

# Farmers' Markets and CSAs on Hospital Grounds

Unhealthy diets and limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables adversely affect the health of many Americans. Precisely because they are important community and health institutions, hospitals and hospital systems are in a unique position to treat both diet-related illness and address their root causes.

Increasingly, hospitals are demonstrating leadership in health promotion by hosting farmers' markets, farm stands, and CSAs (community supported agriculture) on site as a way to make farm fresh, locally grown produce and other foods more readily available. For example, Allen Memorial Hospital in Waterloo, Iowa has operated a seasonal farmers' market since 1999 to increase their community's access to fresh produce. Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C. began operating a seasonal market as part of their employee health benefit program in 2001. Kaiser Permanente, a large nonprofit health system headquartered in Oakland, Calif., has embraced farmers' markets as a way to achieve their overall mission and improve the health of the communities they serve, opening more than 20 markets since May 2003 at facilities in California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Colorado.

## Farmers' Markets and Hospitals

### Benefits to the Hospital Community

Hospital-based farmers' markets are one way for hospitals to help realize a number of health goals related to patients, staff and their community.

Most obviously, these on-site markets make fresh, locally grown products readily available, which is especially important in many urban communities where other sources of fresh and healthy foods are often lacking. In the process, on-site farmers' markets strengthen staff morale, while increasing the likelihood that patients, visitors, and staff will eat nutritious fresh foods. The markets also provide a fun, outdoor venue for educating passersby about nutrition, food preparation, and the benefits of eating fresh and local, all of which further contribute to the long-term development of healthy eating habits. Additional benefits of these markets, mentioned often by hospital hosts, can include:

- Positive publicity
- Differentiation from competitors
- Better employee health
- Added patient satisfaction
- More visible nutrition education
- Improved community relations

### Benefits to the Local Community

In addition to the above-mentioned benefits, hospitals that host on-site farmers' markets help strengthen their local economies and communities—ultimately strengthening both the hospital's mission as a community institution and the community's ability to sustain its own population healthfully.

### Economic Benefits

As the number of family farmers continues to decline nationwide, new marketing opportunities such as hospital farmers' markets can be key to supporting local agriculture and localized food systems. These innovative direct marketing opportunities give small farmers and growers new outlets for selling directly to the public. By eliminating produce distributors and other middlemen and selling directly to consumers, farmers receive a fair wage for their product and food dollars stay in the local economy.

### Community Benefits

Eating locally grown foods has inherent benefits that extend beyond the nutritional health of consumers. Food produced locally travels a shorter distance from farm to plate, decreasing energy used and air pollution generated from transport. Also, foods sold locally are able to ripen in the field and be picked mere days before being sold so fruits and vegetables achieve peak ripeness on the vine or tree, developing full flavor and nutrient content. Conventionally grown and packaged foods are often picked unripe for ease of shipping and ripened using chemicals, decreasing their nutrient value as well as their flavor profile. By supporting farmers who raise produce more sustainably, such as with reduced pesticides, hospitals are supporting conditions that are better for farmworkers, for the consumer, and the ecosystem as a whole. Hosting a farmers' market on-site is a way for hospitals to demonstrate their recognition that local food production plays a key role in the health and well being of the community.

### Model Hospital-based Farmers' Market

There are various ways to establish a market on hospital grounds, a number of examples follow. However, the most effective farmers' market model for affecting hospital, community, and agricultural health is a market featuring produce and other foods grown sustainably on small or medium-sized local farms, and a market that is linked to an internal strategy to incorporate farm fresh market foods into hospital food services. By setting high quality standards for the food sold at hospital farmers' markets and utilizing the food within the facility, hospitals set an excellent example of good nutrition, conscious consumerism, and support for small farmers and local economies.

### Types of Farmers' Markets on Hospital Grounds

Hospital-based farmers' markets can serve many purposes from increasing consumer access to fruits and vegetables, to facilitating system-wide changes in a hospital's food services and approach to nutrition education and wellness. Here are three types of on-site hospital markets that can address the needs of a wide range of constituencies:

*An internally focused market* primarily serves staff, patients, and visitors. These markets are more likely to be located in the interior of a hospital campus, less visible to the passing community. These markets help achieve the organization's goals of promoting employee health and well being and making positive impacts on local farmers.

*An externally focused market* serves the greater community as well as staff, patients and visitors. These markets are best suited in hospitals located in cities or town centers where foot traffic, parking, and public transportation are accessible. Such markets are useful for extending a wider public health message and offering health promotion activities to the community surrounding the hospital.

*A dual-purpose market* serves the internal needs of hospital food services as well as individual customers. In addition to customer sales at the market, the farmers selling at these markets establish purchasing relationships with the hospital food services department. Locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables are used in the cafeteria, patient foods, and catering as part of a "farm to hospital" program.

### Overcoming Roadblocks

By following the Steps to Starting a Market or Farm Stand listed in the next section, you should be able to address most if not all of the potential roadblocks that may arise. For instance, Kaiser Permanente addressed

the lack of parking at one site by setting the market up on the sidewalk instead of in a parking lot and by having vendors drop off their wares at curbside and park their vehicles at a remote location. Duke University Medical Center addressed a lack of parking by not marketing to the community at large. Other potential, but surmountable, obstacles include permits, liability insurance, and internal and external costs related to set-up and marketing. This fact sheet along with the case studies and other resources provided on the next page can help to anticipate and overcome these obstacles, if not avoid them entirely.

### Steps to Starting a Market or Farm Stand

If you are considering starting a market at your hospital here are the basic steps to take to help assure success.

- 1. Secure internal support** from all levels of hospital operations including, administration, operations management, legal services, community and government relations, facilities and housekeeping, food service, and patient services. Broad support from the entire hospital staff is key to successful implementation of the remaining steps.
- 2. Determine the goal(s)** you want to achieve by hosting the market, e.g. employee wellness, improved community access to fresh produce, hospital purchases, as well as the guidelines for what is allowed to be sold by vendors such as: location within a certain geographic area, all produce grown by one common grower, or pesticide-free or certified organic growing.
- 3. Choose the market type** (internal, external, or dual-purpose) that will best help you to achieve goals.
- 4. Identify a site** or list of possible locations for the market or farm stand. Key factors in identifying an appropriate site include: unrestricted access by the population to be served, parking and public transportation

- availability, expected foot traffic, room for expansion, long-term availability of site, capacity for number of vendors participating, accessibility to restrooms and trash bins, and ease of loading and unloading for vendors. Do not finalize location until step 5 is completed.
5. **Investigate insurance and permit requirements.** A hospital's umbrella insurance policy should be sufficient, but sometimes a rider is needed. Farmers and farmers' market associations usually have their own insurance policies, but it needs to be confirmed. Local and/or state officials may require a health permit and/or zoning permit. Costs for these items tend to vary depending on the jurisdiction. Permits are often free, but hospitals have been known to pay as much as \$1,300, so it is important to find out early in the process.
  6. **Identify potential day(s), time(s) and seasonal duration** for operation of market.
  7. **Identify growers/vendors.** A local or state farmers' market managing association can often assist in market planning and farmer outreach. These groups are also knowledgeable about insurance and permit requirements. Make sure to communicate any vendor standards you have up front. You may want to start with a few vendors at first, with additional vendors prepared to join in response to consumer demand. Note: Some markets charge the grower/vendor a fee to participate and others do not. Each hospital should assess their need for vendor fees depending on the costs associated with starting and running the market and how much the hospital and other potential partners are willing to contribute to costs such as setup and cleanup, tents and tables, internal and external advertising, and market management.
  8. **Address logistical issues** such as setup, cleanup and signage needed on market day.
  9. **Advertise** the new market and conduct outreach to desired customers. Consider using an internal employee newsletter and/or email communication system to advertise the market.

### Tips for Maximizing a Hospital Farmers' Market

- Survey staff, patients, and visitors to assess what types of produce would be popular and how much shoppers would be willing to pay. Successful markets provide a variety of products.
- Offer discharged patients baskets of farmers' market produce or market coupons.
- Hold cooking classes featuring market produce; offer nutritional information for food prepared.
- Give staff members market coupons.
- Send out emails highlighting certain seasonal items; include nutritional information and recipe ideas.
- Obtain authorization for market to accept food stamps and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons.
- Educate patients and staff about the other ways to increase their consumption of fresh, local produce by providing information on the locations and contact information for local community gardens and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs).

## Community Supported Agriculture and Hospitals

In addition to farmers' markets, hospitals are also an ideal site for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. CSAs are another method of offering staff, patients, and community members access to locally grown fruits and vegetables. A CSA can be generally defined as a partnership between a local farm and a community of supporters ("members") that wish to support local agriculture and secure for themselves a reliable, healthy, and safe source of food. Members typically purchase a CSA share in advance which helps support the farm throughout the growing season. In return members receive regular baskets of farm fresh food. Additionally, many farms offer members the opportunity to participate in farm visits and work days. Through CSAs, farms benefit from a guaranteed investment in farm operations, making long term planning and farm management less volatile and dependent on market forces, and members get access to fresh locally grown foods.

CSAs are successfully operated at a number of hospitals throughout the country, and the popularity of programs is increasing steadily. CSAs offer the benefit of having fewer space and oversight requirements than farmers' markets. Hospitals that lack the space or foot traffic to sustain a farmers' market should consider hosting a CSA.

## Steps to Hosting a CSA at Your Facility

### 1. Find a CSA Farm

There are several ways to locate a farm with a CSA: talk with local growers at your nearby farmers' markets; visit online resources such as Local Harvest ([www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)); or contact your region's sustainable agriculture organization or your State Department of Agriculture to help you find a CSA in your area.

### 2. Attract Members

In order to make a CSA financially viable for small farms, a minimum number of members must be established for each drop-off site. This threshold is determined by each individual farmer. Some ideas for attracting members include distributing e-newsletters or flyers to employees, placing an announcement in the local paper, and offering preview days.

### 3. Coordination and Management

Some CSA farms manage all paperwork, invoicing, construction of food boxes, and delivery, while others share these management tasks with members. Minimally a hospital CSA program will need a coordinator to promote the program, encourage staff and patients to become members, and provide space for members to pick up bags on delivery days. Depending on the farm, a person might also be required to collect payment, and pick up food bags. Some hospitals even provide refrigeration of the food for those employees who need to return to work after they pick up their food.

## Innovative Hospital CSA Models

**Baystate Franklin Medical Center** in Greenfield, MA is starting a new CSA program to increase staff members' access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The medical center will deduct CSA membership dues from employee's paychecks to reduce the hassle of processing payments.

**John Muir Health** in Northern California has started a CSA program at three of its hospital campuses. Subscribers receive a weekly basket of fruits and vegetables from a local farm. The CSA program is coordinated by a member of the hospital system's Healthy Food Committee. This committee is also working to include membership in the CSA in the system's Health Matters employee wellness program. If included, CSA members will be eligible for health plan discounts.

**Philadelphia Children's Hospital** has decided to host an employee CSA program as part of the hospital's Healthy Weight Initiative (HWI). The program quickly received a terrific response and may expand in the future to accommodate more participants. Aside from the CSA improving employees' access to fresh, locally-grown foods, the HWI has purchased one CSA share which it will use to educate patients about healthy and local foods.

**Physicians Plus**, a Madison-based health insurance company encourages its 95,000 members to join the CSA movement. The insurance company subsidizes CSA memberships.

## Resources

The Health Care Without Harm - Healthy Food in Health Care Website contains a wide variety of in depth health care specific news, purchasing tools, educational materials, case studies, reports and related links. [www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org](http://www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org)

**"Kaiser Permanente Farmers' Market Resource Guide."** August 2004. This guide describes the various farmers' market programs being implemented within KP, shares lessons learned, and provides tools such as a sample contract and public relations materials.

**"Farm to Hospital: Promoting Health and Supporting Local Agriculture."** 2004. This paper, released by the Center for Food and Justice, a division of the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College, looks at the need for reform in the hospital food system and focuses on the Farm to Hospital model as a strategy for change. Seven case studies highlight hospitals that have incorporated farm to hospital program components, including local food purchasing, hosting on-site farmers' markets and establishing community gardens.

**"Healthy Food, Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Communities."** May 2005. This report produced by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy summarizes the efforts of health care facilities nationwide to offer more fresh food, raised locally or organically, to patients, in cafeterias and via on-site farmers' markets. Four of the eight case studies included in the report specifically highlight hospital-based farmers' markets.

Health Care



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