

Farm to Hospital: Making it Work. Virginia Food System conference, September 30, 2009.

Develop a mission, vision, and plan.

Mission: To provide high quality medical nutrition therapy to Veterans to promote wellness and healing.

Vision: Veterans, staff, and the local community perceive NFS as offering the best food service and clinical nutrition care in VHA and community.

Policy: Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge. www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org

Plan: use whole kitchen approach, efficiencies in electricity, water, and waste management can help support cost of local food (if needed). Start small, wedge it into the budget. Do a "pilot" program (allow farmer to charge delivery fee.) Weekly delivery at beginning of week, then adjust with conventional vendor. Think in terms of institutionalizing local food into your foodservice, cement into policy.

Get all on board: explain concept to food service administrative and clinical nutrition staff, get buy in from top leadership, and empower staff to own the program.

Making the case: local food is smart: Tasty and increases pt consumption and satisfaction, saves on physician time, nutritious, staff like using it, good PR, good for community economy, farmers, environment, can increase sales in a cafeteria.

Budget strategy: Think of budget in terms of meeting monthly, annually, don't compare the cost of local produce with conventional. Comparing a farm tomato and conventional tomato is like comparing apples and oranges. Offset costs by decreasing high cost desserts and/or increasing meatless and less meat entrees. Savings from decreased energy, water, and/or waste mgt can offset food costs. Wedge it in at the beginning, expand each year.

Obstacles: Educating those resistant to change, finding a coop or farmer with vision and commitment, do they have a GAP program and liability insurance? Are they willing to get vendorized, do the red tape? Make it worth the farmer's time, work out the kinks with orders, deliveries, payments. Expect forces of nature, droughts, blights, etc.

Lessons learned: Think in five year blocks of time, farmers' cooperatives or farm market give more variety, if not available, find a farmer who has variety. Plan and talk with farmers in fall or winter, be realistic and respectful the farmer's business needs. Don't make promises you can't keep.

Measure and promote: look for ways to collect data, pt satisfaction and taste evaluations, % of produce that is local each year, pie chart comparing cost of food compared to physician salaries, etc. Promote internally and externally, at beginning and continuously.

Favorite resources: Health Care Without Harm, www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org ; Green Guide for Health Care, www.gghc.org; Green Seal, www.greenseal.org; Hunger & Environmental Nutrition DPG, www.hendpg.org; VA Nutrition and Food Checklist, www.nutrition.va.gov/.

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