

Integrating Sustainability Requirements Into Health Care Food Service Contracting



There are many opportunities for hospitals to improve patient safety, worker safety, and the overall health of communities and the environment via their food service operations. By implementing environmentally preferable purchasing and other operational and maintenance strategies in food service, hospitals can help to reduce patient, worker and community exposure to toxic chemicals, preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics for treatment of human disease, prevent air and water pollution, reduce waste, conserve natural resources and potentially save money over the short and long term.

Issues to address via food service contracts

Depending on a food service contractor's scope of work and related authority, the following food service-related sustainability issues can be addressed via contract requirements/ preferences:

Food and beverage procurement

In the U.S., the typical food item now travels a great distance from farm to plate. In addition many food service contractors prohibit direct sales from farmers and require food products to go through their distributors. This system not only disconnects growers and consumers, it also increases opportunities for food contamination and loss of nutrients. Other major shifts in the U.S. food system over the last century contribute to serious long term impacts on human and environmental health. For instance:

- The routine use of antibiotics in animal agriculture has been shown to worsen antibiotic resistance among bacteria that cause human infections.



- Pesticide drift, field dust, waste burning, toxic gases from degrading manure, and diesel exhaust from transporting food long distances are all factors of food production that contribute to asthma, cardiovascular disease and lung cancer.
- Commercial fertilizers and pesticides contaminate ground water in many locales and large-scale animal feedlot operations contribute to water pollution with biologically active hormones, nitrates and other decomposition products of untreated animal waste.
- Industrialized meat packing is recognized as one of the most dangerous occupations in the US—every year over one quarter of all workers needs medical attention beyond first aid.

The average U.S hospital serves more than a million meals per year, and annual U.S. hospital food expenditures exceed \$5 billion. By purchasing (or asking your food service contractor to purchase) local, more sustainably produced food, hospitals and health systems can help reduce health problems associated with antibiotic resistance, air and water contamination, and global health issues such as climate change while supporting a move toward a healthier and more sustainable food system.

Each year, institutions, including hospitals, consume billions of pounds of janitorial paper including napkins and other paper products, plastic trash liners, paper and fossil-fuel based plastic packaging, and other disposable food service items. Disposable products provide some benefits to hospitals—ease of use, minimal maintenance and reduced dishwashing needs. Yet, most of these single-use items end up in landfills, incinerators, or the world's



oceans where they can cause significant harm to humans and the environment and negative impacts including: depletion of nonrenewable resources, introduction of toxic chemicals into the environment during production, use and disposal, and contamination of food from leaching chemicals.

Hospitals and their food service contractors can help to reduce these impacts by reducing overall use of packaging and other disposable products and by choosing reusable products or unbleached products manufactured from recycled or renewable materials and without use of chlorine or chlorine compounds or other toxic chemical additives, whenever possible.

Cleaning products

Traditional cleaning products can be a major contributor to indoor air quality issues in closed environments. Many cleaning products contain carcinogens, asthmagens and substances associated with reproductive organ damage, birth defects, kidney damage, neurological impacts and other serious health effects. In addition, some of these products contain persistent bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals (PBTs), are classified as hazardous waste, and/or otherwise contribute to environmental pollution during their manufacture, transport, use, and/or disposal.

They also contribute to water pollution and can negatively impact the health of aquatic organisms. Non-toxic and least-toxic sustainable maintenance products exist for virtually every health care facility need. By reducing chemical use, switching to less toxic, biodegradable cleaning products and making use of cleaning equipment that doesn't require chemicals in food service, hospitals can limit exposure of building occupants and maintenance personnel to potentially hazardous chemical, biological and particulate contaminants and contribute to improved ecological health.

Pest management

The health of building occupants is directly impacted by the use of chemical pesticides, termiticides, and rodenticides. The use of chemical pesticides for indoor pest control can impact indoor air quality. Hospitals are encouraged to use Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a cost effective coordinated approach to pest control that seeks to prevent unacceptable levels of pests with the least possible hazard to building occupants, workers, and the environment. The focus of IPM is on first using non-chemical prevention techniques and use of least toxic chemical intervention as a last resort in addressing pest problems.



By eliminating or at least reducing toxic chemicals—including pesticides—in our healthcare facilities, we create a safer environment for patients and staff.

Recycling, waste reduction & composting

Organic matter, including food waste, is the second largest constituent of the health care waste stream, comprising close to 20 percent of the solid waste volume in medical facilities with food service operations. By reducing food waste and donating leftover food, hospitals can reduce the volume of waste going to landfills and incinerators. Composting food waste is also a good option that can save hospitals money while decreasing impacts to the environment by:



- Avoiding high per ton incineration or landfill disposal costs for these dense and heavy materials
- Avoiding sludge issues at the wastewater treatment plant and potential added costs of water discharges for institutions that use an industrial food disposal system
- Using compost on-site can save the grounds department money by reducing their need to buy mulch, fertilizer, and pesticides. Composting organic matter and applying it to the soil increases soil micronutrients, and reduces reliance on chemical fertilizers and their associated industrial, ecologic and health burdens.

Latex-free/PVC-free gloves

Natural rubber latex is a product manufactured from the milky fluid primarily derived from the rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*. In 1997 the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) issued an alert indicating that exposure to natural rubber latex can lead to skin rashes; hives; flushing; itching; nasal, eye, or sinus symptoms; asthma; and (rarely) shock. They noted an increase in allergic reactions to latex, especially among health care workers.

Nitrile gloves are effective substitutes for natural latex products. The use of nitrile gloves can minimize building occupant and worker exposure to conditions that may prompt and/or prolong an allergic or asthmatic condition. Nitrile gloves are also an alternative to gloves made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC). PVC, or vinyl, plastic—the most widely used plastic in medical devices—can be harmful to patients, the environment and public health. There are two key problems associated with PVC:

- a) Dioxin, a known human carcinogen, can be formed during the manufacture of PVC, and during the incineration or burning of PVC products and
- b) Di Ethyl Hexyl Phthalate (DEHP), a phthalate used to soften PVC plastic, which, according to animal studies, is linked to reproductive birth defects and other illnesses, can leach from PVC medical devices.

Efficient appliances

Energy efficiency benefits health by reducing particulate, toxic chemical, and greenhouse gas emissions associated with fossil-fuel based electrical generation, thereby improving outdoor air quality and curbing global climate change potential. If food service contractors have control over capital equipment purchases such as dishwashers, refrigerators, stoves, steamers, ice makers and other equipment consider specifying purchase of Energy-Star approved and water-efficient appliances.



Contracting suggestions

If your hospital/ health system outsources food service management, consider taking the following steps before your next bid or contract renewal process:

- Identify your sustainability goals and priorities and put them in writing.
- Communicate these goals and priorities as part of the contracting process and specifically in any request for proposals (RFPs).
- Add sustainability-related questions or criteria to RFPs so you can better evaluate potential contractors' commitment and ability to help achieve the hospital/ health system's sustainability goals and criteria as well as track progress and provide regular reports.
- If possible, engage a knowledgeable partner to help with reviewing and rating responses.
- Turn bid commitments into contract requirements and establish the means to terminate if goals are not being met to the hospital's satisfaction.

RESOURCES

Green Guide for Health Care Food Service Credits and related Toolkit to develop your sustainable food service goals and criteria, www.noharm.org/us_canada/issues/food/planning.php


Alternatives to Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) and Di(2-Ethylhexyl) Phthalate (DEHP) Medical Devices for glove alternatives, www.noharm.org/lib/downloads/pvc/Alternatives_to_PVC_DEHP.pdf

Energy Star rated commercial food service equipment, www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=commercial_food_service.commercial_food_service

Choosing Environmentally Preferable Food Service Ware-Reusable and Sustainable Biobased Products, http://noharm.org/lib/downloads/food/EPP_Food_Svc_Ware.pdf

U.S. EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines for recycled content at www.epa.gov/cpg/

Practice Greenhealth, <http://practicegreenhealth.org>

Health Care

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Health Care without Harm (HCWH) is an international coalition of organizations working to transform the health care sector, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment. HCWH's Healthy Food in Health Care (HFHC) Program works with hospitals across the country to build a healthier, more sustainable food system, providing education and resources to make the connection between the food they serve and the health of their patients, staff and community.

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SAMPLE SUSTAINABILITY LANGUAGE FOR AN INSTITUTIONAL FOOD SERVICE CONTRACT

9. Catering services

- 9.1 Catering services are to include food, beverages, disposable utensils and dishes, serving equipment, packaging, delivery, set-up, pick-up of equipment and clean-up. (Standards for environmentally preferable disposable utensils, dishes and other food service ware outlined in Section 13.2.2.)
- 9.2 Contractor agrees to use whenever possible reusable serving containers and filtered tap water, and reusable or environmentally preferable disposable cups, instead of using bottled water, for all catering events. (Standards for environmentally preferable disposable cups and other food service ware outlined in Section 13.2.2.)

13. Customer Sustainable Food Service Program

- 13.1 Contractor agrees to support **[insert name of institution]** goal of increasing access to fresh, healthy food and promoting agricultural practices that are ecologically sound, economically viable and socially responsible in **[insert name of institution]** cafeterias and catering services. Contractor agrees to support **[insert name of institution]** goals of increasing the availability and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, purchasing food that has been produced without use of pesticides, added hormones or antibiotics given in the absence of disease, and increasing the proportion of **[insert name of institution]** food that is locally-sourced, seasonal, organic and sustainably produced.
 - 13.1.1 Contractor will prioritize the purchase of food products that meet **[insert name of institution]** Sustainable Food Purchasing Criteria (attached). Contractor will partner with **[insert name of institution]** and make reasonable efforts to achieve a minimum percentage of 15 percent sustainable annual combined food and beverage spend based on total food spend during the first year of the contract per the Green Guide for Health Care Food Service Credits 3.1-3.3 benchmark, with the goal of reaching 25 percent sustainable or greater by the end of the contract period. (See http://noharm.org/lib/downloads/building/GGHC_Ver22_Operations_2008_Revision.pdf.)
 - 13.1.2 Contractor agrees to use and serve only milk produced without the use of recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone or recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (rBGH/rBST) in cafeterias, for catering and for cooking. Contractor agrees to use and serve rBGH/rBST free yogurt, cheese, ice cream, butter, cream and other dairy products in cafeteria and catering services to the maximum extent feasible, and to partner with **[insert name of institution]** to eliminate the use of any dairy products produced with rBGH/rBST.
 - 13.1.3 Contractor agrees to support sustainable seafood practices by purchasing seafood identified as “Best Choices” or “Good Alternatives” per the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch list or certified by Marine Stewardship Council or similar independent, third-party eco-label AND low in mercury as according to the Physicians for Social Responsibility Healthy Fish Healthy Families Guide (or equivalent program).
 - 13.1.4 Contractor agrees to provide at least one Fair Trade certified coffee option in cafeterias and catering services at each location.
 - 13.1.5 Contractor agrees to work with **[insert name of existing farm partners, if applicable]** and other similar organizations to achieve **[insert name of institution]** sustainable food sourcing goals.
 - 13.1.6 Contractor agrees to adapt menus to allow the maximum practicable use of locally sourced, seasonally available produce...