

GSA Foundation Focuses on Bringing More Produce into Local Schools and Beyond

BY ABBY TAYLOR-SILVA, GROWER-SHIPPER ASSOCIATION

Based upon local grower-shipper concern that many local schools are not equipped to receive salad bars or increase their produce distribution, the Grower-Shipper Association Foundation formed its "More Produce in Schools" program in late 2011. This program represents a new initiative on finding solutions to the national obesity epidemic by focusing on avenues to bring more produce into schools on the Central Coast. Nationwide, schools are facing new federal regulations regarding how much produce they must serve, and this program is working with Central Coast area school foodservice directors and grower-shippers to find solutions.

The Grower-Shipper Association Foundation held a gathering of Central Coast food service directors and grower-shippers on June 13th in Salinas. Participants learned about the preliminary results of the Foundation's school foodservice director survey and discussed local school foodservice needs, including how local produce companies might provide more produce to schools through packaging styles that will address the 2013-2014 USDA Child Nutrition Meal Plan Guidelines.

Guests included Congressman Sam Farr, who spoke about the nation's need to address the obesity epidemic through the inclusion of more produce in schools, as well as Deborah Beall of the California Department of Education. The rest of the guests represented about fifteen grower-shippers and ten school foodservice departments.

The Foundation's preliminary survey results show that there's capacity to include more produce in local schools, but packaging has become of paramount importance. Individual servings have become more popular due to many factors, including shortened lunch periods and new USDA regulations.

Participants learned about new USDA regulations to the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs that took effect as of July 1 as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which in addition to other changes, set new nutrition standards for the first time in fifteen



(l to r): Abby Taylor-Silva (GSAF), Linda McGlone (Monterey County Public Health), Luis de la Garza (Reiter Berry Company), Margaret D'Arrigo-Martin (Taylor Farms), Congressman Sam Farr, Suzanne du Verrier (Healthy Eating Lifestyle Principles), Chris Moss (Monterey County Public Health).

years. Starting in the 2012-2013 school year a 1/2 cup serving of single-commodity vegetables from one of the defined, dietary "colors" such as dark green and red/orange is the new standard.

Participants agreed that a conversion system that could aid producers in standardizing weights for 1/2 cup servings, as well as a market analysis of the impact of the new regulations would be important next steps for the Foundation to undertake. The Foundation plans to hold another meeting of school foodservice directors and grower-shippers following further analysis and will continue to work with partners such as United Fresh, the Monterey County Health Department and Healthy Eating Lifestyle Principles (HELP) on next steps.

Additionally, at the Grower-Shipper Association's 74th Annual GSA Golf Tournament and Gala Events, Association Chairwoman Margaret D'Arrigo-Martin (Taylor Farms), and produce industry leaders raised more than \$43,000 to support the Grower-Shipper Association Foundation's More Produce in

Schools Program. Fifteen salad bars and related educational training are coming to schools in the Salinas/Monterey County area thanks to these donations and through participation with the United Fresh Produce Association Foundation's campaign to place salad bars in schools across the country. D'Arrigo-Martin has made it her priority to guide the Grower-Shipper Association Foundation's programming this year to promote increased access and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables in schools.

The GSA salad bar donations are made possible by the generous contributions of the following companies and other event attendees: NH3 Service Company, Pro*Act, Green Gate Fresh, Dole Fresh Vegetables, Taylor Farms, Church Brothers, R.C. Farms, Johnson, Moncrief & Hunt, PLC, Tanimura & Antle and Three Star Lettuce.

For more information about the Grower-Shipper Association Foundation and its More Produce in Schools Program, please contact the Foundation's Executive Director, David Bonetti, at (831) 422-9007. **CG**