

# Healthy Food in Health Care



The Canadian Coalition  
for Green Health Care

## A Pledge for Fresh, Local, Sustainable Food



**N**utrition-related chronic diseases are placing new demands on an already overburdened health care system, and taking their toll on human productivity and quality of life. Our current large scale, industrial food system favours animal products and highly-refined, preservative laden, calorie-dense foods, rather than fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and other high fiber foods important for health. It is a system misaligned with dietary guidelines. Moreover, the way our food is produced and distributed impacts our health and the environment in which we live. For example:

### Air and Water Pollution

Pesticide drift, field dust, waste burning, and toxic gases from degrading manure are all factors of food production that contribute to air pollution. Such air pollution can lead to asthma and other respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular disease, and lung cancer. A study in Ontario, Canada found that food is transported an average of 4,500 kilometers to reach its destination. Through the use of diesel and other fossil fuels, vehicles unnecessarily contribute to global warming. Fertilizers and pesticides contaminate ground water in many locales and some pesticides have been found regularly in rainfall. Large-scale animal feedlot operations contribute to water pollution when untreated animal waste releases biologically active hormones, nitrates and other toxic breakdown products into waterways.

### Worker Health and Safety

Widespread pesticide use in industrial-scale food production exposes farm workers and their families to dangerous chemicals, often at levels that exceed established “safety” limits. Longer-term, low-level pesticide exposure has been linked to an array of chronic

health problems including: cancer, birth defects, neurological, reproductive, and behavioural effects, and impaired immune system function. Industrialized meat packing is recognized as one of the most dangerous occupations: every year, over one quarter of all workers need medical attention beyond first aid.

### Antibiotics

The routine use of antibiotics contributes to growing antibiotic resistant bacteria. Each year 20 to 30 million pounds of antibiotics (including related antimicrobials) are used in agriculture—by volume, about 7-10 times the total antibiotics used in human medicine. Industrialized food systems that produce poultry, pork, beef, and farmed fish routinely use antibiotics as growth promoters rather than to treat identified disease. Routinely feeding antibiotics to animals that are not even sick increases antibiotic resistance among bacteria that cause human infections.

### Healthy Food in Health Care

Hospitals and health systems have opportunities to help prevent these food-related health concerns by modeling good nutrition in their institutions and by influencing how food is produced and distributed. Through its food purchasing decisions, the Canadian health care industry can promote health by providing more fresh, good tasting, nutritious food choices for patients, staff, and the community. And by supporting food production that is local, humane, and protective of the environment and health, health care providers can help create food systems that promote the well being of the whole community.

*\* This pledge was created in collaboration with Health Care Without Harm as part of their Healthy Food in Health Care Initiative.*

# Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge

This Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge is a framework that outlines steps to be taken by the health care industry to improve the health of patients, communities and the environment.

As a responsible provider of health care services, we are committed to the health of our patients, our staff and the local and global community. We are aware that food production and distribution methods can have adverse impacts on public environmental health. As a result, we recognize that for the consumers who eat it, the workers who produce it and the ecosystems that sustain us, healthy food must be defined not only by nutritional quality, but equally by a food system that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and supportive of human dignity and justice. We are committed to the goal of providing local, nutritious and sustainable food.

Specifically, we are committed to the following healthy food in health care measures for our institution. We pledge to:

**Increase** our offering of fruit and vegetables, nutritionally dense and minimally processed, unrefined foods and reduce unhealthy (trans and saturated) fats and sweetened foods.

**Implement** a program to identify and adopt sustainable food procurement. Begin where fewer barriers exist and immediate steps can be taken, such as the adoption of fair trade coffee, or selections of organic and/or local fresh produce in the cafeteria or for patients.

**Work** with local farmers, community organizations and food suppliers to increase the availability of fresh, locally-produced food.

**Encourage** our vendors and/or food management companies to supply us with food that is produced in systems that, among other attributes, eliminate the use of toxic pesticides, prohibit the use of hormones and non-therapeutic antibiotics, support farmer and farm worker health and welfare, and use ecologically protective and restorative agriculture.

**Communicate** to our Group Purchasing Organizations our interest in foods whose source and production practices (i.e. protect biodiversity, antibiotic and hormone use, local, pesticide use, etc) are identified, so that we may have informed consent and choice about the foods we purchase.

**Develop** a program to promote and source from producers and processors which uphold the dignity of family, farmers, workers and their communities and support sustainable and humane agriculture systems.

**Educate** and communicate within our system and with our patients and community about our nutritious, socially just and ecologically sustainable healthy food practices and procedures.

**Minimize** and beneficially reuse food waste and support the use of food packaging and products that are ecologically protective.

**Complete** an annual survey on Pledge implementation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of (indicate your department, facility or system): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me a clean copy of the pledge with signature line only. We would like to have it framed and displayed.

Submit your pledge to: The Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care  
1724 Concession 6 West, RR #2 Branchton, ON, N0B 1L0

Or scan and email to: [healthyfood@greenhealthcare.ca](mailto:healthyfood@greenhealthcare.ca) [www.greenhealthcare.ca](http://www.greenhealthcare.ca)

