Assignment Two – Global Commodity Chain

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Cereal Global Commodity Chain

One of the classic food products found in many homes around the world is cereal. Cereal can be eaten in two forms: hot or cold. It is more common in the American households where breakfast is fast-paced and streamlined to get people out of the door to prepare ready-to-eat cold cereal with milk, whereas in other countries and cultures, cereal given more time to be prepared, is eaten for any meal and is usually served hot. Some consume it with cold milk in a bowl and others as a warm side with other foods such as meat. While we know that cereal is a global food staple, many are not aware of the different varieties of what is considered cereal. I will only touch on a few since the term includes many different types of food.

The cereals that we are most accustomed to here in the United States are made up of mainly whole grain oats and cornstarch. Grits and other warm cereals (other than oatmeal) are usually made from hominy, which is made from dried corn kernels with the hull and germ removed. Oatmeal is also considered a cereal and its primary ingredient is rolled oats. The process of rolling oats (also known as old-fashioned oats) consists of first cleaning, toasting, hulling, and cleaning the oats a second time. Then the oats are steamed and rolled flat to create the product that we know as oatmeal.

Whole grain oats, the primary ingredient found in cereal and oatmeal are mainly produced in Russia (22%), Canada (14%) and the United States (7%). This makes sense since oats are better suited to grow in cooler, moist areas. Corn, which is the main ingredient in hominy, is mainly produced in the United States (39%) with the next largest producers being China (19%) and Brazil (5%). Since corn is one of the top three grains grown in the world, it makes the production of corn in the US a vital part of the agricultural economy in the country. The US is the primary exporter of corn on the planet and between it and China, produces over half of the world’s total corn. In the United States, Iowa is the largest producer of corn, followed by Nebraska, Minnesota and Illinois (also known as the US Corn Belt located in the Midwestern US).

Mixing together grains, water and other ingredients, and cooking the mixture are the main steps in cereal production. Steps vary depending on cereal brand and product, but usually the mixture is formed into whatever shape it needs to portray and then is puffed and toasted into what we eat. In more detail, all of the grains are mixed into a pressure cooker along with the flavoring agents and other ingredients. Once cooked, the grain passes through a drying oven. After being cooled in a process called tempering, the grains are flattened between large metal rollers under tons of pressure. This produces flaked cereals. To make gun-puffed wheat cereals, which is what was mentioned above, wheat grains must be treated to partially remove the outer layer of bran, which is done by a process called pearlizing. The grain is then placed in a “gun”, a small vessel that holds hot steam at very high pressures. It works by opening to reduce pressure suddenly, which in turn puffs the grain. Cereals are packed by machines in factories in moisture-protecting plastic and sealed in specially designed boxes. Once packaged, cereals are shipped by truck or rail to regional distribution centers for distribution to retail grocery chains or warehouse stores.

From ground to store, the process of making cereals that we consume is not very difficult and is usually done domestically here in the United States due to our large investments in domestic grain and corn production. The next time you pick up your box of cereal, you can take pride in knowing that the majority of the product was grown, processed and packaged in the US, and part of the process may have even been local to you. It is great to know that we have a strong and growing agricultural market with these two crops that continues to provide thousands of jobs to Americans, as well as a steady domestic supply of staple crops.
