A true taste of Minnesota
Kids push for Honeycrisp to be state's official apple

BY RUTH DUNN

Bite into a juicy Honeycrisp apple and you have a true taste of Minnesota.
That's because the apple was developed in 1960 through the University of
Minnesota's apple breeding program aimed at developing a hardy apple that would thrive
in cold climates.

When a fourth-grade class from Andersen Elementary School in Bayport discovered this
fact, they began a push to add the apple to a list of state symbols that includes the pink
and white lady's slipper, the loon, walleye and blueberry muffins.

"My class and I think that Minnesota should have a state fruit," wrote Madeline, one of the stu-
dents, in a letter to Gov. Tim Pawlenty and her state legislators. "We think that the state fruit
should be the Honeycrisp apple."

Twenty of the 50 states have a state fruit, wrote many students in their letters. "Even Wisconsin
has a state fruit (cranberries) so we should too," wrote Jackie Ellingson.

"It snowballed!" said the students' teacher, Laurel Avery. The whole effort began with an assign-
ment to write a persuasive letter. Avery, who seeks ways to make learning more relevant, thought,
"Let's make it real." She remembered reading about another class that successfully promoted the
Monarch butterfly as the official state butterfly in 2000. She urged the class to think of another item
they could suggest for official designation.

The students' research showed that Minnesota has no official fruit or vegetable. They considered blue-
berries, raspberries and corn, but the obvious choice became Honeycrisp apples when they discovered

the apple is truly made in Minnesota.

They contacted their legislators, Rep. Mike Charron (R-Woodbury) and Sen. Brian LeClair (R-Woodbury), who were quickly won over to the cause and sponsored bills on the topic.

Students were on the floor when the bills were dropped in the hopper in both the House
and the Senate. "It was a very exciting day," remembers Avery. She explained to students
that bills don't automatically become laws so the children were not too disappointed when
the bill was not passed during the regular

Hoping to be 'official'

Rep. Chris DeLaForest (R-Andover) sponsored HF336, which would have made English
the official state language. He is optimistic the bill will make it out of the House Governmental
Operations and Veterans Affairs Committee next year.

Lefroy Stumpf (DFL-Plummer), would have created the position of state poet laureate (at
no cost to the state). It was approved by a wide
margin in the House and Senate, but vetoed by the governor. The bill would need a two-thirds
vote in each body to override the veto.

session. Neither bill (HF2516 and SF2302) received a hearing in 2005. They awaited action
by the House Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs and Senate State and Local Gov-
ernment Operations committees, respectively.

"The kids did their homework, researched and came up with a good idea," said Charron. He's
optimistic about the bill's chances during the 2006 session. "It's hard to be against an idea like this." He
believes that adding the Honeycrisp apple to the state's official list would be a good way to promote a
Minnesota product.

"I'm so proud of the kids and
their teacher who got them actively involved in the process," said Charron.

He hopes the students can come and testify next year if the bill is heard in committee. If the bill
progresses, he'd also like them to be in the gallery for the floor vote and attend the ceremony when the
governor signs it into law.

Avery says the students want to be present for every possible step. Although they'll be in fifth grade
next year with another teacher, it's all worked out for them to come to St. Paul and follow the bill's
progress, if it does move forward.

A copy of the letter sent by Anderson Elementary fourth grader Adora,
of Bayport, hoping to get the Honeycrisp apple made the state fruit.