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ENGLISH APPLES BACK EARLIER THAN EVER

English apples are celebrating ahead of Sunday's Countryside Alliance march

After a disappointing year in 2001 the launch of the new English apple season on September 19th heralds the earliest arrival of English Cox in living memory - good news for consumers who can enjoy their favourite apples for longer this year. There is further reason to celebrate as the Department of Health's National School Fruit Scheme extends to London this term providing an additional fillip for growers.

One of the few beneficial side effects of global warming and the recent milder winters is that English apples are in the stores a full three weeks earlier than last season. This year they have excellent flavour. The summer weather has produced russetting and weather marking on the skins – very characteristic of English apples and a reflection of their natural English charm. English apples can be easily identified on the shelves by the Union Jack sticker.

Among the people to benefit from this season's crop will be London's school children who are due to join the National School Fruit Scheme this term. The campaign, which will provide kids aged 4-6 with one fresh piece of fruit every day, will be rolled out across the nation by 2004 and eventually will reach two million children in 23,000 schools.

It is expected that an increase in demand from children will significantly affect apple production in the UK. Children have smaller appetites and sweeter palates than adults so growers will be encouraged to produce fruit that reflects their needs. The initiative is expected to increase consumption of fresh fruit by up to 42,000 tons per year – equivalent to almost 10% of UK apple consumption.

The early appearance of English apples could not come at a better moment for the health of the nation. This month's British Association Festival of Science indicated that almost 40% of the population is overweight. Apples provide a healthy, low calorie antidote to the national obsession with high fat, high calorie fast foods.

Apples contain a mere 45 calories compared to a whopping 250 – 500 calories for an average chocolate bar. Packed with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that actively guard against certain cancers, apples can also help to protect against conditions such as heart disease and strokes.

“Apples are one of the healthiest, most beautifully packaged fast foods available,” said Adrian Barlow, Chief Executive of English Apples and Pears. “Their beneficial nutritional content is without question. It really is time to fight the flab and two outstanding, cost effective, weapons in the battle are the wonderful English Cox and the English Gala.”

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Photography available on request

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