

Hospitals can help reduce the negative health impacts generated by our conventional food system by transitioning 20% of total food purchases to meet verified criteria while incentivizing food producers and businesses that apply healthful production practices.

The opportunity

The way our food is produced, processed, transported, made available for consumption, and consumed has profound impacts on environmental, public, and individual health. At each point in the food system, there are opportunities to support the health of workers, eaters, and the biological systems on which health depends. However, our current food system is failing to meet these opportunities, resulting in a rising tide of diet-related disease, inequitable access to healthy food, health and economic challenges for farm and food businesses (and their communities), and environmental degradation which further impacts human health. As large, mission-driven institutions, hospitals are uniquely poised to assert purchasing standards that support local and sustainable food systems for a greater cumulative impact on human and public health.

Getting started

- 1: Learn about key [issues](#) and build your sustainable food purchasing plan using these [sustainable food purchasing standards](#) – a comprehensive and vetted list of third-party certifications and label claims that Practice Greenhealth has determined to be highly meaningful.
- 2: An impactful place to start is to transition current meat and poultry sources to varieties [raised without routine antibiotics](#) to support broader antibiotic stewardship efforts.
- 3: [Expand your regional organic food purchasing](#) to assist in preserving the environment in your own communities by regulating soil and water quality, livestock practices, allowable food additives, and pest management.

How Practice Greenhealth can help

The Practice Greenhealth website provides a wealth of resources for our network partners, and our sustainability specialists may provide more personalized support on [local and sustainable food purchasing](#). A sample of these additional resources include:

- Creating a healthy food retail environment to showcase your purchasing efforts and win the support of your hospital community – from administrators, to clinicians, to patients.
- Product specific guidance to understand certifications and label claims in different food categories.
- A sustainable food purchasing tracking tool to assist in baselining your purchases and tracking progress.
- Guidance using tested strategies to increase the availability of sustainably produced food options via existing supply channels and relationships with GPOs and distributors and integrating sustainability into food service contracts.

Success story

Recognizing that conventional agriculture practices are threatening our food supply by degrading soil, polluting air and water, negatively impacting wildlife and fisheries, and leading to chronic health concerns, such as neurodegenerative disorders and cancer, the University of Washington Medical Center implemented a facility-wide Regional Organic Purchasing Policy. UWMC believes “the food we eat is critical to our wellbeing, and in times of sickness, our recovery. Similarly, the increasing production of local, sustainable, and organic food products improves the strength of local economies and environments.” UWMC’s strategic plan addressed shifting purchasing to organic products by working with local suppliers, encouraging current partners to divulge product origin on ordering guides, communicating their purchasing volume commitment to their supply chain, and finally, engaging health professionals at UW Schools of Medicine, Nutrition, and Public Health to ensure purchasing decisions are evidenced-based in terms of nutrition and environmental health. UWMC’s food service purchasing pathways brought the hospital national recognition and multiple Healthy Food in Health Care awards.

Let Practice Greenhealth help you lead change in your hospital. To get started today, email join@practicegreenhealth.org.