

Healthy Futures: food and sustainable development

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Sustainable
Development Commission



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Healthy Futures

Food and sustainable development

'The NHS serves over 300 million meals a year to staff, patients and visitors. The opportunity to impact on health and to give the right messages about sustainable food is enormous.'

Dr Fiona Adshead, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health

How food is served, prepared, purchased and produced can have a huge impact on the health of individuals, communities and the environment. Through nutritional standards, catering and procurement, the NHS has the power to speed patient recovery, build a healthy workforce, strengthen local communities, bring jobs to poor neighbourhoods, cut road traffic and promote sustainable farming.

But, by taking the wrong decisions, the NHS can undermine patient and staff health, waste natural resources and damage the environment. It can also contribute to rising rates of obesity. One in five Britons is obese and that could double in a generation. Diet and obesity are now top priorities in the government's health policy agenda.

Promoting sustainable development through decisions about food will help the NHS to be a good corporate citizen and a health-enhancing organisation with a viable financial future. That's why sustainable development must be taken seriously by all NHS trusts.

Why does food matter?

This publication sets out why food matters and how decisions about food impact on the health and well-being of patients, staff and visitors, as well as on local communities and economies, and the environment. The back page lists useful sources of guidance, support

and relevant initiatives to help you take action on sustainable food. If you are already working on this, we would be very interested in hearing from you and adding your work to our collection of case studies, at www.sd-commission.gov.uk/healthyfutures.

'Having burger chains and junk food vending machines on hospital grounds is not an acceptable way forward. The NHS should be leading by example.'

Jonathon Porritt, Chairman, Sustainable Development Commission

Sustainable food is about

- Promoting good health
- Having access to healthy food and helpful information
- Engaging with the local community
- Supporting your local economy by buying food from as close by as possible
- Eating food in season
- Sustainable farming, involving high environmental standards and reduced energy consumption
- Promoting animal welfare, and valuing nature and biodiversity
- Fair prices, fair trade and ethical employment in the UK and overseas.

Producers, distributors, packing houses and wholesalers in the South West have been encouraged to tender to provide fruit and vegetables for local schools, under the National School Fruit Scheme. As part of their work on promoting sustainable food procurement, the **South West Government Office**, together with the National Farmers Union and South West Food and Drink, arranged two workshops to give local suppliers information on the tendering process.



IMPACTING ON PEOPLE



- Poor diet costs the NHS over £2 billion each year – it contributes to about a quarter of deaths from cancer, and obesity is a major factor for conditions such as hypertension, heart disease and type II diabetes
- Around 800,000 meals a day are served in hospitals

- The NHS loses an estimated 8.2 million working days a year to staff absence
- The choice of retail outlets or vending machines in NHS buildings sends strong subliminal messages about what constitutes healthy eating.

Serving and making available quality, fresh, nutritious and value-for-money food, can **improve patient recovery times**, staff morale and staff health. Buying locally produced, seasonal food where possible, will help educate people about the origins of food, and can have knock-on health benefits for the local community. Labelling food and **providing healthy and sustainable choices** – including organic options, fair trade produce and free water – can lead to reduced food waste and improved satisfaction levels. Because of the huge number of patients, staff and visitors who eat NHS food every day, the NHS is in a unique position to take a proactive approach to **changing people's eating habits** – promoting a diet low in sugar, salt and fat and high in fibre. Investing in encouraging healthy eating will help reduce future health problems, thereby reducing future NHS costs.

The London Hospital Food Project aims to increase the amount of local and/or organic food served in **Ealing General, St George's, the Royal Brompton and Lambeth hospitals**. The project – run by London Food Link in partnership with the Soil Association – will promote health by providing fresher food for patients, staff and visitors and benefit local communities, through supporting food and farming in London and the South East.

ENHANCING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Households receiving benefits consume less fruit and vegetables and more sugar and processed foods than other households
- NHS Trusts offer important local resources to their communities
- Poorer neighbourhoods tend to have less access to healthy food.

Providing people – especially the elderly and socially excluded – with **a place to meet and eat**, and an inviting setting for a nutritious meal, helps strengthen local communities. Working with local small firms and social entrepreneurs to provide food helps the NHS **engage with local people**, and can form part of policies to **improve access to healthy food** for harder to reach population groups. A happier, more cohesive community is a healthier community and people who feel engaged in society need less health care.

The **Pickering Community Orchard** provides fruit for local residents. The orchard was established as part of the **Yorkshire and Humber Regional Public Health Team's 5 A DAY** programme. They worked with four local Primary Care Trusts, and with the Pickering Community to establish the orchard. The project promotes healthier eating, regenerates underused allotment land, encourages exercise and outdoor activity, promotes locally produced food (reducing the need for food transport), and brings the community together – this all impacts positively on the health of local residents.

'This isn't about buying 100% of your food locally, it's about using your common sense and supporting local industries and communities whenever you can.'

Anna Coote, Director of Health Policy, King's Fund

SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

- The NHS spends around £300 million on food each year
- Every £10 spent on local organic food, generates £25 for the local economy. The same £10 spent in a supermarket generates only £14
- The countryside is maintained by farmers.

By spending more of its food budget locally, and opening up its contracting to local suppliers, the NHS could **support local economies**, contribute towards local employment and **play a significant role in regeneration**. In rural areas, supporting local farming will help maintain the landscape, which could promote tourism. A strong local economy makes for a healthier population and in areas of deprivation can **decrease health inequalities**.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

- The food system accounts for over 30% of UK road freight and since 1991 this has increased by about 25%
- The NHS produces 200,000 tonnes of domestic waste a year
- The widespread use of antibiotics in livestock farming is contributing to the growing problem of antibiotic resistant bacteria in humans.

The NHS could **reduce the need for food transport** by buying locally where possible and developing seasonal menus. **Supporting sustainable farming** practices could reduce the use of pesticides, antibiotics and chemicals. Efforts to **minimise food and packaging waste** will reduce landfill volume. Transporting food causes air and noise pollution, increased emissions, the consumption of fossil fuels and leads to traffic accidents – all of which increase demands for health services, either directly or indirectly.

The Rural Regeneration Unit in Cumbria has been working with **West Cumberland Hospital** to promote local food procurement. Dairy products such as milk, eggs, and fresh meat are now all locally produced. Work is ongoing with some of the area's cottage hospitals, to encourage them to buy from the local food co-operative, thus cutting down on food miles.

'Sustainability and improving the health of the nation must be integral to public procurement. Sustainable food procurement offers the opportunity to deliver benefits across the board, from working with UK suppliers to improving environmental and health outcomes.'

Duncan Eaton, Chief Executive, NHS PASA

Who is doing what?

The **Sustainable Development Commission** has more information on each of the case studies described, and other examples of good practice in the *Progress in Practice* section at www.sd-commission.gov.uk/healthyfutures.

The **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs'** *Public Sector Sustainable Food Procurement Initiative* encourages schools, hospitals, prisons and all public sector canteens to work more closely with suppliers to support health and sustainable food. Guidance is at www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement.

NHS Estates and NHS PASA (Purchasing and Supply Agency) have developed a *Food Procurement Action Plan* which includes goals for promoting nutritious food, using assurance schemes, encouraging local and regional suppliers to tender for contracts, increasing the uptake of organic produce, and reducing the adverse environmental impacts of food supply systems. www.pasa.doh.gov.uk/sustainabledevelopment/food

The **Department of Health** is working on a *Food and Health Action Plan*, which aims to:

- increase people's access to healthy food
- improve the availability and awareness of nutritional and dietary information
- increase the amount of fruit and vegetables we eat to at least five a day
- reduce the levels of salt, fat and added sugar and increase fibre in the diet.

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/HealthyLiving

The **Department of Health** will be rolling out the *National School Fruit Scheme*, originally funded by the National Lottery's New Opportunities Fund. All four to six year-olds in state schools in England will receive a free piece of fruit or vegetable each day. www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/FiveADay

John Reid has launched *Choosing health? a consultation on action to improve people's health* which will result in a White Paper. Food is a central part of this consultation. www.dh.gov.uk/Consultations/LiveConsultations

Sustain and **East Anglia Food Link** have published *Good Food on the Public Plate: a manual for sustainability in public sector food and catering*. It looks in detail at EU procurement rules, offers practical guidance for producers, purchasers and caterers, and a comprehensive directory with links to useful organisations. www.sustainweb.org

The Department of Health's **Health Inequalities Unit** supports initiatives to tackle inequalities and ensures that new policies contribute to this agenda.

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/HealthInequalities

The **Welsh Procurement Initiative** includes work on food for the Welsh public sector. www.buy4wales.co.uk

In England, **Regional Public Health Groups** are taking forward work on sustainable development in various ways. For more information about your relevant group, see www.publications.doh.gov.uk/cmo/publichealth/regional.htm.

The Sustainable Development Commission's *Healthy Futures* project, funded by the Department of Health, helps the NHS to maximise its contribution to the health of individuals, communities and the environment. For more information on each of the case studies described above, and to see more examples of good practice, visit the Sustainable Development Commission's website, at www.sd-commission.gov.uk/healthyfutures. If you are involved in sustainable development in the NHS, or want to be, please call 020 7238 4984, or e-mail victoria.read@sd-commission.gsi.gov.uk or susannah.senior@sd-commission.gsi.gov.uk, and we can add your project to our website.

Resources

- *Claiming the Health Dividend: unlocking the benefits of NHS spending*, King's Fund, 2002, www.kingsfund.org.uk
- *Coronary Heart Disease Statistics: economic supplement*, British Heart Foundation, 1998, www.heartstats.org
- *Eating Oil: food supply in a changing climate*, Sustain and Elm Farm Research Centre, 2001
- *Food Procurement for Health and Sustainable Development*, Sustainable Development Commission, 2002, www.sd-commission.gov.uk/healthyfutures
- Health Development Agency, www.hda-online.org.uk
- International Obesity Taskforce, www.iotf.org
- *Local food: benefits and opportunities*, Caroline Lucas & Andy Jones, 2003
- *National Diet and Nutrition Survey*, The Food Standards Agency, 2002-04
- *Plugging the Leaks*, New Economics Foundation, 2001
- Scotland's *healthyliving* campaign, www.healthyliving.gov.uk
- *Securing Good Health for the Whole Population*, Derek Wanless, 2004, www.hm-treasury.gov.uk
- *Some Benefits and Drawbacks of Local Food Systems*, Jules Pretty, 2001, www.villagekey.com/localfood.html
- *Storing up Problems: the medical case for a slimmer nation*, Faculty of Public Health, Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health, 2004, www.fphm.org.uk
- *Tackling Health Inequalities: a programme for action*, Department of Health, 2003
- *Tackling Obesity in England*, National Audit Office, 2001, www.nao.gov.uk
- *The Burden of Food-Related Ill Health in the UK*, Mike Raynor, University of Oxford, 2002