

# Healthy Food in Health Care



The Canadian Coalition  
for Green Health Care

## A Pledge for Fresh, Local, Sustainable Food



**N**utrition-related chronic diseases are placing new demands on an already overburdened health care system, and taking their toll on human productivity and quality of life. Our current large scale, industrial food system favours animal products and highly-refined, preservative laden, calorie-dense foods, rather than fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and other high fiber foods important for health. It is a system misaligned with dietary guidelines. Moreover, the way our food is produced and distributed impacts our health and the environment in which we live. For example:

### Air and Water Pollution

Pesticide drift, field dust, waste burning, and toxic gases from degrading manure are all factors of food production that contribute to air pollution. Such air pollution can lead to asthma and other respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular disease, and lung cancer. A study in Ontario, Canada found that food is transported an average of 4,500 kilometers to reach its destination. Through the use of diesel and other fossil fuels, vehicles unnecessarily contribute to global warming. Fertilizers and pesticides contaminate ground water in many locales and some pesticides have been found regularly in rainfall. Large-scale animal feedlot operations contribute to water pollution when untreated animal waste releases biologically active hormones, nitrates and other toxic breakdown products into waterways.

### Worker Health and Safety

Widespread pesticide use in industrial-scale food production exposes farm workers and their families to dangerous chemicals, often at levels that exceed established “safety” limits. Longer-term, low-level pesticide exposure has been linked to an array of chronic

health problems including: cancer, birth defects, neurological, reproductive, and behavioural effects, and impaired immune system function. Industrialized meat packing is recognized as one of the most dangerous occupations: every year, over one quarter of all workers

### Antibiotics

The routine use of antibiotics contributes to growing antibiotic resistant bacteria. Each year 20 to 30 million pounds of antibiotics (including related antimicrobials) are used in agriculture—by volume, about 7-10 times the total antibiotics used in human medicine. Industrialized food systems that produce poultry, pork, beef, and farmed fish routinely use antibiotics as growth promoters rather than to treat identified disease. Routinely feeding antibiotics to animals that are not even sick increases antibiotic resistance among bacteria that cause human infections.

### Healthy Food in Health Care

Hospitals and health systems have opportunities to help prevent these food-related health concerns by modeling good nutrition in their institutions and by influencing how food is produced and distributed. Through its food purchasing decisions, the Canadian health care industry can promote health by providing more fresh, good tasting, nutritious food choices for patients, staff, and the community. And by supporting food production that is local, humane, and protective of the environment and health, health care providers can help create food systems that promote the well being of the whole community.

*\* This pledge was created in collaboration with Health Care Without Harm as part of their Healthy Food in Health Care Initiative.*

## What Is the Health Care Industry Doing?

Across the country, hospitals and health care systems are beginning to adopt policies and practices to support incorporation of more local, sustainably produced food into their practices. Because of its size and purchasing power, this market leadership is creating a model for wellness at the individual, community, and national levels. Providing access to healthier food promotes wellness among patients, visitors, and staff. Buying food produced in ways that are ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible also supports a food system that ultimately benefits healthier individuals and communities.

- **St. Joseph's Health Centre Guelph** spends approximately 20% of their food service budget on local food, resulting in \$140,000 being directed back into Ontario farms. They feel purchasing local food is good for the agricultural community, and is appreciated by the patients and residents at their facility. They also support sustainably raised beef, pork, and poultry, as well as organic produce whenever possible.
- **St. Joseph's Care Group** in Thunder Bay, Ontario works with the social enterprise Team Werks to empower people living with mental health challenges to gain employment skills and training through food literacy. They run a market garden that grows over 2000 pounds of organic produce, all of which is grown on land at the Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital (LPH). Eighty percent of what is grown is sold to a regional food hub for food banks and shelters. The remaining 20 percent is enjoyed by the hospital community.
- **St. Michael's Hospital** values social responsibility and reduced environmental impacts. They have worked within their existing food service systems to “do the right thing for patients” by injecting more fresh local foods into meal trays. They have developed a multi-ingredient menu that uses local products for items such as Ontario apple chicken wraps, red pepper frittatas, and desserts like blueberry crisp and baked apple crumble. Patient ratings of their food as “excellent” have soared 206% for the menu items using local ingredients compared to the previously offered
- **The Hospital for Sick Children** offers onsite farmers' markets to give their entire hospital community easy access to fresh, healthy, and local food. Often organized on a weekly basis – either year-round or seasonally – vendors bring exclusively their own crops and products to sell to staff, patients, volunteers, and passers-by.

## What Your Hospital Can Do: Take the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge

Taking the pledge to support procurement of local, nutritious, sustainably produced food demonstrates a commitment to “first, do no harm” as part of a whole hospital approach to preventive medicine that protects the health of patients, staff, and communities.

Review the pledge and submit yours by completing the bottom and mailing or faxing it to the Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care.



For additional resources, visit us on the Web at [www.greenhealthcare.ca/pledge](http://www.greenhealthcare.ca/pledge)

# Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge

This Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge is a framework that outlines steps to be taken by the health care industry to improve the health of patients, communities and the environment.

As a responsible provider of health care services, we are committed to the health of our patients, our staff and the local and global community. We are aware that food production and distribution methods can have adverse impacts on public environmental health. As a result, we recognize that for the consumers who eat it, the workers who produce it and the ecosystems that sustain us, healthy food must be defined not only by nutritional quality, but equally by a food system that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and supportive of human dignity and justice. We are committed to the goal of providing local, nutritious and sustainable food.

Specifically, we are committed to the following healthy food in health care measures for our institution. We pledge to:

**Increase** our offering of fruit and vegetables, nutritionally dense and minimally processed, unrefined foods and reduce unhealthy (trans and saturated) fats and sweetened foods.

**Implement** a program to identify and adopt sustainable food procurement. Begin where fewer barriers exist and immediate steps can be taken, such as the adoption of fair trade coffee, or selections of organic and/or local fresh produce in the cafeteria or for patients.

**Work** with local farmers, community organizations and food suppliers to increase the availability of fresh, locally-produced food.

**Encourage** our vendors and/or food management companies to supply us with food that is produced in systems that, among other attributes, eliminate the use of toxic pesticides, prohibit the use of hormones and non-therapeutic antibiotics, support farmer and farm worker health and welfare, and use ecologically protective and restorative agriculture.

**Communicate** to our Group Purchasing Organizations our interest in foods whose source and production practices (i.e. protect biodiversity, antibiotic and hormone use, local, pesticide use, etc) are identified, so that we may have informed consent and choice about the foods we purchase.

**Develop** a program to promote and source from producers and processors which uphold the dignity of family, farmers, workers and their communities and support sustainable and humane agriculture systems.

**Educate** and communicate within our system and with our patients and community about our nutritious, socially just and ecologically sustainable healthy food practices and procedures.

**Minimize** and beneficially reuse food waste and support the use of food packaging and products that are ecologically protective.

**Complete** an annual survey on Pledge implementation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of (indicate your department, facility or system): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me a clean copy of the pledge with signature line only. We would like to have it framed and displayed.

To submit your pledge this form should be mailed to the Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care:  
1724 Concession 6 West, RR #2 • Branchton, ON, N0B 1L0  
Or scanned and emailed to: [brendan@greenhealthcare.ca](mailto:brendan@greenhealthcare.ca) • [www.greenhealthcare.ca](http://www.greenhealthcare.ca)

