

CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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Ryall urged to support positive healthy policies for New Zealand schoolchildren

Child Poverty Action Group has added its voice to those urging the Minister of Health, Tony Ryall to keep the Fruit in Schools programme running beyond the end of the year.

The programme runs in 500 low-decile schools and provides fruit to 100,000 children every day.

Spokeperson Janfrie Wakim says the move to cut the programme in a recession would be extraordinarily short-sighted. "Low-income families are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. The fruit these children receive is often the only fruit they get, and helps fill a gaping hole in many household budgets," says Mrs Wakim. "The Minister has talked about reducing administration costs, so do that but don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. This programme costs \$12 million, but the government cheerfully gives \$20 million for a party venue for the Rugby World Cup. We urge them to reconsider their priorities. \$12 million is a modest investment, the wellbeing of this country's children should take priority."

Several schools have planted their own fruit trees in anticipation of the programme being cut. CPAG says this will help but should not be used as a substitute for regular, guaranteed delivery of fresh fruit to schools.

"Fruit is seasonal, and unless schools have the capacity to plant and care for a wide variety of fruit trees, there will inevitably be times of the year when fruit will not be available. School-grown fruit should supplement, not replace the Fruit in Schools programme," said Mrs Wakim.

The group's stance is supported by evidence from teachers and overseas research showing that feeding children good quality food improves their behaviour, attendance and academic performance. The [Ministry of Health](#) has also shown the benefits extend well beyond just the students. Mrs Wakim notes that the schools participating are required to be health-promoting schools, and this improves the nutrition of families and communities.

"if something that looks so small can improve the health and wellbeing of so many children and their whanau and communities, we must support it. Children attending schools in low-income communities have the greatest disadvantages. If giving them a piece of fruit at school improves their chances of learning then it should be done. These pupils should not be further disadvantaged by pretending to save a few dollars in administration costs."