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Turning Snack Time into a Learning Moment – Districts, Charters Invited to Apply for USDA’s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

(BOISE) – Students stream in from the playground and file into the hallways of Lake Pend Oreille School District’s elementary schools, ready for another day of learning. Some bring lunch from home, some grab breakfast at school, and many will head to the cafeteria later—but twice a week, all of the students in the school have a chance to add something extra to their day: a fresh fruit or vegetable, thanks to funding from USDA’s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP).

Lake Pend Oreille School District has participated in FFVP for more than a decade, giving K-6 students regular access to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. The federal program, administered in Idaho by the Department of Education, is designed to help children explore, taste, and learn about foods they may not otherwise encounter.

“This program turns snack time into a learning opportunity” said Idaho Department of Education program coordinator Pamela Murray. “When kids are introduced to new, healthy foods in a positive setting, they are more willing to try them, and more likely to build habits that last.”

For many students in Lake Pend Oreille, that means trying foods they’ve never seen before. While locally grown blueberries may be familiar, options like jicama sticks, striped beets, English cucumbers, and rutabaga are often brand new.

For LPOSD School Nutrition Director and 2025 Idaho School Nutrition Director of the Year Bobbie Coleman, the program is about more than exposure. It’s about access. Because some families in the district face long drives to the nearest grocery store, FFVP plays a critical role in closing that gap.

“By participating in FFVP, our district is intentionally addressing access,” said Coleman. “We wanted to go beyond standard cafeteria offerings and create something that feels vibrant, engaging, and truly beneficial for students.”

“We were inspired by the idea that a child’s first experience with foods like jicama or fresh melon should happen in a supportive, shared environment,” she said. “This is about making sure a student’s zip code or family budget never determines their access to healthy options.

FFVP began as a pilot program in 2002, expanded to Idaho in 2006, and became permanent nationwide in 2008. Today, participating elementary schools receive \$50 - \$75 per student each year to provide fresh fruit and vegetables outside of regular mealtimes—often paired with educational activities that encourage students to try something new.

Those shared experiences make a difference.

“When students see their peers and teachers all try something new together, the hesitation and ‘fear of the unknown’ fades,” said Coleman. “It creates a safe space to be curious and to be a brave eater.”

Schools across Idaho can apply for the 2026–2027 program year. The Idaho Department of Education’s Child Nutrition Programs team is currently seeking elementary schools to participate. Applications are due April 30 and are available [on the Department’s website](#). To qualify, schools must serve grades 1–6, participate in the National School Lunch Program, and have at least 40 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

After more than 10 years in Lake Pend Oreille, the impact is clear: students are expanding their palates, building confidence, and developing healthier relationships with food.

“The FFVP is more than a snack program. It’s a foundation for lifelong habits,” said Coleman. “By making fresh fruits and vegetables a regular, expected part of the school week, we’re helping students build a positive relationship with food that carries beyond the classroom.”

Elementary schools interested in participating can visit the [Idaho Department of Education’s website](#) or contact Child Nutrition Programs staff at 208-332-6831.

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