



Fletcher Allen Health Care Sets Industry Standard With Award-Winning Sustainable Food Program

AT A GLANCE

NAME

Fletcher Allen Health Care

LOCATION

Burlington, Vt

SIZE

With more than 560 licensed beds, Fletcher Allen Health Care, in alliance with the University of Vermont’s College of Medicine and College of Nursing and Health Sciences, serves as Vermont’s academic medical center.

MEMBER SINCE

2000

MEMBERSHIP

Principal UHC member

HIGHLIGHTS

- Fletcher Allen Health Care signed the “Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge” in 2006 and is currently setting a national standard with its award-winning sustainable food program.
- The health system maintains 3 gardens, manages a sustainable fish and seafood program, and purchases over 90% of its beef from the state of Vermont. In addition, more than 40% of its food and beverage purchases are healthy and sustainable.
- Fletcher Allen used a grant provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to form a team of regional health care leaders who meet regularly to share ideas and best practices related to sustainable food programs.

Situation

Fletcher Allen Health Care is striving to be the country’s greenest health care organization by continually looking for new ways to build on its lasting commitment to environmental responsibility. A huge step toward achieving this goal includes managing a sustainable food program that sets the health care industry standard.

Currently, more than \$1.5 million of Fletcher Allen’s \$3.5 million total annual food budget is spent on products made in Vermont or within a day’s drive; more than 40% of its food and beverage purchases are sustainable; and more than 90% of the beef served in its cafeterias comes from Vermont and is free of hormones and nontherapeutic antibiotics.

Taking “Sustainable” to Heart—and to the Community

The word *sustainable* has a very personal meaning for Diane Imrie, director of nutrition services—one that is at the heart of what health care is all about. “To me, *sustainable* means doing no harm throughout the nutrition process,” she says. “Sustainable food does no harm to the people who grow it or to the people who eat it. The packaging has a minimal impact on the environment as well.”

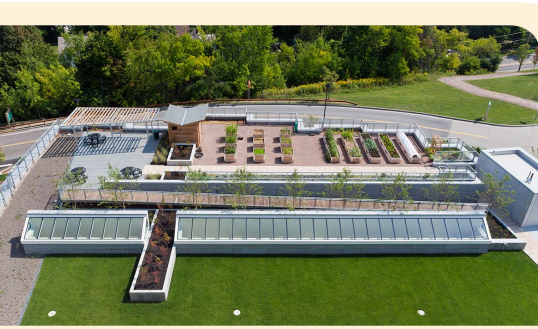
Imrie explains how relying on locally grown food ensures that area farmers are more financially secure, thereby ideally enabling them to sustain better health. “The same is true for the surrounding community. If we’re able to put more financing into our community, it makes it a more vibrant place to live and work,” she says.

Fletcher Allen’s official sustainable food program began in 2006; the organization was one of the first to sign the “Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge.” Developed by Health Care Without Harm—an international coalition of more than 430 organizations working to transform the health care industry—the pledge is a commitment to improve the health of patients, customers, and the community by providing fresh, local, and sustainable food. That commitment led Fletcher Allen to implement a variety of sustainable food program initiatives. Fried foods are no longer offered, and patients and visitors now enjoy nutritionally dense, minimally processed foods, including a variety of locally produced fruits, vegetables, and meats. Some of the produce is grown on site by the Nutrition Services department.

Fletcher Allen maintains 3 gardens, including a healing garden—visible from the Cancer Center—that provides fresh herbs and vegetables, as well as a rooftop



garden situated on the new radiation oncology facility that reduces heat buildup and storm water runoff. A third garden at the Fanny Allen Campus includes beehives, from which Fletcher Allen harvested more than 70 pounds of honey (the goal is 300) in 2011.



Fletcher Allen also has a continually evolving sustainable fish and seafood program that the Nutrition Services management team began several years ago

after analyzing the seafood items being purchased, their origin, and any contaminants (such as mercury) they contained. Imrie (in partnership with Health Care Without Harm) even took a group of about 30 Fletcher Allen representatives to the docks to get firsthand information from fishermen.

“At this point, all of our fish is North American, and the majority is wild and seasonal,” says Imrie. “Our menus now identify the type of fish, where it was caught, and sometimes even the boat name and the captain. It’s a fun thing for everyone.”

Sharing Ideas and Best Practices

Imrie used a \$143,000 grant provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2009 to form a team of regional health care leaders who educate each other on food system best practices. The Healthy Food in Health Care Leadership Team meets 4 to 5 times a year at a variety of venues. Past meeting locations have included farms, a fishing boat, a yogurt creamery, and a beef farm.

Fletcher Allen hosts culinary training events as well. “Our attendees include everyone from chefs to physicians, so it’s an interesting mix,” says Imrie. “Last year’s focus was on seasonal vegetables and grains, and this year we’re focusing on integrating seasonal foods into our salad bar and sandwich selections. In the fall, we’ll probably have a seafood class. We’re there to learn what others are purchasing and how they are saving money and to become more educated about the food system in general.”

“Sustainable food does no harm to the people who grow it or to the people who eat it. The packaging has a minimal impact on the environment as well.”

Diane Imrie, Director of Nutrition Services
Fletcher Allen Health Care

In addition, Imrie used a portion of the grant to develop the [Center for Nutrition and Healthy Food Systems](#), an online community and information-sharing Web site that includes more than 150 members, such as physicians and dietitians. “We share information such as upcoming events, articles that might be helpful, and press coverage that organizations have received,” says Imrie.

Imrie says that exploring all avenues and taking advantage of every opportunity are crucial for success. “For example, we were looking for yogurt that is rBST-free (rBST is a dairy growth hormone), and I communicated to our UHC representative that this was something very important to us,” says Imrie. “When the next set of UHC/Novation contracts came out, I was pleased to see a new offering that met that requirement. It’s important to clearly communicate our product needs because if we don’t, the market won’t change.”

“If we’re able to put more financing into our community, it makes it a more vibrant place to live and work.”

Diane Imrie, Director of Nutrition Services
Fletcher Allen Health Care

Achieving Resounding Success From All Perspectives

Although measuring success with such a program is not easy, it is clear that Fletcher Allen has already proven it can achieve—and sustain—real change that positively affects both patients and the environment. Fletcher Allen’s sustainable food program was recently recognized by Health Care Without Harm with first-place awards in 2 categories: sustainable food procurement and public policy/advocacy, both of which highlight Fletcher Allen’s significant achievements and leadership in improving food service in health care.

The health system is currently below the 50th percentile nationally for food costs and decreased its solid waste from 1,507 tons in 2007 to 1,292 tons in 2011. Recycling has increased dramatically; 1,050 tons were recycled in 2011 compared with 438 tons in 2007, and infectious waste was reduced by 4.96 tons in 2011.

Imrie’s personal definition of success is a bit simpler. “It’s just the right thing to do,” she says. “And best of all, it feels good.”

To learn more about Fletcher Allen’s environmental leadership efforts, visit www.fletcherallen.org/about/environmental_leadership. For more information about UHC member sustainability programs, contact Doug Smith, PharmD, senior director, Capital Resource Program and Supply Chain Services, at (312) 775-4331 or smith@uhc.edu