

Keeping It Fresh and Local Farm to Hospital Initiative

Many hospitals are looking for ways to make their food and beverage environments healthier, and Farm to Institution activities can be an important part of these initiatives. Farm to Institution programs seek to increase access to locally grown or raised agricultural products. These programs create more opportunities for smaller- and mid-sized producers to sell their goods within the state, and provide consumers with healthy, fresh and local food. Produce grown close to where it is served is often more flavorful and can be more nutritious than food that is transported over long distances.

Local Foods Have Many Benefits

Serving local foods can increase healthy eating. In a study of Farm to School programs, two-thirds of schools surveyed indicated that providing fruits and vegetables to students created a positive change in students' dietary behaviors. Serving more fresh and local foods not only improves the health of consumers, but also may improve patient satisfaction scores.

In addition to contributing to customer health, Farm to Institution policies can benefit the local economy. Farmers involved in farm to school programs averaged a 5 percent increase in income, according to the National Farm to School Network. An Oregon study found that every job created through local food production led to the creation of 1.67 jobs in the overall economy, and that money invested in local food production generated further economic activity with a ratio of 2.16 to 1.

Farm to Institution policies also can benefit the environment. Locally purchased food has a lower carbon footprint because of the shorter distance traveled and lower transportation costs. One Iowa study noted that the conventional food distribution system, in which food is shipped long distances (from within the United States or from abroad), produced between four and 17 times more carbon dioxide than a local or regional distribution system.

Community Health Needs Assessments and Community Benefits

The 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) modified the requirements for nonprofit hospitals relating to addressing community health needs and

community benefits. The ACA requires all nonprofit hospitals to conduct a community health needs assessment every three years and make the results and implementation plans publicly available.

The community benefit rules, finalized in 2014, specifically state that implementation strategies can address "the need to prevent illness, to ensure adequate nutrition, or to address social, behavioral, and environmental factors that influence health in the community." The Catholic Health Association, which provides guidance and technical assistance to hospitals on meeting community benefit requirements, recommends hospitals support programs that increase the availability and/or knowledge about healthy foods when obesity or nutrition-related chronic

disease and access to healthy food are identified as community health needs.

Many assessments conducted by Kansas hospitals have identified access to healthy food, obesity and obesity-related chronic diseases as community health needs. Encouraging community gardens and supporting Farm to Table initiatives are among the ways Kansas hospitals can help address these needs. Implementing Farm to Hospital initiatives allows hospitals to set an example and encourage a healthier diet.

Examples of Farm to Hospital Activities to Put into Action

Local Food Procurement

Hospitals can support farmers by purchasing food for their cafeterias or patient meals from local producers.



Farm to Hospital Initiatives

Hospitals can institute a benchmark or goal for the percent of local food purchased; from an established baseline, the hospital can work to increase the percentage over time to help encourage the development of local food economies in the area.

Benchmarks should be low enough to be achievable, based on currently available local food vendors, but high enough to encourage a change in purchasing practices. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy provides several resources for hospitals interested in procuring food from local farmers. Hospitals also could write into future requests for proposals a price preference for food grown, manufactured, processed and/or produced within the state of Kansas. For example, a 5-10 percent pricing preference would make the Kansas grown and produced food more competitive in the bidding process.

Community Gardens

Hospitals can use their grounds to create a community garden. The hospital can manage the garden and use the produce for their food service, or offer up plots for community members or employees to garden. Community gardens can promote a sense of “comradery” and add beauty to hospital grounds. Community gardens also can create a resource of health education. For example, the hospital could offer the community gardening workshops and cooking classes using the produce harvested.

Farmers’ Market or Farmers’ Market Initiative

Hospitals can offer space inside the facility or in the parking lot to host a farmers’ market, which can provide employees and the community with easy access to fresh and local food. A farmers’ market also can become an easy, fun way to educate the community about nutrition and healthy eating, and can provide positive media coverage for the hospital. Some hospitals and clinics have instituted a “Fruit and Vegetable Rx” program, where providers can write “prescriptions” for fruits and vegetables, which can be redeemed at local farmers’ markets. These programs increase consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income, high-risks patients, and also increase participation in farmers’ markets.

Community Supported Agriculture Program

Hospitals can serve as a drop site for a Community Supported Agriculture program. Individuals can purchase a “share” in a farmer’s crops, ensuring they have a regular supply of local produce and the farmer has a regular supply of customers. Space requirements for CSAs are minimal compared to that required for a farmers’ market. The national organization Health Care Without Harm has created a guide with information on hosting a farmers’ market or CSA drop site.

Hospital-Based Food Shelves

A few hospitals across the country are pioneering efforts to host food shelves, or create therapeutic food “pharmacies” that provide low-income patients with healthy foods and foods that meet special requirements such as low-carbohydrate diets for diabetic patients or low-sodium diets for those with hypertension. Hospitals can connect with local farmers to use excess produce within their food shelves, or connect with local food banks to obtain additional products. The hospital could use the food to provide patients with limited resources a bag of groceries, tailored to meet specific diet needs, along with health and nutrition education.

There are many ways that hospitals can partner with farmers to increase their community’s access to fresh, healthy, local foods. Not only will these partnerships improve the quality of the diet as well as the health of the community, but they also will spur economic development and reduce the environmental impact of food production and transportation.

Additional Resources

Visit these websites for ideas on how hospitals can get involved in supporting local farm to table projects and bringing fresh, healthy local foods to their communities.

[Health Care Without Harm](#)

[Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](#)

[Project Bread](#)

The Kansas Hospital Association and Healthworks have created a series of resources designed to inform and support efforts to promote healthy food and beverage environments in Kansas hospitals. The Public Health Law Center assisted in creating this document. These resources are funded in part by the Kansas Health Foundation. For more information, visit www.HealthyKansasHospitals.org.