

# Balanced Menu

Serve healthy food.  
Mitigate climate change.  
Reduce costs.



**Balanced Menu** is a systematic approach to reduce the amount of animal protein in hospital food and a strategic pathway to serving the healthiest, most sustainably produced meat available.

**Balanced Menu** can offer cost savings as well as concrete public and environmental health benefits.

**Most hospitals** buy substantial amounts of meat, typically through large distributors who source from the 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. Much higher, however, is the hidden cost of meat and poultry produced and distributed via our industrialized food system. This system relies on the routine feeding of antibiotics to make animals grow faster and consume less feed grain. Arsenic compounds and hormones are given to animals for similar reasons. These additives further contaminate animal manure, which then leach from the crowded facilities, polluting our air and water.

U.S. food production relies heavily on fossil fuels, and red meat production is particularly energy intensive as it requires significant inputs of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to grow crops for feed. Nearly 80% of the grains grown in the United States are produced for livestock feed.

The rising social costs of antibiotic resistance, air and water pollution, and associated impacts to the health of communities are ultimately borne by the health care sector.

On average, Americans eat 33% more meat than is recommended by the USDA. Hospital food service operations often 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. Reducing 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.

## Did you know?

The food system accounts for over 10% of overall energy use in the United States. Globally, livestock for meat and dairy production accounts for 18% of greenhouse gases, more than all of Earth's cars, trains, and planes put together.



# Less Meat, Better Meat

## The Big Picture

Our meat-rich diets are more costly than we realize. By transitioning to predominantly 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 70% 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 labels 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 known as CAFOs in part because of the tremendous impacts from antibiotic resistant bacteria, as well as water and air pollution.

Waste lagoons from concentrated livestock operations also produce significant amounts of methane, a potent climate change gas. Studies suggest that certified organic and grass-fed livestock operations may reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that high-quality pasture can also lower methane emissions from cattle rumination. Yet, all cows, and sheep naturally produce methane and we know that plant-based diets can be half as energy and emissions-intensive as diets dominated by red meat. According to the United Nation Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, eating meat-free one day per week may be the most important thing 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 eliminate meat from hospital menus.

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



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*

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.

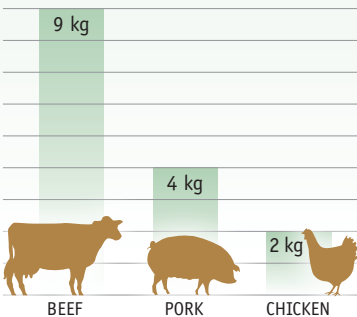


healthier and preferred ratio of “good fats” to “bad fats.” 100% grass-fed beef contains 2 - 4 times the amount of omega-3 fatty acids compared to its grain-fed counterpart. Meat from pastured animals also contains far more other beneficial nutrients such as CLA (conjugated linoleic acid), Vitamin E, 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 Menu approach.

While meat production is recognized as one of the largest contributors to the global carbon footprint, a *Balanced Menus* approach provides a variety of public health benefits that extend beyond a climate perspective. By reducing meat consumption and improving the quality of meat, hospitals can save money in the short term and in the long term realize the economic benefits of this comprehensive preventive health approach.

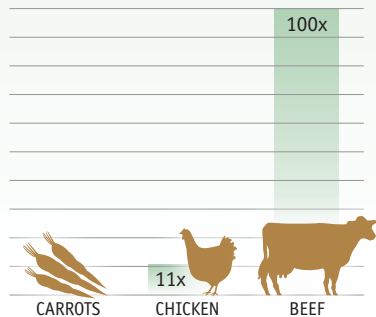
## Resources and Impacts of Food Production Choices

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:



Rosenthal, *New York Times*, December 4, 2008

# Increasing Options for Sustainable Meat and Poultry

While as a society 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.

- Alternatives to industrial poultry and meat 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.
- Yet because demand and supply are growing every year, the cost of sustainably produced meat is increasingly within the means of more 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 preliminary data from hospital pilot projects suggests that when an average-sized, 200-300 bed facility begins to implement a balanced menu that reduces meat and increases grains and vegetables on a very modest scale, savings are seen on the order of \$10,000 or more per year.

# Creative Approaches to Balanced Menus

Throughout the country, hospitals are working towards an initial goal of 20% reduction in meat and poultry procurement along with an increase in the purchase of sustainably produced alternatives.

- Review current recipes for options to reduce volume of meat being served.
- Increase vegetable and grain portion sizes while substantially reducing animal protein.
- Design recipes with meat as a complement to a variety of grains and vegetables.
- 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, 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, which are fewer per animal, expensive and more difficult to source in substantial volume from sustainable producers.
- Collaborate with other health care 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.

For more information about Balanced Menus, our program Toolkit and a list of hospitals participating in the Balanced Menu Challenge, visit [www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org](http://www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org) and click on Balanced Menus.



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