

In Iowa's Interest: Eating More Fresh Fruits and Veggies

Written by Sen. Tom Harkin
Tuesday, 31 May 2011 13:56

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by Senator Tom Harkin

As the summer approaches, I always look forward to enjoying the many delicious fresh fruits and vegetables that can be found across Iowa. From sweet corn at a roadside stand to Iowa melons and ripe tomatoes at a farmers market, our state truly has some of the best produce anywhere. And while we have a bit of time until peak harvest season, June is National Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Month, and a time to remind ourselves about the importance of eating fruits and veggies all year round as part of a balanced and varied diet.

In order to encourage more Americans to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, I have introduced measures in Congress aimed at making fruits and vegetables easier to get. For example, as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, I successfully worked to make free fresh fruits and vegetables available to millions of children across the country by authoring a historic expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which I first initiated in the 2002 farm bill. The program has to been a tremendous success. Both teachers and parents notice a change in student behavior and attentiveness, and kids love the great-tasting snacks. At the same time, we are reducing long-term national and state health care costs by raising a generation of children less likely to get sick or develop a chronic illness such as diabetes.

I have also been proud to promote efforts to expand farmers' markets. Over the past ten years, farmers' markets grew at a tremendous pace across the country. Iowa is no exception to this trend. As a farmers' market shopper myself, it makes me feel proud to know that I'm helping to support local farmers and the rural Iowa economies they depend upon to make a living, all while bringing delicious and nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables to people. Our state consistently ranks at the top nationally in per-capita farmers' markets, a testament to Iowans' strong support for farmers, good food and their communities.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories and provide essential nutrients and dietary fiber. They

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may also play a role in preventing certain chronic diseases. When compared to people who eat only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, those who eat more generous amounts, as part of a healthy diet, tend to have reduced risk of chronic diseases. These diseases include stroke, type 2 diabetes, some types of cancer and even cardiovascular disease and hypertension.

Everyone needs different amounts of fruits and veggies based on age, gender and amount of activity but unfortunately, the vast majority of Americans are not eating enough fruits and vegetables. To see if you are getting your recommended amount, please visit the CDC's website dedicated to this subject at www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/ .

So this summer – and all year long – I encourage Iowans to plant a vegetable garden, visit a local farmers market or roadside stand, or just go to their local grocery store to stock up on fruits and vegetables. They make a delicious snack or meal and can be so important to improving your health. For more information on other health initiatives, please feel free to contact my office or visit my website at harkin.senate.gov .

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