

BY DAVID TUCKWILLER
COMMODITY
PROCUREMENT
BRANCH CHIEF

It's Time to Shrink the Kids

USDA incorporates fresh fruits, vegetables into school meals

The statistics are alarming: 33 percent of the children in the United States are overweight.

From 1980 to 2008 obesity rates for American children tripled—from 6.5 to 19.6 percent for ages 6 to 11, and for ages 12 to 19 up from 5.0 to 18.1 percent. But there is a movement afoot in this country—from First Lady Michelle Obama to celebrities and numerous child nutrition advocates—to stem the tide and reverse the trend of overweight youth, and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) is actively engaged.

As part of her strategy to fight childhood obesity, First Lady Michelle Obama established the “Let’s Move!” campaign, giving parents support to keep their children healthy and become more physically active, and to make healthy and affordable food available across the country.

In 2008 the USDA commissioned the Institute of Medicine to recommend updates and revisions to the national school breakfast and lunch programs, which feed 10 million and 30 million students, respectively, each day. The Institute released its recommendations in October 2009,



which included increasing the amount and variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; setting a minimum and maximum level of calories; and focusing more on reducing saturated fat and sodium.

Key Elements

The USDA continues to pilot healthy alternatives for our nation’s kids, especially through its National School Lunch Program:

- fresh-sliced apples were introduced in March 2009 to school districts in several states
- the Child Nutrition Act helps fund the fresh-cut apple and carrot pilot programs
- plans are underway to extend the fresh fruit and vegetable offerings to other schools.

To learn more about each key element, look for the — symbols throughout the article.



Dave Tuckwiller is chief of the USDA’s Commodity Procurement Branch of the Agricultural Marketing Service. He manages the purchase of fruit and vegetable commodities for the National School Lunch Program and other domestic nutrition programs.

It's Time to Shrink the Kids

"I share Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's belief that we face a public health crisis of high child obesity rates across the country," says Rayne Pegg, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). "The health of our nation depends on our children, and we will not succeed if [they] cannot achieve their potential because they aren't healthy." Pegg says AMS will remain

focused on bringing more fruits and vegetables to school lunches, as well as other national nutritional programs.

School Programs

➤ In March 2009 the USDA's National School Lunch Program introduced a pilot program to school districts in five states (California, Michigan, North Carolina, New York, and Pennsylvania) to provide students with fresh-cut apple slices. Apples were processed and packaged

into single-serve, two-ounce bags, similar to those found in kids' meals at major fast-food restaurants.

Schools in California's Santa Clara County were among the first recipients of the apples. Pavel Matustik, chief administrative officer of the Santa Clara Valley School Food Services Agency said, "It's one of the best things the USDA has done. It's wonderful because the kids love it, it's money well spent, it's healthy, and it helps our program." The apple pilot program was extended into the 2009-10 school year and now includes districts in Colorado, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, Texas, and Wisconsin.

To further this success, the USDA launched another pilot program in April for fresh-cut baby carrots. School districts in California, Florida, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, and Wisconsin were slated to receive the products.

Wake County schools near Raleigh, NC, receive both fresh-cut apple slices and baby carrots. "They're a welcome sight," says Marilyn Moody, senior director of child nutrition services for the schools. "We think students will eat healthy choices when...given the option. And, the more options we give them, the more likely they are to select the school lunch."

Moody has observed the habits of students who choose the fresh-cut products. The older students prefer them for safety reasons: they are individually packaged and not touched by other students or food handlers. Younger kids responded as well: "Our little folks," she said, "don't have front teeth so those sliced apples afford them a product that's easy to eat."

New Initiatives

➤ Secretary Vilsack urged Congress to pass robust reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act to continue efforts for improving children's health. Dr. Lorelei DiSogra, vice president of nutrition and health for the United Fresh Produce Association, was on board, explaining, "This is a revolution! All of the stars are aligned: you've got Mrs. Obama taking this on as her personal cause and Secretary Vilsack committed to improving school meals... They're shining the spotlight on this issue [and it] needs to be fixed now."



MANGOS
Available Year-Round

FRESKA
PRODUCE INTERNATIONAL

tel: 805-650-1040 fax: 805-650-3550 email: chuy@freskaproduce.com
www.freskaproduce.com
Oxnard, CA USA



"For a Fresh Clearance"

J & K Fresh, LLC
Customhouse Brokers

Serving the Ports of
Los Angeles - Long Beach
Port Hueneme
San Diego

Lynnette Keffer - President
Robert Lechoy - Office Manager
Raymond Keffer - Operations Manager

Phone 310-419-8770
Fax 310-419-8790
Los Angeles, CA



T E PRODUCE X CONVENTION A S

IS GOING TO SOUTH PADRE ISLAND !



CONVENTION & EXPO

**AUGUST 11 - 13, 2010
SHERATON BEACH HOTEL**

FOR REGISTRATION OR EXHIBITOR INFORMATION

Visit or Call 956 581-8632



www.texasproduceassociation.com

How to Get Involved

The Commodity Procurement Branch, part of the Agricultural Marketing Service's Fruit and Vegetable Programs, procures more than \$477 million (almost 1 billion lbs.) of fruit, vegetables, tree nuts, legumes, and other specialty crops on an annual basis for domestic nutrition assistance programs. The Branch collaborates with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, responsible for distributing the commodities to a number of programs including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and several others.

How does the USDA procure fruits and vegetables?

The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announces procurement needs throughout the year (annually, quarterly, or more frequently depending on need) and opens bid sessions for qualified, interested parties. All commodities have to be grown and processed within the United States and vendors must be approved and pre-certified, after meeting requirements outlined at the AMS's website (www.ams.usda.gov/fvprocurement).

Once AMS releases a Food Purchase Report, announcing plans to buy quantities of particular commodities, pre-certified vendors may submit bids following USDA guidelines and regulations (see www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5069167). Lowest bidders are then notified by AMS, quality and quantity are verified, and the Farm Service Agency renders payment.


Exceptions to the bidding process include declared disasters and rare instances when only one vendor can supply a product. Interested suppliers can register with AMS to receive electronic notifications of upcoming bids by using the following link: www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5069167.

When does AMS buy fruit and vegetables for the National School Lunch Program?

Purchases for school programs generally start in July, with deliveries beginning in August and continuing on a weekly or biweekly basis through May of the following year. Purchases for other food programs vary, depending on funding and need.

It's Time to Shrink the Kids

Lisa McNeese, a California-based vice president of food service and industrial sales for one of three vendors selected to provide baby carrots to schools, believes these products will go a long way toward improving children's health. "We must all act now because the cost of health care is going to be significant," she warns. "If you start now and introduce young kids to healthy fruits and vegetables—letting their palates become aware of these flavors—it's what they'll crave and what they'll want."

 The fresh-cut pilot programs are popular with schools, but need to be expanded into more states and cities, says Robert C. Keeney, deputy administrator for AMS's Fruit and Vegetable Programs. "The USDA will continue to collaborate with schools and explore ways to improve distribution to quickly provide additional product. The bottom line," he says, "is America's children are our most valued asset. Healthy minds and bodies can help create strong, intellectual leaders who will direct this nation as it keeps pace with an ever-emerging and diverse global economy."



Gibson Produce and Watermelon Sales

Vero Beach, Florida
877-569-4268
gibsonproduce@att.net



Bob Gibson, President

LITTLE JUNIOR

CENTRE MARAÎCHER

Eugène Guinois Jr. Inc.



GROWN IN RICH ORGANIC SOIL



Traceability...a priority!



All our products

vacuum-cooled



A FAMILY TRADITION



Centre Maraîcher Eugène Guinois Jr Inc 450 826-3207

WWW.LITTLEJUNIOR.NET