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By Nina Pullman

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NZ school scheme has 'normalised' eating fresh produce



New Zealand's scheme to provide schoolchildren with one fruit per day has had multiple benefits, EGEA conference hears

New Zealand's Fruit in Schools scheme operates in 480 schools

The New Zealand Fruit in Schools scheme (FIS) has succeeded in "normalising the consumption of fruit and vegetables" among young children, it has been announced.

Paula Dudley of United Fresh, which is responsible for managing the FIS scheme in New Zealand, presented the results of the scheme so far, during her talk at this week's EGEA conference in Milan.

Established in 2007, the New Zealand FIS schemes has now been rolled out to 480 low-income schools, among children aged between five and 12.

"An evaluation by the school principals has shown that as a result of the scheme, there are fewer hungry children, there is a reduced stigma and bullying culture around children who did not bring food to school, and children have a better attention span," she said.

"Health of the children had definitely improved. "School sores" have now been eradicated in most of those schools, which used to be a big problem, and children take less sick days. Essentially, it has succeeded in 'normalising' fruit and vegetable eating among these children."

The FIS scheme now provides fruit to staff as well as children, which has been found to make a big difference as adults can lead by example, Dudley added.

United Fresh is contracted by the New Zealand's ministry of healthy to supply fruit and freight under the scheme, which Dudley said removed any organisational burden over delivery or payments from the schools themselves.

In the same session, a panel of high-level representatives of the European Commission's DG Sante updated delegates on the European School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (SFVS).

Isabel De La Mata, principal advisor to DG Sante, said: "The EU comprehensive approach fits the complexity of the issue.

"It has a total budget of €150m, and it is reaching around 8.6 million children. It is now further increasing the impact through co-operation with DG Agri, to increase and evaluate the accompanying the educational measures."

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