

Brussels, 17 December 2008

"Yes we can": Stakeholders give strong support to School Fruit Schemes at EU conference

The European 'School Fruit Scheme' was at the centre of a major conference organised by the European Commission this Monday and Tuesday in Brussels which resulted in concrete recommendations on how to get fruit and vegetables to European children from the start of the 2009/2010 school year.

"This conference has been a huge success. It was great to see so many committed people who really want to make the School Fruit Scheme work effectively", said Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. "The past two days have provided excellent opportunities for networking and sharing ideas. Now we look forward to seeing the results of all this work as Member States draw up their programmes for the start of the School Fruit Scheme in 2009. The European Commission is providing 90 million euros for this scheme and this will be added to from national and private funds. I am confident that the work we are doing will play a major role in helping children learn good eating habits. This in turn will benefit everybody."

Around 300 stakeholders ranging from farmers to fruit traders, from the food industry to public health, education and environmental organisations, scientists and researchers as well as representatives of Member States, the Commission and the European Parliament participated in the conference.

The conference emphasised the need to strike the right balance which should allow for tailor-made programmes that fit local needs but which would also meet the basic requirements about accountability when using public money. The aim is to avoid red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy but at the same time allow the schemes to be well controlled.

The Commission will now take inspiration from the outcome of the conference in drawing up implementation rules on which the participants at the conference have given numerous recommendations on guidance, standards and indicators. This also includes immediate setting up of monitoring and evaluation, allowing for continuous improvement of school fruit schemes as well as an evidence-based report to be delivered after three years on the functioning of the scheme.

Furthermore it was recommended to set up two expert groups. The first expert group would involve researchers in the fields of public health and education which would take up an academic, advisory function. The other expert group would advise on the practicalities of implementation, exchange best practices and assist in designing and updating an internet networking portal which would facilitate the transfer of knowledge between Member States.

Background data:

The Commission has put aside €90 million for the distribution of fruit and vegetables in European schools with the principle of co-financing which will take the total amount of funds available for school fruit and vegetables to €157 million. In addition to that Member States are invited to involve funds from industry, national, regional and local authorities and others in order to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme. This is necessary in order to make it a powerful instrument in the fight against obesity and in order to counter the effects of low or even declining consumption of fruit and vegetables, resulting in higher risks of developing cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and certain types of cancer.

More information on the school fruit scheme available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/fruitveg/sfs/index_en.htm