



FPC PRESS RELEASE

17 June 2009

FPC CALLS ON UK TO FOLLOW SCOTTISH LEAD TO EXPAND SCHOOL FRUIT AND VEG SCHEME

Millions more children in Scotland and in other European schools will be eating free fresh fruit and vegetables regularly from September, thanks to a school fruit scheme offered by the European Parliament. However, the UK Government is dragging its heels in taking up available EU funding to expand its successful Schools Fruit and Veg Scheme, with only the Scottish Government seizing this initiative to benefit its schoolchildren.

"Many UK fresh produce businesses are involved already in the successful UK School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme, and we have supported the development of an EU-wide school fruit scheme," said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the Fresh Produce Consortium. "We are disappointed that, despite much lobbying, the UK Government is not looking to grab this opportunity to extend the existing scheme in England and Wales. It's great that the Scottish Executive has had the foresight to take up the funding, but we'd like to see more children south of the border 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 contributed to a successful increase in consumption: a September 2007 report found that five-a-day consumption among school children had risen from 32% in 2004 to 44% in 2006.

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 scheme is a welcome means of encouraging schoolchildren to eat more fruit and vegetables.

“We urge the UK Government to think again and 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.”

The Scottish Government has been allocated 1.3 million Euros for the first year of the EU scheme. The European Commission will publish online details of the individual countries’ strategies next week.

Ends

Notes for editors:

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. 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.
4. 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.

Ends