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## Schools Awarded for Fight Against Childhood Obesity



Giles County School System employees accept a check for \$500 from Southeast United Dairy Industry Association as part of an award for its efforts to fight childhood obesity.

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An Award of Excellence for School Wellness now hangs on the wall of the Giles County School System. The award, in recognition of the district's programs to improve its students' nutrition and physical fitness, was presented Oct. 22 by the Southeast United Dairy Industry Association Inc., (SUDIA) for efforts made to combat childhood obesity.

The Giles County High School cafeteria was crowded with eager adults instead of hungry highschoolers as the group of local and statewide government officials, key business leaders and dairy farmers took part in the presentation of the certificate and a check for \$500.

### **Presentation Makes a Difference**

One of many new programs Giles County is utilizing takes advantage of new plastic packaging by Nashville-based Purity Dairies to make school milk a much more appealing option on the school lunch line.

“All eight of Giles County’s schools have converted their milk packaging to plastic, resulting in an increase in milk sales and meal participation,” Giles County Nutrition Supervisor Ann Chaffin said as she accepted the award.

With the help of Tennessee’s Department of Agriculture, the schools have new milk coolers that make choosing milk more convenient and appealing to the students.

A release given to Pulaski Publishing stated Bob Strasser, a Nashville-area dairy farmer and interim president of the SUDIA Board of Directors, said, “Giles County and hundreds of others across the state of Tennessee have made significant strides to teach their students about healthy eating and exercise. “As a dairy farmer, I’m proud to see our students take such an active interest in their health by consuming the milk they need to grow strong bones that will last them a lifetime.”

The same program has been increasing milk sales in other districts by anywhere from 10 percent to 50 percent.

“We’ve found that packaging can make a tremendous difference,” said Tracy Noerper, a Tennessee-based dietitian with SUDIA. “The bottles are easier to open, easier to drink, milk tastes better and students like the look. With all of these new advantages, we’ve discovered that children will overwhelmingly choose milk over less nutritious beverages.”

SUDIA, which is in part funded by Tennessee dairy farmers, offers grants for milk merchandising equipment to schools that convert to plastic bottles, along with training aimed at improving the quality of school milk. Tennessee’s Department of Agriculture also added another \$1 million in matching funds to the effort to improve milk quality at the state’s schools.

“I recognize the importance of milk and milk products on children’s health,” said Tennessee Agriculture Commissioner Ken Givens at the award ceremony at Giles County. “This program is a win-win for students, schools, the industry and the state in promoting better nutrition and supporting dairy production.”

Other Giles County programs aimed at tackling childhood obesity include “Expanding Breakfast,” which ensures students get a nutritious meal before school, and the “Do Amazing Things” program in partnership with SUDIA, the NFL and the Tennessee Titans that aims at teaching children the importance of education and nutritious diets.