



FOOD SUSTAINABILITY IN HEALTHCARE

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In the healthcare industry, embracing sustainable food practices is not merely an environmental or ethical concern; it is contributing to the overall health outcomes of residents and improving operational efficiencies in food services.

What is Food Sustainability

As the global population continues to grow and the effects of climate change become more pronounced, the need for sustainable food practices has become more important.

Sustainable food practices are defined as a food system that ensures food security and nutrition for all, while safeguarding the economic, social, and environmental foundations essential to sustain food security and nutrition for generations to come.¹ Sustainable food systems are essential to provide nourishment for everyone, both now and in the future.² This includes ensuring access to sufficient, nutritious, affordable, delicious, diverse, and culturally significant food.² Furthermore, such systems support physical and mental well-being while respecting the integrity of ecological and social systems.²



Food Sustainability in Healthcare & its Benefits

Incorporating sustainable food practices within healthcare can significantly impact both the health of the community and the environment.

Health Benefits

Studies indicate that sustainable food practices can improve resident or patient recovery by decreasing the demand for healthcare services² as these practices typically includes plant-based diets and nutrient-dense whole foods with reduced meat consumption. Ultimately, this eating pattern supports chronic disease management which may contribute to reducing long-term healthcare expenses.²

Environmental Benefits

By adopting sustainable practices in sourcing, preparing, and disposing of food, we can also significantly reduce our environmental impact. For example, a global shift to a plant-based diet could lead to a significant 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.³

Operational Benefits

Integrating sustainable practices into your food service operations can offer a variety of benefits, including reducing waste, managing costs, and improving resident satisfaction.

How to Implement Sustainable Food Practices in Healthcare:

While adopting sustainable food practices in healthcare comes with change, it also offers opportunities for innovation and leadership.

In healthcare, sustainable food practices may include:

1 Sourcing Food Responsibly

Prioritizing responsible food sourcing reduces emissions and helps manage rising food costs.⁴ Healthcare organizations can also consider sourcing food products from vendors located in nearby provinces or states, offering eco-certified items, and/or providing products that ensure animal welfare.⁵ Additionally, buying locally sourced foods can support local economies and reduce carbon footprint.⁴ It also improves the traceability of food in the food system.⁴ This not only supports sustainability but also ensures that patients enjoy high-quality, nutrient-dense meals.

Establishing an on-site garden is another creative way to promote sustainable food practices. It not only enhances biodiversity but also offers a chance for residents and staff to work together, raising awareness about sustainable food practices and healthy eating.² Furthermore, it contributes therapeutic health benefits by supporting mental health and well-being.²

2 Creating a Sustainable Menu

Healthcare organizations can champion sustainability by adopting menus that include foods that have a lower environmental impact, such as plant-based foods.⁵

A sustainable menu also focuses on:

- Food quality (taste, fresh, seasonal foods)⁵
- Social values (animal welfare, equality & justice)⁵
- Environment (climate change, land use, biodiversity)⁵
- Health (safety, nutrition, availability)⁵
- Economy (affordability, food security, jobs & working conditions)⁵
- Governance (i.e. transparency, ethical values, and international aid & development)⁵

Other ideas for sustainable menus:

- Using items that are in season & choosing vendors that support local foods
- Designing a menu that can repurpose leftover foods
- Reducing packaging by purchasing in bulk or purchasing products with more sustainable packaging
- Adding more beans and legumes to your menu, as they are among the most sustainable and budget-friendly sources of protein available. Here are a few ideas:
 - *Combine plant-based and animal proteins in your favorite recipes, such as beef and lentil chili*
 - *Elevate your meals with plant-based toppings or garnishes, like adding roasted chickpeas to a salad*
 - *Get inventive by including plant-based ingredients in unexpected ways, such as a black bean brownie*
 - *Maintain your favorite flavors while adding a plant-based twist, such as vegetarian tacos with beans, lettuce, tomato and avocado⁶*
 - *Offer canned baked beans in tomato sauce with toast for breakfast, lunch, or dinner or add a can of rinsed beans to homemade soups and stews⁶*

3 Managing Food Waste

Implementing waste reduction strategies is crucial for fostering sustainability. Studies indicate that around 10-15% of food goes to waste in hospitals.³ Factors contributing to food waste encompass several key issues related to menu planning, food quality, mealtime practices, inaccurate forecasting food production.

Some tips to reduce food waste:

- Standardizing portion sizes or serving utensils
- Tailor nutrition care based on resident needs & preferences
- Implement a waste analysis management policy and practices (ex: plate waste audits)

Some tips to manage food waste include:

- Composting food scraps (using on-site composting and/or off-site composting)³
- Safely donating food scraps³
- Recycling packaging materials³
- Implementing better inventory management and portion control strategies³

It's important to tailor the menu to better fit residents' preferences, recognize patterns and trends from waste audits, and modify production numbers accordingly. Utilizing technology like Sysco's Synergy Tech Suite can assist staff in easily adapting to operational changes by adjusting production figures and generating reports to monitor leftover food at the point of service. Furthermore, increasing awareness among staff and patients about waste reduction practices can enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives.

4 Facilities & Equipment

Investing in energy-efficient kitchen appliances and water-saving technologies can reduce the environmental impact of food preparation.⁵ Facilities can also explore sustainable cooking methods that require less energy and produce less waste.⁵ Regular maintenance of equipment and efficient kitchen practices help maximize these benefits.⁵



Sysco and Food Sustainability

Sustainability is an integral part of Sysco's Recipe for Growth business strategy. Achieving our business goals are aligned with our sustainability goals.

As the global leader in foodservice, Sysco is committed to growing responsibly and purposefully while leading our industry to more sustainable future.

Our commitment to serving the healthcare market means we have top-quality, sustainably sourced products designed to meet the needs of the healthcare market segment.

Sustainability is essential to our business. We rely on the health of our planet and the resilience of our food systems to feed the world. At Sysco, we supply products responsibly by improving animal welfare in the foodservice industry; minimizing negative environmental, social, or ethical impacts when sourcing products; and ensure that human rights are respected in our operations, as well as the global supply chain.

Sysco's Sustainability Goals focus on three key areas:

People, Products, Planet.

People



Sysco believe in caring for people by investing in our colleagues' growth and well-being; doing good and giving back to our communities; creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive culture; and ensuring everyone feels welcome at Sysco's table.

Products

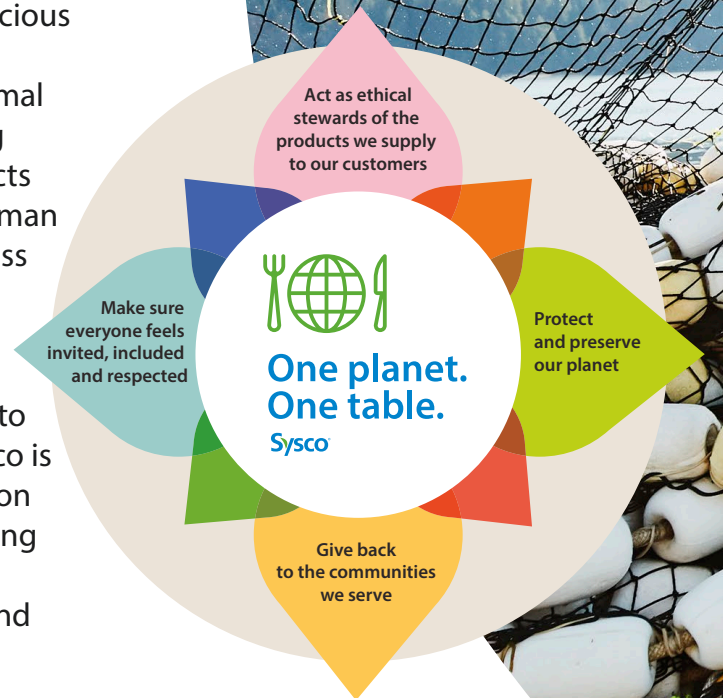


Sysco is committed to providing access to more responsibly sourced and environmentally conscious products through our One Planet. One Table assortment. Sysco is focused on improving animal welfare in the foodservice industry; minimizing negative environmental, social or ethical impacts when sourcing products; and ensuring that human rights are respected in our operations and across our supply chain.

Planet



Protecting the health of our planet is essential to Sysco's business and fulfilling our Purpose. Sysco is driving collaboration to accelerate climate action in our industry. By reducing emissions, advancing sustainable agriculture practices, and diverting waste from landfills, it will protect our planet and preserve its resources for future generations.





References:

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