

Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

In 1994, the Food and Nutrition Service began working with the Agricultural Marketing Service and other agencies in and out of government to explore options for providing more fresh fruit and vegetable products to schools. This meeting led to talks with the Department of Defense, Defense Personnel Support Center, now known as the Defense Supply Center Philadelphia (DSCP) to enter into a pilot project to supply fresh fruit and vegetables directly to schools along with their deliveries to military installations or other sites in the United States. An agreement was signed by administrators of the Food and Nutrition Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, and DSCP in August 1995 authorizing the program.

The pilot project began in School Year (SY) 1995 with eight States participating, allocating a portion of their commodity entitlement funds toward the program. Produce valued at \$3,259,367 was delivered to schools that year. Due to the favorable response from States participating in the pilot, the program was opened up to all States. The program increased each year until allocations for SY 1998 reached \$20 million, and \$25 million in SY 1999 through SY 2002. The 2002 Farm Bill doubled spending to \$50 million in SY 2003, where it is today (SY 2008). At this time, 47 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam are participating in the program using commodity entitlement funds.

Because of the success of the entitlement program for schools, it was expanded to include purchases for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, which in SY 2007 spent \$4,479,972 on produce. School lunch programs were also given the opportunity to purchase additional quantities of fresh fruits and vegetables directly from DSCP using Section 4 and 11 funds. During SY 2007, 23 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands ordered an additional \$25,071,931 of produce with these funds.

DSCP operates a nationwide system to purchase and distribute a wide variety of high quality fresh produce to military installations, Federal prisons, and veterans' hospitals. Either States or their schools place orders directly with DSCP's field offices for a variety of available, American-grown fresh products. A few of the 874 currently available products include various types and pack sizes of: lettuce, salad mix, white mushrooms, broccoli, alfalfa sprouts, watermelon, apples, oranges, lemons, honeydew, nectarines, kiwi fruit, strawberries, pineapples, pears, celery sticks, kale, cantaloupe, red grapes, collard greens, cucumbers, carrots, avocado, tomatoes, peaches, spinach, radishes and bananas. States can and do limit the types of products their schools may order.

Through the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been able to offer schools a wider variety of fresh produce than would normally be available through USDA purchases. States and schools are extremely pleased with the quality, condition, and appearance of the products, and they are excited about the extensive selection. Deliveries are frequent, on time and the cost is reasonable.