

# Balanced Menus



Across the country and the globe, the health care community is reducing its environmental footprint and improving environmental health. **Balanced Menus** helps hospitals purchase and serve the healthiest and most sustainable food to benefit patients and staff, the environment, and the bottom line.

# What Is BALANCED MENUS?

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

Most health care facilities purchase substantial quantities of meat annually, typically through large distributors that source from U.S. 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.** Industrialized meat and poultry production relies on the addition of antibiotics, arsenic, and growth hormones, as well as crowded conditions that pollute air and water. The rising costs of antibiotic resistance, air and water pollution, climate change, and the 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 times per day. This abundance of meat negatively impacts the health of Americans. While food choice is distinctly personal, the health care community can help reshape the food environment. **A reduction in the overall amount of meat served in health care 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 purchasing sustainably produced meats.

## Accepting the Challenge

*Balanced Menu* is a voluntary commitment health care facilities can make to reduce their meat procurement by 20% from baseline purchasing. Reducing the overall quantity of meat and poultry served allows hospitals to invest their cost savings in increased purchasing of sustainably produced meats.

*Balanced Menu* is one sustainable food option outlined in the Healthier Hospitals Initiative, a national sustainability agenda for the health care sector. Visit [www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org](http://www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org) to sign up for *Balanced Menu* and to access the *Balanced Menu* toolkit and marketing materials.

# Less Meat, Better Meat

## The Big Picture



Our meat-rich diets are more costly than we realize. By moving away from meat intensive 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:

### Antibiotic Resistance

80% of antibiotics sold in the U.S. are used for animal agriculture. This equates to nearly 30 million pounds of antibiotics, annually. Most of these antibiotics are routinely used for non-therapeutic purposes and are available over-the-counter with no veterinary supervision. Many of these antibiotics are also medically-important, like penicillin, and used to treat illnesses in humans.

The overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture threatens the efficacy of antibiotics in human medicine. The need to eliminate the routine use of antibiotics in animal agriculture is necessary to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics and minimize the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria. This call to action comes from more than 300 leading medical organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

### Climate Change and Greenhouse Gases

From beginning to end, the lifecycle and common practices of industrial beef production produce the highest amount of greenhouse gas emissions of any other food. Dairy and poultry production also emit a significant amount of greenhouse gases, contributing to global climate change.

### Air and Water Pollution

Large-scale meat production has a negative impact on water and air quality. Feedlots produce large manure lagoons with concentrated amounts of ammonia, phosphorus, and nitrogen, as well as dangerous microorganisms. These wastes have been shown to run off into drinking water supplies, have destroyed wetlands, and led to fish kills. They also contribute to poor air quality in local communities.

### Chronic Disease

High consumption of meats and fats contribute to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, dementia, and some types of cancer. Arsenic additives are used routinely in poultry and pork production to promote faster growth of the animals, yet arsenic is a known carcinogen and poison.

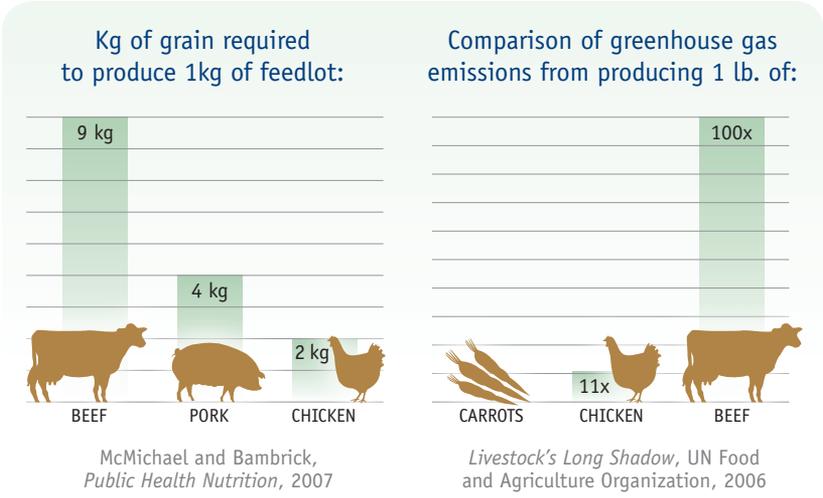
# Reducing Health Care's Carbon Footprint

Climate change is one of the biggest risks to human and environmental health. Health care facilities have an opportunity and a responsibility to reduce their carbon footprint.

Globally, livestock production for meat and dairy accounts for 22% of the world's greenhouse gases. U.S. food production relies heavily on fossil fuels, and red meat production is particularly fossil fuel intensive due to the use of pesticides and fertilizers to produce grain for animal feed, and the need for transportation and refrigeration throughout the lifecycle of meat production. The U.S. meat industry alone is responsible for up to one third of the nation's total fossil fuel consumption annually, and nearly 80% of the grains grown in the U.S. are produced for livestock feed. The waste from cattle and swine also releases large quantities of methane and nitrous oxide, greenhouse gases far more potent than carbon dioxide. Animal manure is a major contributor to climate change, producing 16% of total global methane emissions.

An important climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy is to lower meat consumption, especially of beef. Choosing more sustainably produced meat and poultry products can offset the impacts of climate change. Studies show that plant-based diets can be half as energy- and emissions- intensive as diets dominated by red meat. Certified organic and grass-fed operations may also reduce greenhouse gas emissions through reduced fossil fuel use.

## Resources and Impacts of Food Production Choices



# Creative Approaches to Balanced Menus

*Balanced Menus* participants use various strategies to meet the initial goal of 20% reduction in meat and poultry procurement, and increase the purchase of sustainably produced alternatives. Here are some ideas to get started:

## ▶ Review and Develop Menu Items

Review current menus and recipes to determine where to reduce volumes of meat served and where to substitute sustainably produced meat.

## ▶ Reduce Meat

Reduce portion sizes by moving meat away from the center of the plate, increasing meat-free options, and utilizing recipes that use meat as a “condiment” to larger portions of vegetables, whole grains, and legumes.

In 2008, the National Health Service in the United Kingdom announced a plan to reduce meat and dairy on hospital menus.

## ▶ Cut Costs

Reduce reliance on higher-priced, pre-cooked, and/or processed meats such as fajitas strips, chicken strips, beef patties, and lunch meats. Avoid using small cuts from large animals, such as tri-tip steaks. Incorporate less expensive cuts of meat including ground beef, stew meat, or chicken legs and thighs.

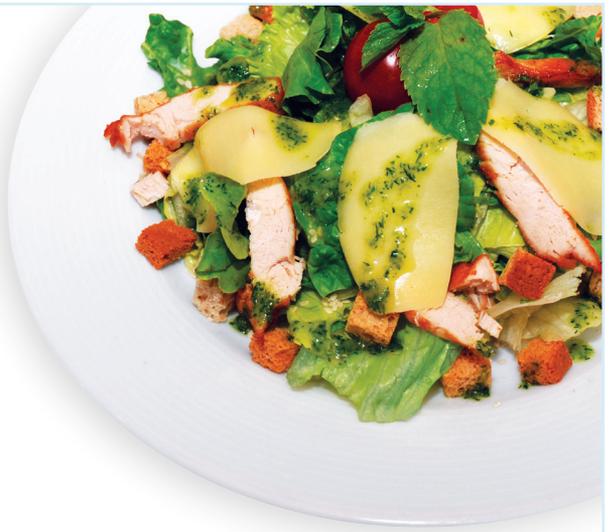
## ▶ Offer High Quality Meats

Offer a diversity of meat and poultry that is organic, grass-fed, or produced without the routine use of non-therapeutic antibiotics. Serve these in smaller portions and less frequently.

## ▶ Collaborate

Work with other health care facilities to create regional sustainable meat alliances, and investigate the possibility of collective purchasing strategies and other efforts to build a local, affordable supply of sustainable meat. Communicate your interest in purchasing sustainable meat and poultry to your group purchasing organization (GPO), distributors, and suppliers.





# Grassfed Meat: A Healthier Option

Meat and poultry from animals raised outside on pasture (often called “grass-fed” or “pastured”) 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 grass-fed animals also contains far more beneficial nutrients such as CLA (conjugated linoleic acid), Vitamin E, beta-carotene, and Vitamin C. Grass-fed meats also have fewer calories per equal size serving. Sustainably produced meat, when eaten in smaller quantities less often, is consistent with *Balanced Menus*.

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“Grass-fed” and “produced without the use of antibiotics” are label claims for meat and poultry that are approved by the USDA and FDA, respectively. Other sustainability certifications to look for are: USDA Certified Organic, Food Alliance Certified, Certified Humane Raised and Handled, or Animal Welfare Approved. Consider talking to small local farmers in your region to find out more about their on-farm practices



# 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 the demand for plant-based options grows, hospital menus are evolving as well. Many facilities have already reduced or eliminated meat from their menus for religious, ethnic, and cultural reasons. With these changes comes a deeper understanding within the dietetic community of how people can achieve their 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 in many regions through direct markets or off-contract purchasing, and are beginning to penetrate contractual purchasing agreements of institutional food procurement systems. Ask vendors what sustainable options they offer.
- Sustainable meat production bears the full, true cost of production. While the short term costs of sustainable meat production may be slightly higher, the long-term public and environmental health costs—which health care systems and consumers ultimately bear—are reduced.
- Because demand and supply are growing every year, the cost of sustainably produced meat continues to become more affordable and within the financial means of institutions.

## 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 the implementation of *Balanced Menus* yields substantial savings, on the order of \$20,000 or more annually for an average-sized hospital.\*

\* 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.

# Health Care Examples from Across the Country

**Overlake Medical Center** in Bellevue, Washington works with its GPO and local cooperatives to purchase USDA organic beef, wild caught fish and shrimp, and poultry produced without the use of non-therapeutic antibiotics. In 2012, 19% of the meat and poultry Overlake purchased was raised without the routine use of antibiotics and 50% of total food purchases were sustainably-produced. Overlake has achieved this number by reducing portion sizes of meats, adjusting pricing in its cafeteria, and working directly with producers.

**Union Hospital** of Cecil County in Elkton, Maryland reduced its red meat purchases by 13% in one year after committing to *Balanced Menus*. Union Hospital implemented these changes by eliminating high cost red meat options, increasing fresh vegetables and fruit on its cafeteria and patient menus, and gradually increasing its purchase of local, sustainably produced meat and poultry. In 2012, 60% of Union Hospital's beef and 51% of its poultry was produced without the routine use of antibiotics. Union Hospital also used its cost savings from *Balanced Menus* to purchase local and third-party certified sustainable food, at 32% and 17% of its total food and beverage purchases in 2012, respectively.

**Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU)** in Portland, Oregon has created a sustainability policy that focuses on moving towards more sustainable meat and poultry purchases in conjunction with *Balanced Menus*. As a result, 45% of OHSU's total beef purchases were produced by a local rancher without the use of antibiotics, and 9.5% of its poultry and 2.5% of its pork purchases were sustainably-raised in 2012. OHSU is currently working with other local farmers to increase these purchasing volumes. Additionally, to reduce the consumption of meat, OHSU reduced the portion sizes of meat while increasing vegetable options for patient and cafeteria meals.

For more information about *Balanced Menus*, to download our program toolkit, and to see a list of hospitals participating in *Balanced Menus*, visit [www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org](http://www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org)



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