

Agriculture Day Festivities
Minister of Health, George Abbott
Monday, April 3

Check against delivery

It is a pleasure to be here. Thank you Val and Minister Bell.

I want to acknowledge all of our young participants here today, and the thousands of people who work in our agriculture industry. The agriculture industry plays a key role in our economy, and it also plays an important part in promoting the health of British Columbians.

As the Minister of Health, I'm proud to say, our province has a well-deserved reputation for leading Canada in healthy living. But, like the rest of Canada, we face rising health-care costs that result from rising rates of preventable chronic disease – the result of poor lifestyle choices. The key word here is 'choice'.

British Columbians can make choices for small changes that can make a big difference in their health and well-being. One of the most important factors in the commitment to live a healthy lifestyle is to make healthy food choices.

The Canada Food Guide recommends a minimum of five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. That's a minimum and it's not all that many. Did you know that eating 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day can cut the risk of cardiovascular disease by 28 per cent? Simple, healthy choices have profound results.

Right now, about 40 per cent of B.C. adults eat the minimum level of fruits and vegetables - five a day. Another 20 per cent eat four servings of fruits and vegetables a day – they're only one serving away.

Our ActNow BC goal is to increase by 20 per cent the proportion of B.C. adults who eat the minimum recommended servings of fruits and vegetables each day. So you can see that if we can get everyone in B.C. to eat just one more serving, then we'll meet our ActNow BC target. I hope they seek out the BEST fruits and vegetables, grown right here in British Columbia!

Through ActNow we are helping our children to understand the importance of healthy eating through programs in the schools, including:

- Introducing the Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools (jointly with Ministry of Education), the Healthy Eating component of the Action Schools! BC program, and the pilot School Fruit and Vegetable Snack program.

We are also supporting communities to ensure that people have the best possible access to safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate foods through the Community Food Action Initiative.

Healthy eating, understanding what constitutes healthy food choices, and access to the best healthy foods possible is essential to preventing diabetes, cancer, and other preventable chronic diseases. Add healthy eating to our other ActNow goals – more physical activity, weight management and reduced tobacco use – and we have the recipe for a healthier British Columbia.

We're not doing this just to reduce health care costs. We want to see British Columbians live longer and enjoy the best possible quality of life and we want BC to be the healthiest jurisdiction to ever host the 2010 Olympic Games.

Right now, I will give out these ActNow T-shirts to our young guests on stage.

Thanks to everyone for joining us today.