

# KAISER PERMANENTE

## PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FARMING AND FOOD CHOICES

Locally grown, sustainably farmed and produced food choices are good for the environment and for people's health. Kaiser Permanente offers sustainable food choices on patient menus and in cafeterias and vending machines at many of our hospitals and medical centers. We support the development of local and sustainable food systems as a public health tool.

At Kaiser Permanente, we recognize that sustainable food promotes good health by reducing the prevalence of synthetic pesticides and chemicals in the food stream and the environment and by fostering the availability and consumption of locally grown, fresh food choices. We advance sustainable farming and food choices through these efforts:

- Increasing sourcing of locally grown, sustainably farmed and produced food in Kaiser Permanente hospitals, cafeterias and vending machines
- Sponsoring farmers markets as a means to promote access to fresh, local produce and support investments in local economies
- Increasing awareness about toxins in the food chain
- Collaborating with other major health care systems and non-governmental organizations to accelerate improvements in sustainable food procurement throughout the health care sector

### Sourcing Locally Grown, Sustainable Food

As part of their mission of healing, health care providers have a responsibility to their patients, employees, visitors and the communities they serve to offer food options in their patient meals, cafeterias and vending machines that support overall health. At Kaiser Permanente, we recognize that the way food is produced, processed, packaged, distributed, consumed and disposed of in the United States has significant impacts on human health and the environment. We are working to shift the food system in a more sustainable direction by increasing our sourcing of locally grown and sustainably produced food options.

Kaiser Permanente devotes nearly 20 percent of our overall food spending to sustainable food across the organization, a substantial percentage for a hospital system of our size.

Kaiser Permanente has developed specific sustainability criteria within each food category which align with the *Green Guide for Healthcare Food Service Credits*, a benchmarking tool for sustainable food in health care. Some examples include: food produced within 250 miles of the Kaiser Permanente facility; produced without pesticides, antibiotics or added hormones; and certified as sustainably produced by a third-party eco-label such as Certified Organic or Animal Welfare Approved. Food products must meet at least one of these criteria to be considered sustainable, though preference is given to products that meet multiple criteria for sustainability.

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### Sponsoring Farmers Markets

Kaiser Permanente has been a pioneer among health care systems in supporting the flourishing of farmers markets at our hospitals and medical centers and in the surrounding community. In 2003, Kaiser Permanente physician, Preston Maring, MD started one of the first hospital-based farmers markets at the Oakland Medical Center. Since then, the number has grown to more than 50 farmers markets and farm stands at Kaiser Permanente facilities across five states and the movement has spread to other health systems across the country.

A survey published in the online, peer-reviewed *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, found that 74 percent of patrons surveyed at Kaiser Permanente markets consume more fruits and vegetables as a result of shopping at the market, and 71 percent indicated that they were eating a greater variety of fruits and vegetables.

### Increasing Awareness about Toxins in the Food Chain

Kaiser Permanente recognizes the importance of engaging in public policy work in order to advance an economy where chemicals used in commerce are not harmful to humans or the environment. Kaiser Permanente's environmental stewardship officer, Kathy Gerwig, has testified before U.S. Senate and House committees and in hearings held in California about Kaiser Permanente's efforts to curb the use of potentially toxic chemicals.

### Collaborating for Sustainable Food

Solving the nation's food system challenges requires a multitude of partners. Kaiser Permanente has joined with several other health care systems and representatives from area food distributing companies in an effort to better create a market for sustainable food. The initiative, termed the Regional Produce Sourcing Project, is funded through Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit and is being led by the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers.

Kaiser Permanente is a strategic partner and member of Practice Greenhealth and Health Care Without Harm and a founding member of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative, all working collectively to accelerate improvements and advance the mission and goals of greening the health care sector through sharing best practices.

The following examples highlight some of Kaiser Permanente's achievements in promoting sustainable food:

- About 590 tons of the fruits and vegetables (nearly 50 percent of fresh produce that Kaiser Permanente purchases annually) served on patient menus are sustainably produced and/or locally grown.
- Approximately 6 percent of fruits and vegetables purchased are certified organic, (compared to 3 percent overall consumption of organic in the U.S.).
- Kaiser Permanente hosts more than 50 farmers markets at hospitals and medical centers across the country and support community-based farmers markets as part of Healthy Eating, Active Living programs.
- Coffee and tea in Kaiser Permanente vending machines is fair trade.
- All milk and yogurt that is served with patient meals and in cafeterias and vending machines is free of the growth hormone rBGH.
- Many California patient menus offer cage-free and Certified Humane Raised and Handled® eggs as well as beef and chicken from animals raised without antibiotics or added hormones.
- Kaiser Permanente consistently funds community organizations and public-private partnerships working to create greater access to fresh, local produce in underserved communities.
- Kaiser Permanente uses a Sustainable Food Scorecard to rate potential food/service vendors during bidding.