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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**IRELAND SCOOPS MAJOR AWARD FOR “FOOD DUDES” INITIATIVE**

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan T.D., has welcomed confirmation that the programme encouraging school children to taste and learn about the benefits of eating more fruit and vegetables is to receive a major international award. The healthy food initiative known as “Food Dudes”, supported by the Minister, the E.U. Commission and industry, has been run on a pilot basis in over 50 schools throughout the country for over a year. Managed by Bord Bia, it is now to be awarded a best practice award by the World Health Organisation from among 202 applications from 35 countries.

Welcoming news of the award, Minister Coughlan said: *“I am delighted that this worthwhile initiative, which is in its second year, is to receive international recognition. We are all becoming more aware of the need for our children to develop a balanced diet. The results of the National Children’s Food Survey 2005 tell us that currently in Ireland, some one in five children are overweight or obese. It is therefore important that we encourage our children to eat healthily and fruit and vegetables are key in that regard. The Food Dudes programme is designed to encourage children to develop a liking for fruit and vegetables through repeated tasting and to maintain this behavioural change over time.”*

Minister Coughlan went on to say that the initiative would receive a significant boost in the Estimates later this week. *“Food Dudes has proved to be popular with both parents and children in the participating schools. It has been successful in increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables among children in those schools. As a result, for some months now I have been working with my government colleagues on extending the initiative to more schools. This requires substantial funding however and that is why we will be putting some €4 million in place in the Estimates for Food Dudes next year, which is a significant increase on the funding currently in place.”*

The award is to be accepted in Turkey on Thursday at the W.H.O. European Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity by Professor Fergus Lowe of the University of Wales, where the Food Dudes programme was initially developed, Dr. Laurence Swan representing Fresh Produce Ireland and Michael Maloney of Bord Bia.

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