, anemia, leg numbness, muscle cramps, aphthous ulcers, seizures, infertility or behavioral changes that may or may not be associated with celiac disease.

In fact, the consumer base for gluten-free diets includes a greater proportion of non-celiacs, due to growing concerns related to symptoms associated with celiac disease and incorrect self-diagnosis among non-celiac sufferers. The sector also is being driven by consumer belief that gluten-free can address non-celiac-related disorders, such as autism, and celebrities endorsing gluten-free and wheat-free diets as a weight-loss regimen.

The rapid expansion of gluten-free products has made it easier for consumers to try out this formerly niche dietary regime. The market witnessed an avalanche of new product launches in 2010, with savory snacks, energy bars, baking ingredients and mixes, chocolates, and cookies topping the list of gluten-free introductions. Consumers now have a variety of options to choose from in the baked-goods category, including baking mixes, breads, bagels, muffins, entrées, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, pastas, pizza, cereals, snack foods and soups. In addition, a variety of gluten-free grains, starches, flours and seeds are available to home cooks and industry alike.

As more gluten-free products hit the shelves, FDA has reopened the comment period for its proposed rule on regulations related to "gluten-free" labeling of products. The agency also has made available a safety assessment of exposure of gluten to people with celiac disease. The proposed rule dictates that foods carrying the claim cannot exceed 20 ppm gluten. This number was tapped because it was deemed that testing methods could not reliably determine amounts below 20 ppm. FDA also notes that this is the level that has been agreed upon for foods carrying a "gluten-free" claim in other countries. 