

## Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

When is the last time you ate Dragonfruit, Chayote squash, Ugli fruit, or Meridol papayas? You say you can't remember? Perhaps it's more likely you've never heard of them? It's okay...you can admit it. If you know a student at James Gettys or Lincoln Elementary Schools, that student can tell you all about these delectable nutritional taste treats. Why? Because these schools are participating in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

This program began as a pilot program in 2002, and was expanded to all 50 states in 2008. It is a federally assisted program providing free fresh fruits and vegetables to students in participating elementary schools during the day. There is an application process, and the program targets elementary schools with the highest free and reduced lunch enrollment. The goal of the program is to improve children's overall diet and create healthier eating habits to impact their present and future health. The program accomplishes this goal by providing healthier food choices, expanding the variety of fruits and vegetables children experience, and increasing children's fruit and vegetable consumption. There are a wide variety of fruits and vegetables available in this program. Some of them are less well-known like those listed above. Many are very common such as strawberries, broccoli, green beans, grapefruit, and spinach. Did you know that there are 130 varieties of green beans? Did you know that grapefruit are the fruit of a sub-tropical evergreen tree?

Okay, so how does this program work? There is a different fruit or vegetable provided a minimum of three days per week. Each classroom has a calendar for the month, which identifies which fruit or vegetable will be featured on each day. In addition, the teachers have an information sheet to post about each fruit and vegetable which provides: detailed nutritional information, a listing of varieties, how to select, how to store, fun facts, and easy ways to enjoy the item. Students are offered the opportunity to try each fruit or vegetable. Although participation is not mandatory, students are highly encouraged to try each fruit or vegetable. Students know what time the fruit or vegetable is supposed to be sampled, and will often remind their teacher that it's time. The cafeteria staff drops off the fruit or vegetable at the classroom door and the teachers take it from there. In some classes the students will each vote on how well they like the fruit or vegetable of the day. Choices in one class are "yum", "okay", "not a fan", and "no thanks". Then they prepare a chart or graph of their results. Some classes will vote on their favorite over time, and chart or graph those results. In some classes they look at their classroom map to see where the fruit or vegetable grows. Other classes are preparing a journal containing information on all of the fruits and vegetables with their tally sheet on which they like or dislike like.

Regardless of the classroom, students are very excited to participate in this program. Hopefully when they get home they are telling their family about the fruit or vegetable of the day. Families, if you're not hearing about these fruits and vegetables, you need to ask your child.

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