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health care

Without Harm

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Hospitals Reduce Climate Impact and Promote Health Through “Balanced Menus Challenge”** *Hospitals Accept Challenge to Reduce Meat Offerings by 20 Percent in 12 Months*

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) has announced the “Balanced Menus Challenge,” a voluntary commitment by health care institutions to reduce their meat offerings in patient meals and hospital cafeterias by 20 percent in 12 months. Balanced Menus is a climate change reduction strategy that also protects the effectiveness of antibiotics and promotes good nutrition. Fourteen hospitals are already participating in the national Balanced Menus Challenge, which was developed by HCWH’s Healthy Food in Health Care Initiative. (See hospital list at end of release).

The USDA recommends 5-6 oz of meat/fish/poultry/beans per day, and for meat alone, Americans on average eat 8 oz daily. Hospital food service operations often mirror this trend, offering sizable servings of meat several meals per day. High consumption of conventionally produced meat and processed meat contributes to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, dementia, and some kinds of cancer. Over-consumption of meat contributes to the overwhelming cost of the US health system (estimated to be \$147B as a result of obesity management alone) as well as environmental damage such as climate change, water and air pollution.

Most hospitals buy substantial amounts of meat, typically through large distributors who source from the U.S. commodity beef, pork and poultry markets. 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. The food system accounts for over 10 percent of overall energy use in the United States. Globally, livestock for meat and dairy production accounts for 18 percent of greenhouse gases, more than all of Earth’s cars, trains, and planes combined.

“While food choice is distinctly personal, the healthcare community should be at the forefront in modeling a healthy food agenda for the nation,” said Jamie Harvie, chair of the HCWH Healthy Food in Health Care Initiative. “Encouraging a reduced and sustainable meat diet is part of a primary prevention agenda to reduce the nation’s chronic diet-related illnesses, but also contributes substantially to climate mitigation, clean air and water, and protection of the effectiveness of antibiotics.”

Most US meat is produced under a system that 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 moves off the crowded facilities, polluting land, air and water. Sustainably raised meat and poultry precludes the use of antibiotics for non-therapeutic purposes. Approximately 70 percent of all antibiotics used in the U. S. are given to healthy animals to promote growth and compensate for crowded conditions and poor husbandry practices in conventional animal production.

“The power of this strategy is that hospitals are utilizing their considerable buying power to send a strong

signal to the marketplace, while also demonstrating leadership by reducing the public health effects and environmental impacts caused by current livestock production practices," stated Louise Mitchell, Sustainable Foods Coordinator for Maryland Hospitals for a Healthy Environment and Regional Food Coordinator in Maryland for Health Care Without Harm. "The patients, staff and the local and global communities all benefit along with the planet. There are many wins with this initiative," she said.

"As we debate health care reform in the US, it is important to recognize that eating less conventionally produced meat will reduce drivers of many of the major chronic diseases that threaten the sustainability of our health care system," stated Ted Schettler, MD, MPH, of the Science and Environmental Health Network. "It is good for people and good for the planet."

"We are taking the Balanced Menus Challenge because it is consistent with our hospital's wellness initiative for patients and employees," said Holly Emmons, RD, LD, Food Service Manager at Union Hospital of Cecil County in Elkton, MD who was the 1st in Maryland to sign on to the Challenge. "We are increasing our offerings of fiber, legumes, and vegetarian entrees in our menus and implementing more portion control to decrease over-consumption," said Emmons. "We have also recently become more aware of the negative health and environmental effects from how our food is produced and transported. As a result, we are shifting our food purchasing practices to include more local, sustainably produced beef, pork and poultry," she said.

For more information about the "Balanced Menus Challenge," go to [http://noharm.org/us\\_canada/issues/food/menus.php](http://noharm.org/us_canada/issues/food/menus.php)

*HCWH is an international coalition of more than 430 organizations in 52 countries, working to transform the health care industry worldwide, 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 has an ambitious healthy food agenda, which includes buying fresh food locally and/or buying certified organic food; avoiding food raised with growth hormones and antibiotics; supporting local farmers and farming organizations; introducing farmers markets and on-site food box programs; reducing food waste; and establishing an overarching food policy at each health facility. More than 250 hospitals have signed the HCWH "Healthy Food in Healthcare Pledge." Signers pledge to work toward developing sustainable food systems in their facilities. To learn more about HCWH's work on food and other issues related to health care [www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org](http://www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org)*

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### **Hospitals Participating in the Balanced Menus Challenge:**

UCSF Medical Center, CA  
John Muir Health System, CA  
Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital, CA  
San Francisco VA Medical Center, CA  
New Milford Hospital, CT  
Union Hospital of Cecil County, MD  
Carroll Hospital Center, MD  
St. Joseph's Manor/ Covenant Health System, MA  
Anne Arundel Medical Center, MD  
Truman Medical Centers, MO  
Good Shepherd Medical Center, OR  
Oregon Health & Science University  
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, PA  
Cooper University Hospital, NJ