

# A true taste of Minnesota

## Kids push for Honeycrisp to be state's official apple

By RUTH DUNN

**B**ite 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 students, 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 assignment 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 blueberries, 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.

Another bill, HF1275/SF877\*/CH108, sponsored by Rep. Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior) and Sen. LeRoy A. 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 await action by the House Governmental Operations and Veterans Affairs and Senate State and Local Government 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.

### Honey Crisp

Dear Governor Pawlenty and Senator Le Clair,  
I am a student from Andersen Elementary, and I am in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and I think that we should have a state fruit. 20 states have it but only 30 don't. Maybe if we got a state fruit there will only be 23 states that don't have a state fruit. Our teacher said that our state apple should be the Honeycrisp apple. The Honeycrisp apple was introduced to us in 1971. Honeycrisp apples are really, really good too. The flavor is sub-acid and ranges from mild and well balanced to strongly aromatic, depending on the degree of maturity. Here are some of the states that have state fruits, Florida - orange and Utah has the cherries. Every half of the states have a state fruit. Did you know that Wisconsin's state fruit is cranberries? I think that our state fruit should be the Honeycrisp Apple because we produce 40 million a year! That's all!

Lucy Adora

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