

CASE STUDY



SIMPLE MACHINE EMPOWERS HOSPITAL TO SERVE LOCAL EGGS

The Problem

The vast majority (94 percent) of eggs in the United States are produced in battery cages, which prevent hens from performing natural behaviors including perching, nesting, foraging and even spreading their wings, with hundreds of thousands of birds in one facility. The intensification of the egg industry over the past half-century has elevated animal welfare concerns. Workers in poorly ventilated barns or aviary houses are exposed to significantly higher concentrations of airborne particles, ammonia, and endotoxin, which pose respiratory health risks for workers and in some cases, nearby residents.

“Any organization can do this if the administration, the executives, [and] the thought leaders are at the table and are committed to making it happen.”

- Grant Fletcher, Bronson Healthcare,
System Director of Healthy Living and Sustainability

Free-range and or pasture-raised operations alleviate air quality concerns. Increasingly, many operations are transitioning to housing systems that offer more space for hens. These include (from lowest to highest standards) enriched colony cages, cage-free, free-range, and pasture raised operations. Additionally, different production systems used to raise laying hens have varying impacts for farmers, farmworkers, and surrounding communities.

Recent science reveals that moderate whole egg consumption is not likely to lead to an increased risk for cardiovascular disease and mortality for the general population. Eggs have low environmental impacts associated with their production compared to other animal products.

Bronson Methodist Hospital

Bronson Healthcare is the largest employer in southwest Michigan with nearly 9,000 employees. The food service at Bronson hospitals in Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Paw Paw and South Haven are self-operated, or independent, and have a \$7 million budget for the entire system, serving nearly two million meals per year.

Highlights

- Bronson Healthcare has a goal to source 70 percent of their food locally.
- With no processor in the Kalamazoo community, Bronson purchased an egg extractor — a small machine where employees send whole shelled eggs through a centrifuge to separate the shell from the liquid eggs in just minutes.
- As of August 2017, 100 percent of the eggs used at Bronson Methodist Hospital are sourced from two local farms representing 450-500 dozen eggs per week, upwards of 24,000 eggs per month.



Strategy and Implementation

Since 2008, Bronson Methodist Hospital has been changing the way it sources food for patients and its cafeteria. As the area's largest employer, Bronson's leadership values the role the hospital plays in southwest Michigan's agricultural economy. Bronson's food service began by scaling up purchases of local fruits and vegetables, hosting on-site seasonal farmers markets and offering community supported agriculture memberships for employees. As those programs became successful, hospital leadership decided to turn to proteins with a goal of sourcing eggs from local producers.

"Eggs represented an opportunity to make a significant transition," says Grant Fletcher, Bronson Healthcare's System Director of Healthy Living and Sustainability. Bronson Methodist Hospital, like many hospitals and large institutions, was purchasing egg products such as liquid eggs, pre-shelled hard boiled eggs, pre-made egg patties, and low-cholesterol egg products. In addition to research pointing to consumption of whole eggs as a healthier alternative to low-cholesterol egg products, the timing of the switch to local eggs was partially motivated by an avian flu outbreak that caused the price of liquid eggs to skyrocket.

When considering where to source local eggs, Bronson did not have to look far. A pair of local farmers, Norm Carlson, of Naturally Norm's and Joe Koopsen of Joe's Farm, were already selling eggs in the Kalamazoo community and were interested in establishing a partnership with Bronson. Their eggs came from chickens that were raised completely on pasture (housed with plenty of room to move about during the cold winter months). In 2016, Bronson's executive

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chef Jason McClellan partnered with Carlson and Koopsen to overcome some significant processing challenges so that the hospital could begin purchasing their eggs.

With no processor in the community, Bronson purchased an egg extractor – a small machine where whole shelled eggs are put through a centrifuge to separate the shell from the liquid eggs. With this streamlined approach and new machine, the hospital was able to support two community-based businesses, save thousands of dollars in egg costs without increasing prices for consumers, and provide a healthier alternative to previously used egg products.

Local, farm fresh eggs are now the only eggs served throughout the Bronson Methodist Hospital campus and are used for every application including omelets, scrambles, hard boiled eggs, chopped hard boiled eggs

for salad bars, egg patties for sandwiches and even soft-boiled for broth and noodle bowls. As of August 2017, 100 percent of the eggs used at Bronson are sourced from either Carlson's or Koopsen's farm representing 450-500 dozen eggs per week, upwards of 24,000 eggs per month. The economic impact has been significant for both farmers. Each have invested heavily in their operations and expanded distribution to additional retail and institutional facilities.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Bronson thought outside the carton when they knew there was no processor in the community by purchasing an egg extractor ([Centri-Matic III](#)), which paid for itself in less than a year. Without this processor, they would also have had to overcome the challenge of the eggs not being pasteurized. They also worked with the local health department to ensure the eggs are washed/cleaned in accordance with Michigan Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Agriculture criteria. The hospital purchases eggs in the shell and liquefies them in-house.

"We worked with the county health departments to develop appropriate HACCP plans," says Fletcher, "The primary concern from County Health was ensuring an appropriate 'kill stage,' ensuring the eggs would be heated or cooked to the appropriate temperature to kill bacteria."

Bronson worked with the farmers to determine a price that took into account the costs to raise the chickens in a responsible manner, harvest, wash, and package the eggs, along with delivery directly to the hospital.

Bronson is committed to advancing the health of the community and sees the success and profitability of local businesses, including farmers, as critical to achieving their mission.

What's Next

As each new local product change takes root, Bronson gets closer to its goal of 70 percent locally sourced food. "The next step is sourcing local protein such as whole chickens," Fletcher says, "We piloted purchasing 5,000 local, pasture raised chickens in early 2017 and were able to use the meat and carcasses for broth production."

Resources

- [Understanding Labels: Eggs](#)
- [Video of Bronson Methodist Hospital's egg-cracking machine in action](#)