

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced that, as authorized by the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill), USDA will expand assistance to state agencies for schools operating USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) in the 2011/2012 school year.

The investment is part of the Obama administration's efforts to improve health of children by providing access to nutritious meals in schools and also serves as a valuable resource to schools that continue working to improve the health and nutrition of the foods they serve.

The assistance will provide free fresh fruit and vegetables to children throughout the school day.

"Improving the health and nutrition of our kids is a national imperative and by providing schools with fresh fruits and vegetables that expand their healthy options, we are helping our kids to have a brighter, healthier future," said Vilsack.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, authorized and funded under Section 19 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and expanded in recent years as a result of the 2008 Farm Bill, operates in selected low-income elementary schools in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

This year, USDA plans to provide \$158 million in assistance to state agencies. States then select schools to participate based on criteria in the law, including the requirement that each student receives between \$50 and \$75 worth of fresh produce over the school year.

"The program is highly successful in introducing schoolchildren to a variety of produce they otherwise might not have the opportunity to try," said Kevin Concannon, USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services.

In January, USDA published a proposed rule to update the nutrition standards for meals served through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, signed into law by President Barack Obama.

The proposed rule, based on the latest science, will make the first major improvement to the nutritional quality of school meals in 15 years, and is an important component of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative to solve the challenge of childhood obesity.

The standards will significantly increase fruit and vegetables provided at lunch.

Depending on enrollment and the allotment spent on each child, USDA estimates the expanded assistance could help schools serve additional 600,000 to 950,000 students next year.

Based on funding levels provided by the 2008 Farm Bill, subject to Congressional action, the school year 2011/2012 FFVP the planned allocations for Nebraska is \$2,032,086.