**USDA’s Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program Works!**

When 64,000 U.S. school students had access to free fruits and vegetables throughout the school day, amazing things started to happen.

Students*…

- Ate more fruits and vegetables
- Ate less high calorie, high fat vending options
- Ate more healthy meals as part of School Lunch Program
- Had better attention spans and were less hungry throughout the day
- Felt better and visited the nurse less often
- Had fewer discipline problems

*as reported by school staff
The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program provided $6 million for 107 schools to determine the best ways to increase fruit (both fresh and dried) and fresh vegetable consumption in elementary and secondary schools. The pilot, which began in October 2002, also looked at how increased intake of fruits and vegetables would impact other eating behaviors, like snack choices and participation in the school meals programs. The pilot was implemented in 25 schools each in Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, and seven schools of the Zuni Indian Tribal Organization in New Mexico for purchases of fruit and vegetable snacks to be offered free to children throughout the school day. High school, middle school, and elementary schools all participated in the program during the 2002-2003 school year. The results are amazing.

An evaluation* of the pilot project conducted by the USDA Economic Research Service in May 2003 showed:

- Fewer students purchased less healthy items such as doughnuts and candy – the availability of fruits and vegetables helped transform the school environment to promote healthy food choices.

- Many schools reported students were more likely to eat the more nutritious School Lunch Program meals and to select more fruits and vegetables as part of that meal – the pilot helped students make better choices.

- More schools implemented nutrition education activities to build on the healthy fruit and vegetable offerings – the pilot helped leverage additional resources and coordination among school and community stakeholders.

The pilot program has transformed schools into models of healthy behavior and improved learning environments.

- Team building occurred among staff and students, and in some cases parents. Schools had to figure out how to pick up, deliver, and hand out the fruits and vegetables as well as deal with consequences of trash and clean-up.

- Barriers were broken since the fruits and vegetables were free and available to ALL students—there were no social, economic, ethnic or academic obstacles to confront.

- Positive interactions and role modeling occurred as more student-student and student-teacher interactions were observed – with students and teachers talking about produce and related topics, and students sharing and talking to each other more than in previous years.

Students loved the variety of fruit and vegetable options available throughout the school day.

“I eat more fruits and vegetables at home now too!”


Parents loved what it did for the kids and the habits their children were establishing.

“It makes me smile when I picture her eating CELERY sticks – prior to this she would have never touched them! Thank you for making those healthy foods available to the kids. Parents do appreciate it!”

Parent, Allen Park Middle School, Mich.

School principals & teachers loved the flexibility afforded by USDA to implement the pilot.

“This program has provided each teacher the opportunity to be seen as more human, with personal feelings, likes and dislikes. For each student their classrooms have become more warm and welcoming.”

Dennis Heiman, Principal, Muscatine High School, Iowa

Foodservice & health education staff reported the importance of teaching students to make healthy choices.

“School officials have heard students in the hallway talking and some students get excited about kiwis and other students don’t know what a kiwi is.”

Debbie Kohn, Health Education Director, Whittier Middle School, Mich.

Learn more today about expanding the Fruit and Vegetable Program into your state and all states! Contact:

Produce for Better Health Foundation
302-235-2329, ext. 332
www.5aday.com

United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association
202-303-3400
www.uffva.org
Given the fact that overweight and obesity doubled in children and tripled in adolescents over the last decade* and nearly 75% of elementary school students are not eating the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day**, the time is ripe for a healthy food environment that promotes more fruits and vegetables.

If you don’t believe it, just ask the kids!

“…instead of going to the store across the street to buy pop and chips, I eat fruit before cheerleading practice.”

Student, Allen Park Middle School, Mich.

“I think it’s good the school is providing food for us to get healthy and do good in class and get good grades.”

Student, Whittier Middle School, Flint, Mich.

“North High School has hour-and-a-half classes, the fruit and vegetable snack comes in handy and helps you focus on your work.”

Student, North High School, Iowa

“The snack program shows that the school cares about our health and if we are eating right.”

Student, Linden High School, Linden, Mich.


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