



## THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATION RESEARCH

# Pancakes on a Gluten-Free Diet: Purely Elizabeth's Innovative Strategy to Capture New Customers

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### KEYWORDS

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# SPEARHEAD

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# Pancakes on a Gluten-Free Diet: Purely Elizabeth's Innovative Strategy to Capture New Customers

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Paleo Foundation, El Salvador**Contact**<sup>1</sup>Email: karen@paleofoundation.com<sup>1</sup>Twitter: @5WordsorlessKP<sup>2</sup>Email: tobias@paleofoundation.org**Abstract**

As ever-larger segments of the population begin to realize the connection between the excessive consumption of "empty," refined carbohydrates and the myriad of chronic health problems affecting the country, there is a major market opportunity for healthier grains to grow in popularity. Purely Elizabeth is a natural foods company that, for the past decade, has been a leader in providing consumers with gluten-free products made from wholesome, alternative grains. The brand has developed an impressive product portfolio that attracts consumers from several different dietary trends and nutrition/lifestyle choices. Purely Elizabeth has also found that their investment in third-party certifications has played a major role in expanding their marketing opportunities.

**KEYWORDS**

Third-party certification, Purely Elizabeth, ancient grains, superfoods, Keto Diet, Paleo Diet, Certified Paleo, Keto Certified

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

According to recent estimates, well over three million people in the United States [1] follow a gluten-free diet. Almost three-fourths of

those people are considered to be people without Celiac disease avoiding gluten (PWAG). A recent scientific study by the National Institutes of Health [2] (NIH) found that "celiac disease patients have an increased risk to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which has also been implicated in glyphosate exposure...Glyphosate residues in wheat and other crops are likely increasing recently due to the growing practice of crop desiccation just prior to the harvest." Similarly, refined grains such as white flour have been linked to the diabetes and heart disease epidemics affecting large sectors of the population.

The negative health implications of consuming refined,

"white" grains have led millions of consumers around the country to make significant changes to their diets. Strict adherence to low-carb diets such as the Keto Diet or Paleo Diet is also increasing in popularity. However, finding ways to "replace" traditional dietary staples such as bread, pasta, and pancakes is a challenge for many people wanting to make healthier nutritional choices.

The natural foods company "Purely Elizabeth" recently released a new line of pancake mixes made from nutrient-rich ancient grains and superfoods. Not only do these pancake mixes offer more nutritious breakfast options for people wanting to avoid refined flours and grains, but it also indicates upcoming economic trends in the health food industry.

## 2 | NUTRITIONAL LOGIC AND THE ANCIENT GRAIN CONNECTIONS

The adverse health implications of an industrialized food system centered on the monoculture production and manufacture of food products from refined grains have never been more evident. Today, the CDC estimates that over 100 million Americans [3], almost a third of the population, suffer from diabetes or prediabetes. Similarly, unhealthy diets and a lack of exercise are the leading causes of the coronary heart disease epidemic. Over 365,000 people died from coronary heart disease in 2017 [4]. Almost 7 percent of the population over 20 years old has this condition.

Among other nutritional recommendations, replacing refined grains with healthier, unrefined, whole grains in our diet is an essential strategy to reducing the risk for diabetes, coronary heart disease, and other common diet-related health issues. Nutritional studies have found that wholegrain foods are more nutritionally rich in dietary fiber, resistant starch, antioxidants, and other vital micronutrients such as folic acid and other vitamins [5].

However, one of the most significant obstacles to healthier diets and lifestyles is the lack of healthy food alternatives for the standard shopper. There are probably twenty aisles selling highly processed and refined food products for every health food aisle in a grocery store. While individuals could certainly purchase whole grains and make their pancake mixes, wholesome flours, and other healthier food alternatives, the hectic schedules of our lives make this impractical for millions of Americans.

The natural food company Purely Elizabeth has stepped in to fill this void, offering nutrient-rich pancake mixes that are made from wholesome alternative grains and even grass-fed collagen.

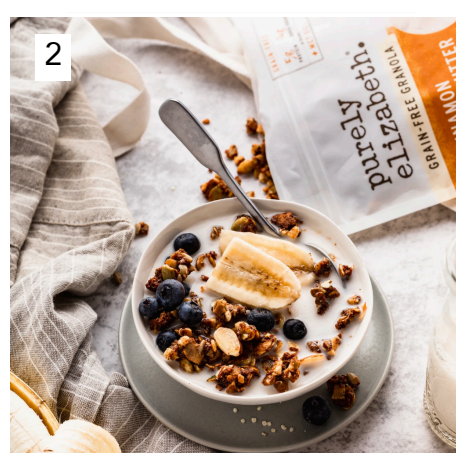
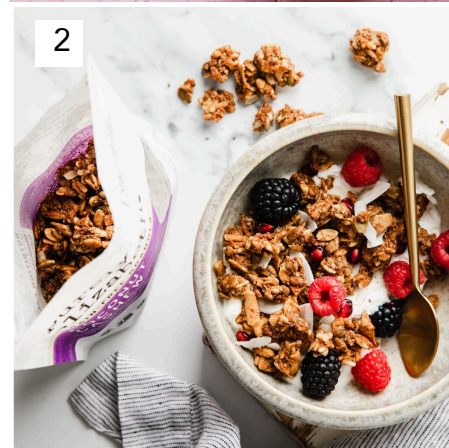
Lily Steinbock, director of marketing communications at the company, states that the brand was founded by Elizabeth Stein [Image 1] a certified holistic nutrition counselor. "Realizing the superfoods and ancient grains she was recommending weren't readily available on store shelves, Elizabeth created a first-of-its-kind line of gluten-free Ancient Grain Granola. With consumer health in mind, Purely Elizabeth takes pride in sourcing ingredients based on their superior quality and nutritional benefits. Almost 12 years later, Purely Elizabeth has thoughtfully created a line of Paleo and Keto Certified hot cereals, grain-free granolas, and pancake and waffle mixes. [Exhibit 1,2,3]



Image 1: Elizabeth Stein, founder of Purely Elizabeth

Wheat, corn, and rice are the three "major" grains that are the foundation for the modern-day diet. However, different cultures worldwide have longstanding traditions of cultivating various types of grains (and pseudo-grains) to add healthy carbohydrate intake to their diets. Amaranth in Mesoamerica, quinoa in South America, buckwheat in





**EXHIBIT 1:** Purely Elizabeth Strawberry Hazelnut and Cinnamon almond cauliflower-based hot cereals. **EXHIBIT 2:** Certified Paleo and Keto Certified grain-free granolas **EXHIBIT 3:** Purely Elizabeth Certified Paleo Grain-Free Pancake and Waffle Mix.



Russia, farro in Italy, and sorghum in Africa are just a few of the ancient grains that have made up an essential part of diets in diverse regions around the world.

Many of these ancient grains are not only much more nutritionally dense than corn, wheat, and rice, but are also gluten-free. Sorghum, for example, looks like corn but offers more nutrition while also being completely free from gluten. Quinoa and amaranth are two pseudo-grains (meaning they are not biological members of the grain family though they are cooked and eaten similarly) renowned for being extremely high in protein.

Purely Elizabeth's Founder and CEO Elizabeth Steins says, "I launched Purely Elizabeth in 2009 with muffin and pancake mixes made with alternative nutrient-rich flours and superfood seeds. A few years later, when our granola launched and became an instant seller, we decided to focus on the one product line... Now, ten years later, we felt there was still a gap in the marketplace for a better-for-you, better-tasting pancake mix."

The baking mixes, granola products, and now pancake mixes offered by the company all rely on a diverse mixture of healthy, wholesome, ancient grains, including chia seeds, hemp flour, almond flour, buckwheat flour, flax seeds, among others. The company even offers a grain-free bar made from Reishi mushrooms known to boost the immune system and provide anti-cancer properties.

### 3 | CATERING TO DIFFERENT DIETARY TRENDS TO FILL A VOID IN THE MARKET

One of Purely Elizabeth's pillars of success has been the ability to cater to different dietary trends with their diverse product line. A 2018 study finds that

over 36 percent of Americans stated that they were actively following a diet or specific eating pattern [\[6\]](#). This number was up from only 14 percent in the same poll done in 2017. Eating healthy means different things to different people, and there are certainly no shortages of specific diets to choose from.

For example, in 2018, the Keto Diet was widely considered the most popular dietary trend among Americans. Last year, the intermittent fasting diet was the most searched for dietary trend on Google. While Purely Elizabeth has a steadfast commitment to supplying their customers with wholesome, healthy food alternatives, they haven't limited themselves to anyone specific diet.

With their recently released nutrient-rich pancake mixes, the company purposefully designed and manufactured three products that appeal to people who follow different dietary trends. The Ancient Grain Pancake Mix is made from a specific blend of nutrient-rich flours and seeds. Organic teff flour, organic buckwheat flour, almond flour, organic chia, hemp, and flax seeds make this an excellent choice for consumers looking for a non-GMO, gluten-free, and vegan breakfast alternative. With seven grams of protein per serving, it also offers plentiful plant-based protein sources for people who avoid meat products.

The company's Grain-Free Pancake Mix includes a diverse set of ingredients, such as almond flour, organic coconut flour, organic tiger nut flour, organic flax, and chia seeds. This grain-free mix is perfect for people on the Paleo and Keto diets who consistently monitor their carbohydrate consumption. The Keto Diet, specifically, requires strict limitations on carbohydrate intake to achieve a metabolic state of ketosis.

Lastly, Purely Elizabeth also offers a Grain-Free Protein Pancake Mix with Grass-Fed Collagen. This

rich protein source comes from the hides of cattle exclusively raised on pasture (as opposed to being raised on a grain diet in feedlots). While this option will not appeal to vegans or vegetarians, the nutrient-rich pancake mix blend also includes almond flour, organic coconut flour, organic tiger nut flour, organic flax, and chia seeds, in addition to the grass-fed collagen. The 11 grams of protein per serving is incredible for people on Paleo, Keto, and grain-free diets.

All Purely Elizabeth products contain no artificial additives or soy and are made with organic, innovative, nutrient-rich ingredients that add delicious flavor and texture, like Ancient Grains + Superfood Seeds (Quinoa, Amaranth, Chia, Hemp, and Flax), Coconut Sugar and Raw Virgin Coconut oil. Steinbock affirms that "Purely Elizabeth purposely has developed products that people can eat and enjoy without feeling guilty if they abide by certain dietary restrictions like paleo, gluten-free, grain-free and keto."

The business success of Purely Elizabeth goes beyond product innovation and diversifying markets. Maintaining a prosperous natural food company in a market that experiences enormous amounts of competition has also required an ability to think outside the box and predict upcoming trends in the health food market. The health and wellness food industry is expected to grow to over 811 billion dollars by 2021 [7]. While this presents opportunities for entrepreneurs and small businesses, it also increases competition.

Purely Elizabeth has been steadily growing for well over a decade. At its beginning, the company focused exclusively on its line of muffin mixes made from wholesome, ancient grains. Once the company gained a foothold in the market and established a

solid customer base, it carefully expanded its product lines to include wholegrain granola, other baking mixes, and now pancake mixes. Expanding beyond a successful business strategy requires the ability to act on possible future market trends.

In an interview with Entrepreneur, Stein says that "there are so many unknowns in the business...The backbone of what we've always done and how I've always envisioned the brand is to be using the most nutrient-dense, elevated, innovative ingredients. It's almost like the stock market as far as what you're betting on to be the next big trend and what consumers are wanting. [8]"

#### 4 | THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATIONS TO INCREASE MARKETING OPTIONS AND CHANNELS

Purely Elizabeth decided to get several different third-party certifications early on in their process of brand development. Steinbock shares that "I think it legitimizes your products for people who are eating specific or strict diets. Brands only have specific touchpoints with consumers, and especially when they are shopping in-store, it is important for people to easily be able to tell what type of product it is. For example, if someone is keto, they might not look twice at your products because it's not Keto Certified."

The constant shifts in diet popularity might lead some people to believe that specific certifications offer more value than others in terms of connecting with certain groups of consumers and increasing sales. For example, while The Paleo Diet was the most Google-searched dietary trend in 2013, it has fallen into 8th place, receiving almost 1.8 million fewer monthly searches than the Keto Diet, which was the most popular dietary trend in 2020 [9]. For many brands, this might push them in the direction of focusing

most of their attention on searching for the most "relevant" certifications based on current consumer trends.

However, the people at Purely Elizabeth believe that investing in several different certifications allows food brands to stay connected with diverse groups of customers while also staying relevant despite the constantly shifting dietary trends and fads. "I think each of the different certifications has had different uses and importance over the years," Steinbock says. "For example, Whole Foods won't accept products that aren't non-GMO project verified. Today, consumers following the Paleo or Keto diets get excited to see a certification to know we've done the work for them."

One of the most tangible and practical benefits of third-party certifications is that they tend to increase the marketing options that brands can use as part of a wider marketing and publicity strategy. Developing

an e-commerce marketing strategy has become almost essential for brands wanting to stay competitive. Recent market research finds that the U.S. food and beverage retail e-commerce sales were expected to surpass \$38 billion in 2023, giving the industry a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17.3 percent [10]. The e-grocery market share has almost doubled from just over 5 percent in 2018 to 10 percent in 2020 [11]. Further growth is expected, especially after the boom in e-commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Steinbock believes that by "having these certifications (i.e., Keto, Paleo, Grain-Free) you can directly target consumers that are following those diets, which has been a great driver for us via e-comm... It's certainly helped us gain new customers as those looking for the specific attributes can better find us, whether it's gluten-free, vegan, or paleo."

The company has also utilized its third-party certifications for more creative marketing and advertising strategies. "We've also done themed giveaways or partnerships to align with other brands who are keto certified or paleo certified, so then you are able to tap into their audience who may not know of your brand yet," Steinbock mentions. "Having these certifications is an added element of marketing. Obviously, you can target the general public who may be eating granola, but you can get even more targeted by making that group more granular and use messaging that they are looking for."

For people who religiously follow certain diets and lifestyles, Steinbock says that being able to display certain third-party certifications "shows the brand has done the work and effort to make sure the product follows stringent guidelines, whatever that may be based on the certifications."

*"When up against another brand that may not have the certifications, being able to show our certifications has certainly been helpful," Steinbock states. "It shows the buyers that we've already done all the work and the importance of everything that goes into our products."*

Beyond attracting new customers via e-commerce platforms, Purely Elizabeth has also leveraged their third-party certifications as a tool to stay competitive with large retailers. The major food retail companies most certainly have a number of their people following closely the most important dietary trends and data related to consumer preferences. As certain diets like paleo, keto, or gluten-free continue to grow in popularity, having those certifications can be a game-changer when competing for interest with retail buyers.

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As the health food and natural food markets continue to grow, however, consumers will want to look for packaged foods that align with their specific dietary and lifestyle choices. Moving beyond the refined grains that have dominated the industrial food system for decades is seen by many experts as the next major change in the food and nutrition industries. Entrepreneurs that want to incorporate innovative, nutrient-rich ingredients that tailor to the millions of Americans following specific diets as part of a greater interest in health and wellness would do well to learn from the business trajectory of Purely Elizabeth. Investing in third-party certifications seems to be an integral part of growing into this promising market niche.

## 5 | CERTIFICATIONS

- Certified Paleo
- Keto Certified
- Non-GMO Project Certified
- Certified B Corporation
- Certified Gluten-Free

## 6 | CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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