

# Firms, help feed kids

Businesses can play a greater role in helping to feed children in low-decile schools, said National Party leader John Key in his sate of the nation speech in Christchurch on January 30.

The heading of this speech was 'The Kiwi Way: A Fair Go For All'.

Auckland director of ABE'S Real Bagels Ltd, Megan Sargent, who helped set up a school breakfast programme three years ago, says: "I totally agree with what he is saying. Businesses should play more of a role.

It's not hard and we are only a little company and we are making a big difference for the schools. Now I don't do anything, it just happens; it's easy."

Thirteen decile one schools are receiving the company's bagels (product which is unable to be sold but is in perfect condition) weekly or twice-weekly: Alfriston, Clendon Park, Clover Park, Edmind Hillary, Finlayson Park, Glen Taylor, Hay Park, Koru, Mangere Central Primary, Mayfield, Otahuhu

Primary, and two schools within Southern Cross Campus.

In the case of Southern Cross Campus ABE'S was also involved in setting up a 'breakfast club', in conjunction with teachers, the Diabetes Project Trust (DPT) and the Life Centre Trust (LCT).

The club encourages the kids to come to school early to exercise, and then they're rewarded with a healthy breakfast, which the LCT is responsible for serving – and some of which it buys itself.

The LCT has a waiting list of volunteers to help with this, all of who have been checked by the police.

Sargent says, "The problem for lots of these schools is the lack of parental support available, often because both parents start work at 7am and may not be around to supervise their children's breakfast.

"In addition to the kids who have no breakfast at all before they come to school, it's not un-

common for parents to give their children money to buy breakfast but the kids spend it on twisties and coke, simply unaware that this is not a healthy option.

To combat this at Southern Cross Campus the DPT provide education on nutrition and run workshops for the kids."

ABE'S would love for more food manufacturers to be involved.

Sargent says, "There is a huge need for this kind of thing – there are 71 decile one schools in Auckland! We're only scratching the surface."

Key said in his speech: "Is it really beyond us as a country to ensure that every kid turns up to primary school with some food in their stomach? I don't think so....Obviously it's a parent's responsibility to feed their children. What more fundamental parenting role could there be? But that is not what is happening in some parts of the country.

"Unless we tackle this problem we are effectively punishing chil-



■ ABE'S Real Bagels owners Brent Milburn and Megan Sargent.

dren for the sins of their parents.

"Currently, some schools dip into their operational budgets to provide a few Vegemite sandwiches for those who miss out. That is not good enough.

"I believe this is an area where government can work alongside the business community to find new and innovative solutions to a deepening social problem. A National government will challenge the business community to work with us in backing a programme of providing food in low-decile schools for kids in need."