



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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EUROPE ADOPTS SCHOOL FRUIT AND VEG SCHEME

Millions more children in the UK and other European schools could be eating free fresh fruit and vegetables regularly, thanks to a school fruit scheme adopted by the European Parliament. Obesity and poor diet among children is a rising epidemic across Europe, and nearly one in three 10-11 year olds in the UK is overweight. An ambitious programme is needed to tackle this public health issue, and the EU's decision to encourage children to eat more fruit and vegetables is welcomed by the Fresh Produce Consortium.

"Many UK fresh produce businesses are involved already in the successful UK School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme, and we support the development of an EU-wide school fruit scheme," said Nigel Jenney, chief executive of the Fresh Produce Consortium. "We'd like to see the UK initiative extended so that more children have the chance to eat fresh fruit and vegetables at school and to develop good eating habits at an early age."

The School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme in the UK has been successful in increasing consumption: a September 2007 report found that five-a-day consumption among school children had risen from 32% in 2004 to 44% in 2006.

FPC believes that the EU-wide scheme should facilitate the distribution of fresh fruit and vegetables and be supported by a formal network to share best practice about school scheme implementation and management. This would help to improve existing schemes and stimulate new initiatives.

"We urge the UK Government to seize this opportunity to build on the success of the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme," added Nigel Jenney. "We look forward to discussing with the Government how the industry can play its part in addressing this critical issue of public health."

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1. The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK's fresh produce trade association and is based in Peterborough. The FPC has represented the fresh produce sector for many years and is recognized across the UK and EU as the voice of the industry.
2. Extensive membership covers the complete spectrum of industry businesses including growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, processors, packers, food service companies and other allied organisations.
3. FPC believes that to be successful an EU school fruit scheme needs to:
 - recognise the diversity of school environments across Europe and be flexible to allow this.
 - create new initiatives as well as complement existing successful ones. The UK School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme has been shown through independent research to be both successful and well-received by school children. Any system should not distort competition among operators and the beneficiaries should be schools and children.
 - guarantee a wide range of quality fresh fruit and vegetables that are easily pre-prepared and easily eaten.
 - secure a consistent and reliable supply of fresh fruit and vegetables in schools and increase the volume already available.
 - put schools at the centre of any scheme, but involve public and private stakeholders, including local authorities and more importantly fresh produce suppliers which have the infrastructure to guarantee a consistent supply of a diverse range of fruit and vegetables. Other parties such as relevant trade associations, local health trusts and other businesses within the supply chain should also be consulted and encouraged to support the scheme.
 - ensure that an appropriate budget is set to ensure long-term success. As well as covering the direct supply of fruit and vegetables to school children, part of the budget should promote the scheme within the school and throughout the community.
 - be simple to administrate, and avoid unnecessary costly red tape.
4. The UK Government's National Child Measurement Programme 2006/7 reports that nearly one in three children in year 6 at primary school was overweight. In reception, almost one in four of children measured was either overweight or obese.
5. The UK's School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme is part of the 5 A DAY programme to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. Under the scheme, all four to six year old children in LEA maintained infant, primary and special schools are entitled to a free piece of fruit or vegetable each school day.