

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Provides Healthy Afternoon Snacks for Pine Eagle Elementary Students

by Gail Kimberling
of the Hells Canyon Journal

“A thousand thumbs up!” That was the reaction of Pine Eagle second graders last week as they enjoyed an afternoon snack of fresh watermelon prepared by cafeteria supervisor Louise Rasmussen and her helper, Brenda Kuwahara.

In addition to enjoying a tasty treat, the students also learned fun facts about the popular fruit, which originated in Africa and is also considered a vegetable.

The snacks and mini-lessons are being made possible at Pine Eagle Charter School this spring thanks to a grant from the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), a U.S. Department of Agriculture program administered by the Oregon Department of Education.

“It’s definitely a very positive thing in a lot of ways,” Rasmussen said while deftly slicing and dicing watermelons in the school kitchen.

“I’ve wanted to get this grant for years but there are limited funds, and sometimes they are not even taking applications,” Rasmussen added.

But she found out late last spring there was an opening for applications and decided to go for the grant.

The program is open to just elementary schools, and qualification depends upon total enrollment, participation in the federal school lunch program and the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price meals.

The application also requires signatures from school administrators and the food service manager.

“This all happened late in the year, and so Kelli Dennis [school district and elementary secretary] went out on a Saturday to find everyone,” Rasmussen said. “She found me in a llama field and [Superintendent] Cammie [de-Castro] out in a cow field on a tractor.”

Unfortunately, Pine Eagle did not get the grant. But several participating schools dropped out of the program this year for differing reasons – mainly COVID-related – and Rasmussen learned about six weeks ago the district would receive the grant after all.

“We have it until the end of September,” she said.



BRENDA KUWAHARA AND LOUISE RASMUSSEN slice and dice watermelon for an afternoon snack for Pine Eagle elementary students. The snacks are provided through a federal Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program grant, which is administered by the Oregon Department of Education.

Old and New

Rasmussen explained the program’s goal is to introduce students to new types of fruits and vegetables and encourage consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables for snacks.

“They have to be served at a time other than breakfast or lunch so we picked two o’clock,” Rasmussen said.

This means as soon as lunch is done Rasmussen and Kuwahara whip out cutting boards, knives and bowls and prepare individual servings of a particular fruit or vegetable for about 135 students in grades kindergarten through eight.

Servings also go to all classroom teachers and assistants.

“Part of the program is being a good role model so we give it to any adults in the classroom, too,” Rasmussen said. “There also has to be an educational component so we send out fact sheets about the food for the teachers to read to the students.”

Schools are encouraged by the FFVP to serve fresh fruits and vegetables at least two days a week, and Rasmussen aims to serve the afternoon snack four days a week as produce availability and time allow.

Offerings so far have included snap peas, kiwis, pineapple, dragon fruit, kumquats, multi-colored carrots, baby peppers, mini bananas, blackberries and raspberries.

Goals of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

(from the Oregon Department of Education):

- Expand the variety of fruits and vegetables children experience;
- Increase children’s fruit and vegetable consumption, and;
- Positively impact children’s present and future health by helping them learn more healthful eating habits.

“We thought raspberries were pretty common, but some students hadn’t had them before,” Rasmussen commented.

She added the kumquats were “shocking” but the overall reaction was “pretty positive.”

And then there was the unusual acai berry, which cannot be imported as a fresh fruit so Rasmussen served the fruit’s deep purple purée instead.

“We’re only allowed to serve a cooked vegetable once a week,” Rasmussen added, “and I have some butternut squash I plan to roast and serve.”

“Math All Day Long”

Pine Eagle’s FFVP grant, about \$8,000, covers approximately \$50 to \$75 per student for the duration of the program and includes funding for equipment and some labor, as well.

Rasmussen has used part of the grant to purchase new knives, cutting boards and a sectionizer to increase efficiency in daily preparations.

Rasmussen said past grant recipients, including Jessica Dalton of the Baker School District, have been helpful in providing lists of suggested fruits and vegetables and record keeping ideas.

She also mentioned that in addition to preparing daily information sheets it takes considerable time to plan and calculate individual servings.

She laughed, “How many kumquats does it take per person? And how many kumquats come in a pound? We use math all day long.”

Rasmussen has so far relied on the school’s food service supplier, Shamrock Foods, and Ashley Sevier of Halfway Market to procure most of fruits and vegetables for the program.

She will also buy from local growers as produce becomes available in season.

“It’s fun to introduce exotic fruits, but it’s also important to think about eating locally, too,” Rasmussen said.

Thank you notes and positive comments from students let Rasmussen know the program is working and, she commented, “Kids are really hungry at this time of day, so it’s a good thing.”

Rasmussen already plans to reapply for the FFVP grant to hopefully continue the program next school year.

“I want to serve pomegranates in the winter,” she said with a smile.



PINEAPPLE



BLOOD ORANGES




CARROTS with fact sheet




DRAGON FRUIT



KUMQUATS



Spartan Sports



Spartans Set Personal Records in Pair of Track and Field Meets

The Pine Eagle track and field team competed in a pair of meets last week. The Prairie City Annual Track Meet took place Thursday, April 22 followed by the Union Relays on Saturday, April 24.

The Spartan boys finished third overall at Prairie City with 115 team points, behind Imbler with 143 and Cove with 132. Crane was fourth (89) and Prairie City took fifth (13).

On the girls’ side, Crane was first (160) followed by Imbler (127), Cove (94), Pine Eagle (66) and Prairie City (16).

The Spartans set 14 personal records under sunny, breezy skies in Prairie City with notable performances by sophomore Cole Morgan who took first with a PR of 54.35 in the 400 meters and sophomore Cooper Gover who ran a PR of 2:15.57 in the 800 to place second.

Coach Gail Kimberling said, “It’s been amazing to watch the performance of these young athletes when they get on a ‘real’ [rubberized] track. They have set the bar high, and it will be exciting to watch Cole and Cooper as they progress through the season.”

Junior Will Seggerman also had a great meet, leaping to a PR of 16 feet 11 inches to place first in the long jump. Seggerman also took third in the 200

with a PR of 27.06.

Freshman James Denson had a solid performance in the 200, as well, taking fifth with a PR of 27.81.

Denson and senior Curtis Elguezabal set PRs in the 1500, with Denson finishing eighth in 5:12.12 and Elguezabal coming in ninth at 5:36.58.

Two PRs were also set by senior Jeremiah Simrell. In discus he placed first with a throw of 104 feet 2 inches and in shot he took fourth with a 34-foot 2-inch effort.

Sophomore Aiden Robinson set a PR in the javelin with a toss of 85 feet 9.5 inches, taking fifth place.

Also on the boy’s side, junior running phenom Caleb Brown breezed to a first place 9:43.00 finish in the 3000-meter race, setting a season record for the Spartan.

For the girls, junior Taylor Shold took first in the triple jump with a PR of 27 feet 3 inches and third in the long jump with a PR of 12 feet 8 inches.

Senior Abbie Hunt was fifth in the shot (25 feet) and discus (63 feet 4 inches), both PRs.

Senior Grace Davis took fifth in the 200 with a PR of 32.60 and sixth in the 100 with a PR of 17.20. The hardworking Davis also competed in the 1500 where she took first in a

time of 6:27.93 and she placed second in the 3000 with 15:35.

Union Relays

The Union Relays were held under chilly and threatening skies with intermittent downpours. The unusual meet featured mainly relay races and field events.

“It’s a fun way to get athletes out of their comfort zone and try different events,” Kimberling said.

It also turned out to be a rather competitive meet with 10 participating schools: (1A) Cove, Elgin, Griswold, Imbler, Joseph and Pine Eagle; (2A) Stanfield/Echo and Union; and (4A) La Grande and McLoughlin.

Probably the most notable event of the meet was the unofficial Thrower’s Relay. The Spartan co-ed team of Curtis Elguezabal, Taylor Shold, Grace Davis and Jeremiah Simrell took second out of eight schools in the race with a respectable time of 55.35.

“With only three girls on our team, this was probably their one and only chance to compete in a relay this season,” Kimberling commented.

Simrell and Elguezabal both had PRs in the discus at the meet, with Simrell throwing 113 feet 6 inches to take



Photo by Gail Kimberling

WILL SEGGERMAN leaps 16 feet 11 inches to set a personal record and take first place in the men’s long jump event at the Prairie City Annual Track Meet held April 22.

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