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Office of the Premier
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Premier Clark expands kids' fruit and veggie program

COURTENAY - More B.C. children will have access to fresh, B.C.-grown fruit and vegetable snacks in the classroom thanks to a \$3-million expansion of the BC School Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program, Premier Christy Clark announced today.

"Children need a healthy, balanced diet to learn, grow and to prevent health concerns like chronic disease and obesity later in life," said Premier Clark. "As a mom, I know that getting kids to eat their fruits and vegetables can sometimes be a challenge. The great thing about this program is that it brings a variety of fruits and vegetables right into the classroom, helping to make healthy eating part of a routine that can last a lifetime."

The School Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program was created in partnership with the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Education and is led by the BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation.

Starting in September 2011 through the 2012-13 school year, the program will be available to all B.C. public schools and will expand from the current 1,172 public schools to 1,402 schools, which includes most public and First Nations schools in British Columbia. In addition, \$2.5 million from the Ministry of Health's healthy eating in schools budget has been allocated to support student access to fruit and vegetables for the next two years. One-time grants will also be available to schools to purchase fridges and salad bar equipment to support local solutions to increase fruit and vegetable access for students.

"We're building on the success of this healthy eating program that has provided fruit and vegetable snacks to students across the province since 2005," said Minister of Health Michael de Jong. "B.C. has the highest youth and adult physical activity rates in the country and this expanded program builds on our commitment to ensure improved access to healthy living supports for children and families in every region of B.C."

Each school year, enrolled schools receive delivery of fruits or vegetables once every two weeks 13 times during the school year. Apples, blueberries, carrots and mini cucumbers are among the many healthy snacks that children receive through the program. All of the fruits and vegetables provided in the classroom are grown in British Columbia.

"It is great news that every public school in B.C. will now have access to this innovative program," said Education Minister George Abbott. "School is an ideal environment for students to increase their knowledge of the benefits of fruits and vegetables because it helps them to recognize at an early age the importance of a healthy diet."

The program promotes B.C.-grown produce and provides business to 11 different suppliers, representing over 400 B.C. growers. Produce is distributed by the Overwaitea Food Group, Saputo Dairy Products Canada, Dynamex Couriers, Bayview Market and Papason Trucking Ltd.

"This program offers great-tasting lessons about healthy choices and the importance of buying local and supporting B.C. farmers," said Agriculture Minister Don McRae. "Putting B.C. apples, treefruit and vegetables into the hands of hundreds of thousands of students shares the freshness and flavours of British Columbia and establishes that link right back to the farm."

Studies show that children and adolescents between the ages of two and 17 who eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day are substantially less likely to be overweight or obese than those with less frequent fruit and vegetable consumption. Fifty-nine per cent of Canadian children and adolescents consume less than the recommended number of fruit and vegetable servings per day.

"Over the past six years we have worked hard to grow this program, from a pilot of just 10 schools to a strong program that introduces kids from more than 1,100 public schools around the province to fresh fruits and vegetables on a regular basis," said Lindsay Babineau, executive director, BC Agriculture in the Classroom. "We are thrilled that through this expansion, all students in public and First Nations schools in B.C. will have the opportunity to participate."

The BC School Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program complements other provincial initiatives to help B.C. youth stay healthy, including the implementation of mandated daily physical activity for students and guidelines for food and beverage sales in B.C. schools to eliminate junk food and improve student health and achievement. Additionally, in September 2007, the Province introduced legislation which bans the use of tobacco on school grounds.

For more information on the BC School Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program, please visit: <http://www.aitc.ca/bc/>

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