



# Union Hospital of Cecil County

*A Healthiest Maryland Businesses Success Story*

## Fresh, Local Foods Make Hospital Healthier

In September 2009, The Food Service Department at Union Hospital committed to the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge through Health Care Without Harm. The Healthy Food Pledge calls for the adoption of food procurement policies that are environmentally sound and socially responsible, to protect the health of workers, patients, communities and the environment.

Union Hospital's strategic plan to promote healthy eating for patients, employees and visitors focused on three distinct goals.

### **Buying Local**

The first goal was to increase the amount of foods purchased from local suppliers. In 2009, milk and dairy products were the only items purchased locally. A year later in 2010, 19 percent of food and



Union hospital staff have a good time husking locally grown corn.

beverage purchases were local. By the end of 2012, local products made up 32 percent of Union Hospital's total food and beverage purchases. Some of the local farmers and growers include Filasky Farms, Liberty Delight Farms, KCC Natural Chicken, Priapi Gardens, Hy Point Dairy, Kilby Cream and Harbor House Seafood.

In addition to using more local foods for hospital meal preparation, Union Hospital

found a way to make local produce accessible to hospital staff and visitors. During the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Buy Local Challenge in July, the hospital introduced Mimi, the Greens-To-Go Bus, run by Fairwinds Farm. Throughout the season, the produce bus stops at Union Hospital every Tuesday so that employees, visitors and local businesses may purchase fresh produce without making a trip to the market.

## Union Hospital at a Glance:

- **Type of Business:**  
Full-service, 122-bed community hospital
- **Location:**  
Elkton
- **How Long in Business:**  
105 years
- **Number of Employees:**  
900
- **What worked:**  
Switching to local suppliers for fresh produce, sustainably grown meats and dairy products; creating healthy new menu items, including meatless entrees



## Balancing Menus Healthfully

The second goal, called the Balanced Menu Challenge, was to reduce meat purchases and switch to sustainable meats, grown without hormones or antibiotics. To meet this goal, the hospital switched suppliers to purchase beef from a local rancher. By the end of 2012, 45 percent of the hospital's beef purchases were sustainable.

"Meatless Mondays' were adopted as a strategy to offer non-meat protein sources for all hospital menus, including patient meals and cafeteria offerings. Popular Meatless Monday entrees include tortellini primavera (pasta with fresh vegetables in a broth-based sauce), black bean and corn-topped baked potatoes, broccoli and cheddar quiche and cheese quesadillas.

These and other menu items focus on increasing servings of fruits, vegetables, legumes and grains—while keeping dishes tasty and appealing. "We call it common fare with a healthy slant," explains Holly S. Emmons, Food Services Manager. "Many of the new dishes have proven very popular with both patients and staff."

The new approach to hospital meals has meant big changes in the kitchen. "The kitchen has evolved from a heating and serving function to preparing dishes and cooking from scratch," said Emmons. "We plan our menus around which ingredients are fresh and available, and we ex-

tend the season by preserving some fresh foods. For example we freeze corn on the cob, zucchini, peaches and strawberries. We usually get produce from our suppliers on the same day it's harvested."

While using fresh produce can mean there's more work to do in the kitchen (with all the peeling, paring, dicing and slicing), Emmons says even this can be a positive thing. "It promotes a sense of teamwork," she says. "On a day when fresh corn gets delivered, we're all out there husking it together. We have a good time with it."

## Serving Healthier Beverages

The third goal of the hospital's healthy eating strategy is the Healthy Beverage Initiative, to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, while increasing healthy beverage options. Currently, the hospital is purchasing 67 percent healthy beverages, with a goal to increase that by 10 percent in 2013.

## Awards and Recognition

In 2011, Governor Martin O'Malley, along with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Earl Hance, presented Holly S. Emmons, Hospital Food Service Manager, with the 2011 Buy Local Agricultural Challenge Award in recognition of her "efforts to grow a stronger local economy and create a smarter, greener, more sustainable future for all Marylanders."

In the spring of 2013, Health Care Without Harm presented Union Hospital with an award at their Healthy Food in Health Care Awards. The Exemplary Food Service Professional First Place award was given to Holly S. Emmons in recognition of "leading food service professionals in making the critical link between our industrialized food system and public health."

Most people think of 'hospital food' as bland, overcooked and unappetizing—not so at Union Hospital. Brenda O'Connor, Union Hospital's RD Supervisor, says, "By committing to the Healthy Food Pledge and changing our food policies, we have switched to a whole foods philosophy. Our goal was to reduce processed foods and increase foods made with wholesome ingredients from scratch. We are able to improve our patients' diets, as well as employee and visitor meals to improve the overall health of the community."



Union Hospital employees greet Mimi, the 'Greens to Go' bus.