Nutrition-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 favors 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:

**Antibiotic Resistance**
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. Injecting dairy cows with recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH or rBST) increases udder infections, requiring more antibiotics and a higher likelihood of increased antibiotic resistant bacteria in milk.

**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. In the U.S., food is transported an average of 1,500 miles 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 behavioral 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 needs medical attention beyond first aid.

**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 U.S. 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.
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 HCWH.

For additional resources, visit us on the Web at www.hcwh.org/us/food/issue
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 stepwise program to identify and adopt sustainable food procurement. Begin where fewer barriers exist and immediate steps can be taken, such as the adoption of rBGH free milk, fair trade coffee, or selections of organic and/or local fresh produce in the cafeteria.

**Work** with local farmers, community-based 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.

**Report** annually on implementation of this Pledge.

Name: ________________________________________   Title: _______________________________________

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

Address: ______________________________________________________________________________________

City:  _________________________________________   State: _________________      Zip:  ______________

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 faxed or mailed to Health Care Without Harm:
HCWH • Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge • 1901 N. Moore Street, Suite 509 • Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: 703-243-0056 • Fax: 703-243-4008 • www.NoHarm.org
Fact Sheets

Food and Food Purchasing: A Role for Health Care
As places of healing, hospitals have a natural incentive to provide food that is healthy for people and the environment in which we live. Food supply can be met in a variety of ways which have consequences in terms of nutrition, disease risk, public health, environmental health, and social and economic well being.

Healthy Food In Health Care: A Menu of Options
Many health care institutions have begun to adopt practices and policies to support a healthy food system. Following on their model, your facility can improve the quality of food choices by choosing among the recommendations offered in this Menu of Options.

Antibiotic Resistance and the Agricultural Overuse of Antibiotics
Because antibiotic resistance is caused in part by overuse of antibiotics in agriculture, health care food systems can help by establishing a procurement policy under which they seek to purchase meat, poultry, dairy, and seafood products produced with fewer antibiotics.

Farmers’ Markets on Hospital Grounds
Increasingly, hospitals are demonstrating leadership in health promotion by hosting farmers’ markets and farm stands on site as a way to make farm fresh, locally grown produce and other foods more readily available. Hospital-based farmers’ markets are one way for hospitals to help realize a number of health goals related to patients, staff and their community.

A Purchasing Guide to Sourcing Dairy Products Produced Without rBGH
A short guide with background, sample letter, and survey to help assess your dairy supply.

Health Care Without Harm Position Statement on rBGH
This document includes background and scientific rationale for position opposing the use of rBGH.

Health Care Case Studies and Reports

“Farm to Hospital: Promoting Health and Supporting Local Agriculture.” 2004, by the Center for Food and Justice. Seven case studies highlight hospitals that have incorporated farm to hospital program components, including local food purchasing, hosting on-site farmers’ markets, and establishing community gardens.

Healthy Food, Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Communities
May 2005 report by Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy’s Food and Health Program documenting stories of health care leaders bringing fresher, healthier food choices to their patients, staff, and communities.

Cultivating Common Ground: Linking Health and Sustainable Agriculture
Sustainable agriculture practices are rarely seen as viable solutions for improving nutrition and health. In this report by the Prevention Institute we learn compelling reasons to link sustainable agriculture and health sectors.

Does It Have Artificial Hormones? Know Your Milk

Other Reading and Resources

Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community. Thomas A. Lyson, University Press of New England, 2004. Explains how we got to where we are now with industrial, globalized agriculture, and how we might find our way back to more wholesome food through the civic agriculture movement.

The Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group promotes optimal nutrition and well-being for all people, now and in the future, acknowledging the interdependence of food and water security, health, agriculture and the environment. http://www.hendpg.org.

Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition
This peer-reviewed professional quarterly examines factors that govern how people produce, procure, and consume food and the implications for nutrition and health. It examines hunger and environmental nutrition issues including sustainable food systems, poverty, social justice, and human values. http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JHEN/.

National Catholic Rural Life Conference
NCRLC is a partner with many diverse organizations around the country united by the common vision of a more sustainable agriculture and food system for the United States. http://www.ncrlc.com/Agric-and-Food-Issues.html.

Resources
Available at the HCWH Healthy Food in Health Care Website: www.noharm.org/us/food/issue

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