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An antidote to obesity? 📷

A.G. Kawamura says that with strong and diversified crops, the agriculture industry could help beat the nation's weight problem

By P. Kim Bui
kbui@thetribunenews.com

A.G. Kawamura knows the agriculture community has the answer to the nation's obesity epidemic.

As a farmer, the state Secretary of Food and Agriculture said he tries to optimize his crops' nutrition so they will be at their best during harvest. Children should also be fed a diet with optimal nutrition, he said, but Americans are eating a diet that borders on stupidity.

"That's a lousy fertilizer program," he said. "This is a great time to change the way people eat."

He spoke Friday to a group of about 400 people at the annual Festival of Fruit, which is sponsored by the Central Coast Chapter of the California Rare Fruit Growers and the Cal Poly College of Agriculture. The agriculture community -- including rare fruit growers -- could help cure the chronic amnesia about obesity, he said.

Keeping crops strong, making sure there are plenty of young people in the industry and remaining profitable by diversifying crops are main components of the cure, Kawamura said.

It is possible to create healthy fast food that is appealing to the public, he said. His department plans to launch a program next month that introduces children to gardens in public schools and cultivates a passion for watching things grow.

Kawamura said the industry is changing and the strong agricultural economy of California must be protected.

"We're not going away, but we do have to change," he said. Some ideas he highlighted include diversifying the state's crops and expanding a growing system in which people buy food directly from farms.

He also challenged local growers to be vigilant about watching their own crops for insects and plant diseases that might have been introduced into the state from other areas. The task has become more difficult as more growers obtain new species of plants from the Internet.

"It does no good to promote something if you can't protect it," he said. "Be a part of the system, keep your eyes open."