

## Heritage Primary students enjoying fresh produce thanks to state program

*By Jennifer Bonnett  
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Students in one Lodi elementary school are enjoying kiwis and jicayma — fruits and vegetables they may have never tried.

Heritage Primary School was the only school in Lodi Unified School District to be chosen by the state to participate this spring in a program that brings locally grown produce into Title 1 schools for snacks for the students. More than 95 percent of the school's students are on the free and reduced-lunch program.

“A lot of the families aren't able to afford this fruit or have never tried it,” Warren Sun, the district's director of food services, said in praising the program, which kicked off at the beginning of the month.

Many of the offerings, which include organic choices, are too expensive for the district to offer to the entire student body.

Earlier this week, Heritage students enjoyed sliced sweet potato sticks that resembled carrots; principal Maria Cervantes was eager to see if students noticed a difference.

Third-grader Amy Herrera did.

“They were smoother (than carrots),” she said. “They were sweet, too.”

### Food 4 Thought at a glance

Food 4 Thought maintains a network of small, family-owned California farms in order to serve the specific needs of school nutrition programs.

Its Farm to School program is designed to meet federal, state and local mandates to provide healthy meals and snacks.

Food 4 Thought also offers cut and washed vegetables, dried fruit and nuts. And its Healthy School Fundraiser program helps school teams and organizations meet their fund-raising goals by selling nutritious foods.

Source: [www.food4thought-usa.com](http://www.food4thought-usa.com)

So far, that's been her favorite.

Each student starts the day by choosing two fruits from the basket, which can be refilled in the school cafeteria up to four times a day. Amy said she ate 10 pieces on Wednesday and it paid off.

“I’m more focused in my work,” she said.

During the first week of the program, many students tasted jicayma for the first time.

“It was delicious,” said third-grader Nida Hanif. But her favorite fruits are bananas “because yellow is my favorite color.” The school also receives specially grown apples that fit inside a child’s hand, Sun said.

And they crunch when you eat them, as evident from third-grader Jazmin Torres’ big juicy bite. She’s around fruit at home because her family sells it.

But some, like third-grader Ricardo Mendoza, have already asked their parents to buy more fruit, thanks to the new program. The small oranges are Mendoza’s favorite.

The fresh snacks are also provided to the after-school running club. Not only are they a healthy alternative to chips or candy bars, but Sun hopes the snacks influence families’ eating choices in the future.

He plans to reapply to the U.S. Department of Agriculture next year for the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Grant with hopes of expanding to the district’s other five Title 1 campuses.

The grant provides healthy daily snacks for students and teachers from January until July, but because of state funding issues, it didn’t kick off until last week, according to Sun.

Oftentimes, the fresh produce is picked the day before it is delivered to the school. It is in conjunction with Fresno-based “Food 4 Thought,” an organization that collects excess produce from local farmers that wasn’t sold to packing houses.

Through the partnership, Lodi Unified has also been able to secure some new fruit for the entire district due to reduced prices.

“We are very excited to work with them to enhance our district child nutrition program,” Sun said of Food 4 Thought.

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