

Balanced Menus **CHALLENGE**



Across the country, and the globe, the health care community is doing its part to reduce its carbon footprint. Health care food service is no different.

Balanced Menus is a climate change reduction strategy that helps hospitals serve the healthiest food to benefit patients, the environment, and the bottom line.

What Is BALANCED MENUS?

Balanced Menus is a systematic approach to reduce the amount of meat protein in hospital food and a strategic pathway to serving the healthiest, most sustainably produced meat available. Implementation of *Balanced Menus* offers cost savings as well as concrete public and environmental health benefits.

Most hospitals purchase substantial quantities of meat annually, typically through large distributors who source from the US commodity beef, pork and poultry markets. The upfront cost for these products is low, giving a veneer of affordability to serving meat two to three times a day on patient trays and in cafeterias. **However, the hidden cost of meat produced and distributed via our industrial agricultural system is high.** Industrial meat and poultry production relies on the addition of antibiotics, arsenic, and hormones as well as crowded conditions that pollute air and water. The rising social costs of antibiotic resistance, air and water pollution, and associated impacts to the health of communities are ultimately borne by health care systems.

On average, Americans eat about 33% more meat than is recommended by the USDA. Hospital food service operations frequently mirror this trend, offering sizable servings of meat several meals per day. The abundance of meat in our food environment directly and negatively impacts the health of Americans. While food choice is distinctly personal, the health care community can help reshape this environment. **A reduction in the overall amount of meat served in hospital facilities provides health, social and environmental benefits that are consistent with prevention-based medical practices.** As institutions with considerable buying power, hospitals can demonstrate leadership to the marketplace by reducing the overall quantity of meat and poultry served and through preferential purchasing of sustainably produced meats.

Accepting the Challenge

The Balanced Menus Challenge is a voluntary commitment by a health care institution to reduce its meat procurement by 20% in 12 months. By accepting the challenge, hospitals are provided access to the Balanced Menus Toolkit and technical assistance in many regions. Visit www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org/jointhechallenge to sign up.



20% in 12 months

The food system accounts for over 15% of overall energy use in the United States. Globally, livestock for meat and dairy production accounts for 18% of the world's greenhouse gases. Meat production practices also cut to the heart of many other health and environmental impacts. U.S. food production relies heavily on fossil fuels, and red meat production is particularly energy intensive due to the use of pesticides, fertilizers and the transport of grain to concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Nearly 80% of the grains grown in the United States are produced for livestock feed. Cattle, swine, and their waste also release large quantities of methane and nitrous oxide, greenhouse gases far more potent than carbon dioxide.

An important climate change reduction strategy is to lower meat consumption, especially of beef. Studies show that plant-based diets can be half as energy and emissions-intensive as diets dominated by red meat. Choosing more sustainably produced meat and poultry products can also offset climate impacts. Certified organic and grassfed operations reduce greenhouse gas emissions through reduced fossil energy use. Their high-quality pasture can also lower methane emissions from cattle rumination.



For more information about Balanced Menus, our program Toolkit and a list of hospitals participating in the Balanced Menus Challenge, visit www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org and click on Balanced Menus.



Less Meat, Better Meat

The Big Picture

Our meat-rich diets are more costly than we realize. By transitioning to balanced plant-based diets and choosing sustainable options when serving meat and poultry we can collectively create a pathway to personal, community and global health. Consider these factors:

The American Medical Association, Centers for Disease Control, Institute of Medicine and other public health organizations have called for greatly reducing or eliminating antibiotic overuse in agriculture because it promotes antibiotic resistance. Approximately 80% of all antibiotics used in this country are given to healthy animals, to promote growth and compensate for stressful growing conditions. USDA Certified Organic, Food Alliance Certified and other certifications and label claims prohibit the use of antibiotics, added hormones and arsenic in animal production. The

American Public Health Association has called for a moratorium on the construction of the vast animal feedlot operations in part because of the tremendous impacts from antibiotic resistant bacteria, as well as water and air pollution.

Waste lagoons from feedlots also produce significant amounts of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. While certified organic and grass-fed operations can reduce greenhouse gas emissions from methane, all cows and sheep naturally produce methane. We also know that diets dominated by red-meat can be twice as energy intensive as plant-based diets. Reducing meat in one's daily diet is therefore one of the most important things an individual can do from a climate change perspective. In fact, in late 2008, the National Health Service in the United Kingdom announced a plan to reduce meat and dairy on hospital menus.



Feedlot cattle (r) are confined to crowded, unclean spaces while grass fed cattle (l) forage on their natural pasture diet in low-stress conditions.

Photo Credit (r): Shannon Spanhake



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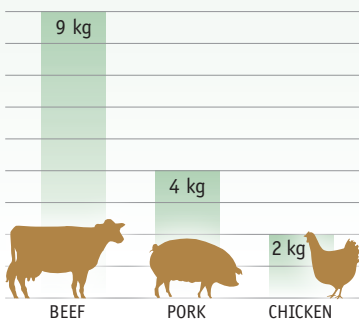
Grassfed Meat: A Healthier Option

High consumption of meat fats and processed meats contributes to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, dementia, and some kinds of cancer. Yet meat and poultry from pastured animals are lower in overall fat and offer the healthier and preferred ratio of “good fats” to “bad fats.” 100% grass-fed beef contains 2 - 4 times the amount of omega-3 fatty acids compared

to its grain-fed counterpart. Meat from pastured animals also contains far more other beneficial nutrients such as CLA (conjugated linoleic acid), Vitamin E, beta-carotene, and Vitamin C. Pasture-raised meats also have fewer calories per equal size serving. Sustainably-produced meat, when eaten in smaller quantities less often, is consistent with the *Balanced Menus* approach.

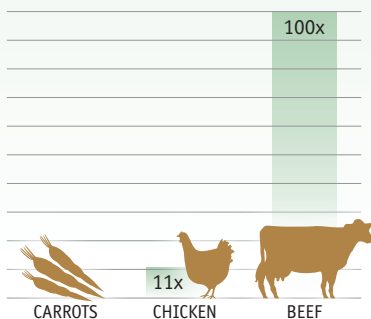
Resources and Impacts of Food Production Choices

Kg of grain required to produce 1kg of feedlot:



McMichael and Bambrick, *Public Health Nutrition*, 2007

Comparison of greenhouse gas emissions from producing 1 lb. of:



Livestock's Long Shadow, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, 2006



Good for the Bottom Line

Meat is expensive. Meat and poultry purchases comprise the largest expenditures of a typical food service spending budget outside of labor. Yet research shows that Balanced Menus implementation yields substantial savings, on the order of \$20,000 or more annually for an average-sized hospital.*

Increasing Options for Sustainable Meat and Poultry

Though currently we eat significantly more meat than generations before us, there is a growing shift in consumer interest to reverse this pattern. As demand for plant-based options grows, hospital menus evolve as well. For religious, ethnic and cultural reasons, many facilities have reduced or eliminated meat from their menus. With these changes comes a deeper understanding within the dietetic community of how we can achieve our daily recommended nutrient requirements with new menus based on plant-based protein and smaller portions of sustainably produced meat.

- Sustainably-produced meat and poultry are currently available to many consumers through retail outlets and direct markets, and are beginning to penetrate the large institutional food procurement system as well.
- Sustainable meat production bears the full, true cost of production without the subsidies enjoyed by the industrial system. So while the short term costs may be slightly higher, the long term public health costs which health care systems ultimately bear, are reduced.
- Because demand and supply are growing every year, the cost of sustainably produced meat is increasingly within the means of more institutions.

* Lagasse, L. and Neff, R., *Balanced Menus: A Pilot Evaluation of Implementation in Four San Francisco Bay Area Hospitals*. Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Center for a Livable Future. 2010.

Creative Approaches to Balanced Menus

Balanced Menu Challenge participants are using various strategies to meet the initial goal of 20% reduction in meat and poultry procurement and increasing the purchase of sustainably produced alternatives. Here are some ideas to get started:

- Review current recipes and menus for ideas on how to reduce volume of meat being served.
- Design recipes with meat as a “condiment” to larger portions of vegetables and grains..
- Offer a diversity of grass-fed meat from a reputable source but less frequently: beef, bison, lamb and goat can all be locally-sourced in various regions throughout the country.
- Reduce reliance on higher-priced pre-cooked and/or processed meats, such as fajita strips, chicken strips, beef patties, lunch meat, etc.
- Develop recipes using readily available, sustainably produced and less expensive cuts such as ground beef and stew meat.
- Avoid using small cuts from large animals, such as tri-tip steaks. These are fewer per animal, expensive and more difficult to source in substantial volume from sustainable producers.
- Collaborate with other healthcare facilities to create regional sustainable meat alliances, investigate the possibility of collective purchasing strategies and other efforts to build local, affordable supply of sustainable meat.

Did you know?

Approximately 80% of all antibiotics in the United States are used for agriculture, primarily given to healthy animals to promote faster growth and prevent infections that are inevitable given their confined conditions in feedlots.



Health Care Examples from Across the Country

Oregon's Good Shepherd Hospital purchases beef produced without the use of hormones or antibiotics that is raised 5 miles from their facility. Even though some of the products they are purchasing are higher in cost, they have been able to stay within budget by decreasing their meat inventory and discontinuing specialty meat purchases. They have also reduced the amount of meat used in dishes like chili and casseroles and serve meat as an entrée less often. Information about the health benefits of these practices is communicated to employees and customers through newsletters and printed menus.

In California, **Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital**, a ministry of St. Joseph Health System, offers a "balanced menu" for patients and cafe patrons that increases vegetarian options and incorporates the use of local grass-fed beef and free range chicken. The *Balanced Menus* approach has proven popular and contributed to increased patient satisfaction scores. Even with a 20% increase in the purchase of higher-priced sustainably raised proteins, the *Balanced Menus* program still saved the hospital over \$30,000 in 2010. Cafeteria revenues are also on a steady rise since the inception of this program. A *Balanced Menus* bookmark that explains the health benefits of this program is distributed on patient trays to continue the education process.

Union Hospital of Cecil County, in Elkton Maryland, introduced *Balanced Menus* for patients and retail areas in fall 2009. By the end of their first year, they reduced meat purchases by 13%, and switched 5% of meat purchases to sustainable options. They also increased fresh fruit and vegetable purchases by 11%, in line with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans that recommend a more plant-based diet. As of 2011, they buy one-third of their meat from a local, sustainable source, and 19% of their vegetable and fruit purchases are from local sources: 15% certified Organic and 4% local/sustainable. Their food costs have remained budget neutral due to *Balanced Menus* and other food cost lowering strategies. They are showing a savings of over \$20,000 in the first half of this fiscal year.



12355 Sunrise Valley Drive, Suite 680
Reston, VA 20191 U.S.A.
Phone: 703-860-9790 • Fax: 703-860-9795
healthyfoodinhealthcare.org • noharm.org



Concept developed and piloted by the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility

