

Dudes in food fight for healthy eating

by **Ray Ryan**

Agribusiness
Correspondent

MORE THAN 30,000 pupils in 150 primary schools are set to become Food Dudes in a three-year €1.2 million Bord Bia programme to encourage healthy eating habits.

The Food Dudes programme, developed by psychologists at the University of Wales Bangor, aims to permanently increase consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables among primary school children in the school and at home.

Agriculture Minister Mary Coughlan and Education Minister Mary

Hanafin yesterday launched the programme at Scoil na mBráthar, a primary school in North Brunswick Street, Dublin.

Ms Coughlan said the low average intake of fruit and vegetables in Ireland is very worrying as poor diet and insufficient exercise contributes to growing levels of obesity.

Ms Hanafin described the initial findings of the programme as very positive, who said a partnership approach with parents, teachers and the whole school community to get young people to understand the value of healthy eating and nutrition is very important.

Bord Bia is managing

and co-ordinating the programme. The EU Commission provides 50% of the budget, with the industry, through Fresh Produce Ireland, providing 30% and the Department of Agriculture and Food 20%. Bord Bia chairman Angela Kennedy said the most exciting aspect of the programme is its potential to bring about large and long-lasting increases in children's consumption of fruit and vegetables. Children learn in the first phase of the programme about super hero Food Dudes who save the life force from a gang of baddies whose objective is to take away the energy of the world

by depriving it of nutritious fruit and vegetables. Each day the children are rewarded with small prizes for eating the fruit and vegetables they are given. They also keep a diary of the fruit and vegetables they have eaten at home.

Research has shown that eating habits are established early in life and it is, therefore, important that any attempts to produce long-term improvements in the nation's diet should start with children. The implementation of the Food Dudes programme was recommended in the recent report from the National Obesity Task Force.