



# **PEI Healthy Eating Alliance**

Fruit & Vegetable Pilot Project  
May – June 2003

Final Report

Submitted by:

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## Introduction

The Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Project was conducted as an initiative of the Access to Safe and Healthy Foods Committee of the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance. The objective of this committee is to increase the availability of fruit and vegetables to school-aged children. It was believed that through this pilot project children would have an opportunity to increase their awareness and willingness to try new and healthy food choices.

The committee felt it was important for the pilot to be conducted with a effective research component. This research was carried out with the support of Dr. Jennifer Taylor and the University of Prince Edward Island Dietetic Internship program. The evaluation included both pre and post tests that evaluated the children's food preferences and determine if the snack project had an effect on their preferences and willingness to try new and difference foods.

The intent of the pilot project was to use the evaluation information to demonstrate the effectiveness of such a snack program and provide a sound basis for further development and expansion.

## Description

Three pilot schools were identified to participate in the project. One school from each of the three Island school districts was used with 379 students in all participating. The pilot schools were: West Kent Elementary School, Charlottetown; Alberton Elementary School, Alberton and École-sur-Mer, Summerside.

The project ran from May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003 to June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003. Over the six weeks each classroom was provided with a fruit or vegetable snack tray once a week before the regular snack (recess) time each morning. Children were encouraged to sample items at their leisure. Each snack consisted of three choices of either fruits or vegetables. During the project students were exposed to each food items twice. See snack menu attached.

Food items were donated through community sponsorship and provided to the students free of charge. Each school was responsible for collecting the food items from the arranged places and parent volunteers contributed to the project by preparing and delivering the food trays and cleaning up after the snacks.

## Project Activities

The detailed events and activities for the project are listed as follows:

- Schools were selected and approached for participation. This included agreement from school officials and parent volunteers.
- Donations of food items were secured and organized for each school.

- A letter was distributed to all students notifying parents of the project and requesting permission for participation in the research component of the project. See letter attached.
- Pre test research was conducted in each school – prior to first snack day.
- Launch of the project occurred at each school site during the first snack day. Attendees included local MLA's, the Minister of Health and Social Services and local media. See attached press release and print media coverage.
- Snacks were given as previously described over the six-week period.
- Weekly parent information sheets and the “5 to 10 Are you Getting Enough?” fruit and vegetable brochures were distributed. See attached samples.
- “Freggie” (Atlantic Fresh Produce Association Healthy Eating Mascot) attended West Kent Elementary School as a wrap-up on the final snack day and distributed the “Freggie” healthy eating newsletter. See attached photos.
- Dietetic Interns returned to each pilot school and was conducted the post research test. Analysis of this data is currently ongoing.
- Thank you letters were sent to all sponsors, schools and parent volunteers for their contribution to the project.

### Participating Sponsors

The following sponsors contributed to the Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Project through the donation of either product or dollars for purchasing of items.

PEI Division, Canadian Cancer Society  
 Atlantic Fresh Produce Association  
 Danone  
 PEI Vegetable Growers Association  
 Summerside Atlantic Superstore  
 Charlottetown Atlantic Superstore  
 Charlottetown, Summerside and Alberton Co-operatives (*in kind support for storage*)

## Recommendations

- The menu items and food donations should be planned and secured well in advance of the project.
- There should be an evaluation component included in all snack programs to monitor effectiveness.
- It is vital to have school and parent support for the project with volunteers readily available for the on site components of the project.
- The workload for school staff should be minimal.
- Each school site will take on its own design. Future projects and guidelines should allow for this diversity and work with the strengths of each school community.
- There should be a close association with the Island producers; both for donations, purchasing and being mindful of 'in season' items which will be easier to obtain.
- Sponsorship dollars and donations for food items should be researched and already existing avenues of funding pursued (ie. G.I.F.T.).
- An overall coordinator would be required to expand this project to more school sites. This position should be well placed within the school community and potentially already associated with other food access programs in the province.

The final result of the research component of the project is still being developed and will be released in September 2003.