

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Agriculture grant to help promote fresh fruit and vegetable consumption among students

COLUMBIA – Students in several South Carolina elementary public schools will be munching on fresh carrots or peaches in their classrooms and hallways next school year.

A \$250,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is partnering the South Carolina Department of Education's Office of School Food Services and Nutrition with the South Carolina Department of Agriculture to work with local farmers to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetables program. The grant funds will provide fruit baskets inside classrooms, kiosks in the hallways and other innovative approaches to give students the opportunity to grab fresh fruit or vegetable snacks throughout the school day. The initiative will operate in 25 schools.

"Our goal is to increase the number of fresh fruits and vegetables our children consume," said State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex. "Participating schools will make nutrition education a priority so that students learn the importance of these items in a healthy diet. We believe that by creating healthier school environments early, we can help our young people develop good eating habits that will last throughout their lives."

According to education and agriculture officials, the program creates an optimum environment for students to develop healthful snack habits because it uses all of their senses - sound, sight, touch, smell, and most important, taste.

Rex said another benefit to the partnership will be helping students develop an appreciation for South Carolina's farms and farmers.

Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers agreed. "This education and agriculture partnership will grow minds and grow farms at the same time," he said. "Providing free, tasty, fresh fruit and vegetable snacks to students improves nutrition and helps develop a more sustainable food system in the state. As an added bonus from this farm-to-school effort, students will get a better understanding of the origin of their food. Certified SC grown. Nothing's fresher. Nothing's finer."

Schools have until April 18 to apply for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and selection of the 25 schools will take place by June 1. Winning schools must demonstrate a willingness to develop nutrition education programs focused on fruits and vegetables, as well as a willingness to develop partnerships with local farmers and growers.