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## 38 HEALTH CARE FACILITIES MEET CHALLENGE TO BUY LOCAL FOODS

*Statewide campaign demonstrates commitment to healthy foods and local economies*

**BALTIMORE** – Amid increasing recognition that food production and distribution methods can have a significant impact on patient and community health, hospitals and nursing homes across Maryland and the District of Columbia are incorporating into their menus food produced locally and using sustainable methods. Nearly 40 health care facilities purchased and served at least one local food item each day during the week of July 17-25 as part of the Buy Local Challenge, a statewide campaign launched by the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) and kicked off each year by Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley at his annual Buy Local Cookout. The challenge gave hospitals new to local food purchasing a chance to test the waters, while those that already have an ongoing commitment to supporting local farmers took the opportunity to promote those relationships and expand their healthy food programs.

“Participation in the Buy Local Challenge is a great way for hospitals to engage their entire communities in thinking about the choices we make about our food,” said Louise Mitchell, sustainable foods coordinator at Maryland Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (MD H2E). As an initiative of the University of Maryland School of Nursing, MD H2E engages hospitals in Maryland in implementing environmentally sustainable practices, including providing healthier, local and sustainably produced foods at their facilities. “Hospitals are a community resource for health information and to the extent that they can model healthier food choices - including local and sustainably produced foods - they can help influence and change behaviors community-wide.”

Purchasing local food has many benefits, including a positive impact on the local economy. The 38 health care facilities that participated in the Buy Local Challenge collectively spent more than \$15,000 on foods from local farms that week, including fruits, vegetables, eggs and meat. Individual hospitals and nursing homes spent from \$45 to \$2276 during Buy Local Week, with Washington County Hospital's \$1185, University of Maryland Medical Center's \$1565 and Union Hospital of Cecil County's \$2276 leading the way in local food purchases for the week-long campaign. If every hospital in Maryland spent an average of \$400 per week in local food purchases during just the 5 months of the growing season, it would result in more than half a million dollars in local food purchases by Maryland's hospitals.

Hospital employees and their surrounding communities can also contribute to this positive economic impact. “If every household in Maryland spent just \$12 a week on local food during the two months of summer, that would mean \$200 million back in the pockets of our local farmers,” said Christine Bergmark, executive director of SMADC. “Institutions like health care facilities can provide larger, more reliable outlets for local farm products and can set a great example for individuals in their communities to follow.”

### **From Institution to Individual**

In fact, many hospitals encouraged their employees and members of their surrounding communities to participate in the challenge as well. As a result, more than 800 individuals pledged, through the hospitals' outreach initiatives, to eat at least

one local food each day during the Buy Local Challenge. Nearly 300 of these individuals were employees and community members of Union Hospital of Cecil County, which also boasted 21 percent employee participation, the highest reported by any health care facility in the state. Harford Memorial Hospital was second in the state, engaging 15 percent of their employees and Upper Chesapeake Medical Center successfully encouraged 11 percent of their employees to take the challenge.

Many hospitals used the logo and other marketing tools from the Buy Local Challenge & MD H2E websites to identify the local foods for their patrons in the cafeterias and on the patient trays. Anne Arundel Medical Center, St. Agnes Hospital, and food service contractor Morrison Management Specialists, which runs the food service for 13 hospitals in Maryland and DC, have each developed their own local food logos and use them regularly throughout the year. Carroll Hospital Center gave employees incentive to buy local foods during the month of July by punching a "Buy Local Punch Card" at their cafeteria's cash register and tracking which employees took the challenge, giving them "wellness points" that they could redeem for healthy gifts and prizes.

In addition to using local foods in the hospital meals, St. Mary's Hospital and Union Hospital now have a 'grocers' section' of local foods available as another way for employees to buy local on a daily basis. As part of the Employee Purchasing Program at Union Hospital, employees can either pay cash or use a convenient payroll deduction to pay for their 'groceries' in the cafeteria or the coffee shop, which they can then use to prepare local food meals at home.

### **Distributors Help Spread the Word . . . and the Food**

While some hospitals are purchasing directly from local farmers, and others like St. Mary's Hospital are purchasing from the local Amish produce auction in Southern Maryland, most hospitals are purchasing their local foods through their distributors. Many food distributors in the Mid-Atlantic region now publish a weekly "local food list" to help hospitals and other institutions identify local choices in their large-scale purchasing. Hearn Kirkwood, a regional distributor in the Mid-Atlantic, has also posted pictures and bios of the local farmers they buy from on their website so their clients can print them out and use them to promote the local farmers at the point of sale. In addition, Morrison Management Specialists now orders local fruits and vegetables as a first preference from its distributors to its hospital locations.

And it's not just produce that distributors are now providing from local farms. "By contacting our distributors, I discovered that local, sustainably produced chicken and turkey were available, so we featured them, in addition to our local fruits and vegetables, as special menu items during Buy Local Week," said Karen McCracken, coordinator/purchasing manager of Food and Nutrition Services at University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore.

### **Going Beyond Local ... to Local AND Sustainable**

Some hospitals used the Buy Local Challenge to start purchasing not only more local food, but local food that is produced using environmentally conscious farming practices. "It's important for hospitals to go beyond just decreasing the miles that our food travels to also begin to address how our food is produced," said Mitchell. "Hospitals have a responsibility to protect patient, employee and public health. When hospitals shift their purchasing practices to more sustainably produced foods, it sends a strong signal to the marketplace." The local chicken and turkey that University of Maryland Medical Center purchased were produced without the use of antibiotics. Sinai Hospital launched the purchase of vegetables grown without pesticides from one of Baltimore's first urban farms, Real Food Farm. Union Hospital's Food Service Manager Holly Emmons explained "We are introducing our patients and employees to healthier, local, certified organic foods, including some vegetables that are less familiar. We also sell local grass-fed burgers, which are so popular I can't keep enough in stock."

### **Challenge Is First Step Toward Lasting Change**

The Buy Local Challenge draws attention to seasonal local purchasing, which is a first step towards hospitals changing their long-term buying habits. During last year's 2009 Buy Local Challenge, 27 hospitals bought local foods, and most of them, plus a few more, are now buying local fruits and vegetables throughout the growing season. In addition, twenty health care facilities in Maryland and DC are part of over 300 hospitals around the country that have signed Health Care Without Harm's "Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge," a commitment to gradually increase the amount of local and sustainably produced foods served to patients, staff, visitors and surrounding communities.

"We are beginning to see a tremendous change in health care institutions in Maryland and throughout the U.S.," said MD H2E's Mitchell. "It's not easy to modify systems that are feeding hundreds or thousands of people a day, with a variety of cost, portion and nutritional parameters that have to be met. Our hospital food service professionals and their distributors

are tackling this larger challenge and demonstrating leadership by providing healthier food and supporting the local community.”

**Maryland and DC Hospitals That Participated in the 2010 Buy Local Challenge:**

Anne Arundel Medical Center	Holy Cross Hospital	St. Joseph Medical Center
Calvert Memorial Hospital	Howard County General Hospital	St. Mary's Hospital
Carroll Hospital Center	Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center	Suburban Hospital
Children's National Medical Center	Center	Union Hospital of Cecil County
Civista Medical Center	Johns Hopkins Hospital	Union Memorial Hospital
Courtland Gardens Nursing and Rehabilitation Home	Kernan Hospital	University of Maryland Medical Center
Doctors Community Hospital	Levindale Hebrew Geriatric Center & Hospital	Upper Chesapeake Medical Center
Franklin Square Hospital	Long View Nursing Home	Washington Adventist Hospital
Frederick Memorial Hospital	Montgomery General Hospital	Washington County Hospital
Georgetown University Hospital	National Rehabilitation Hospital	Washington Hospital Center
Good Samaritan Hospital	Northwest Hospital	Western Maryland Regional Medical Center
Greater Baltimore Medical Center	Shady Grove Adventist Hospital	
Harbor Hospital	Sinai Hospital	
Harford Memorial Hospital	St. Agnes Hospital	

**Editorial Note: Photographs are available** from several of the hospitals in Maryland and DC that participated in the Buy Local Challenge. Contact Louise Mitchell at 443-257-3209 or [Lmitc001@son.umaryland.edu](mailto:Lmitc001@son.umaryland.edu) for details.

*Maryland Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (MD H2E) is a technical assistance and networking initiative of the University of Maryland School of Nursing that promotes environmental sustainability in health care including pollution prevention, waste reduction, environmentally preferable purchasing, green building, and sustainable food practices. Participants include hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, research laboratories, and other ancillary health care providers in Maryland. [www.mdh2e.org](http://www.mdh2e.org)*

*The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) was established to promote diverse, market-driven agricultural enterprises, which coupled with agricultural land preservation, will preserve Southern Maryland's environmental resources and rural character while keeping the region's farmland productive and the agricultural economy vibrant. [www.somarylandsogood.com](http://www.somarylandsogood.com) or visit [www.buy-local-challenge.com](http://www.buy-local-challenge.com).*

*Health Care Without Harm (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. For more information on HCWH, see [www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org) or visit [www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org](http://www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org).*

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