



GUIDE TO
SUSTAINABLE
MENUS



A guide to sustainable menus

A step by step approach
to sustainability



NOURISH
The future of food
in health care.

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Introduction: chapter 1

This is where it all begins

Executive summary



What – and who – is this guide for?

The menus served by healthcare facilities have an impact¹ not only on the health, recovery and well-being of patients, residents and staff, but on the environment and local economies as well. Each year, the Canadian healthcare system spends some \$4 billion² on food—an amount that could have a major effect on the sustainability of food production, processing, distribution and consumption if new criteria for creating menus are used. In addition to the sustainability impacts of food purchasing, there are also major sustainability impacts of food waste from healthcare facilities, which is estimated at up to 50%³.

Some sustainable development criteria are now included in provincial and national government policies, although decision-makers in healthcare facilities often lack the knowledge⁴ necessary to be able to take these criteria into account. The following policies are among those enabling a new direction to be taken⁵:

- Health policies related to food in healthcare settings including menu setting, standards for food services, assessment of patient food experience, serving of Indigenous foods⁶, and group purchasing arrangements.
- Agriculture policies defining and supporting local food promotion and procurement.
- Procurement policies supporting values-based procurement to generate triple bottom-line impacts (social, economic, environmental).

1 Ducak, K. and Keller, H. H. (2011). Menu planning in long-term care: toward resident-centred menus. *Can J Diet Pract Res*, 72(2), 83. doi: 10.3148/72.2.2011.83

2 V-Wilson, G. and Dover, J. (2016) Canadian Institutional Foodservice Market Report, fsSTRATEGY Inc., <http://www.restaurantscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/2016-Canadian-Institutional-Foodservice-Market-Report-Abridged-Sample.pdf>, Retrieved Fall 2017

3 Gooch and Felfel (2014) \$27 Billion Revisited: The Cost of Canada's Annual Food Waste, Value Chain Management International

4 Wilson, E. D. and Garcia, A. C. (2011). Environmentally friendly health care food services: a survey of beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 72(3), 117-122. doi: 10.3148/72.3.2011.117

5 Reynolds, J. Nourishing the Future of Food in Healthcare: a pan-Canadian policy scan (2019). Food Secure Canada/Nourish/McConnell Foundation.

6 Also known as Country or Traditional foods depending on the context

This document provides those responsible for setting menus in Canadian healthcare facilities with a step-by-step guide to creating sustainable menus. As well as facilitating menu creation, it also provides the tools necessary to bring about a significant reduction of the environmental impact of the food served, while contributing to social and economic development. A food service manager may know little about sustainable development, have little time to bring about changes, or be in the process of completely revamping their menu offering. This guide offers ways to make menus increasingly sustainable—one step at a time, one choice at a time.

2

What is a sustainable menu?

A sustainable menu is one that provides the clientele with sustainable diets. The sustainable choices for menu creation put forward in this guide are based on known, validated concepts, and references are provided for recommendations wherever possible. The advice given is largely founded on a multi-criteria approach to sustainable diets, developed by Mason and Lang (based on the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's definition of food sustainability)⁷. Each criterion represents an aspect of sustainable development with which a product can be identified. While it is virtually impossible for all criteria to be present in any one foodstuff, **even a single criterion brings a degree of sustainability**. The more criteria a product meets, the closer it comes to an environmental, social and economic sustainability ideal. The following sustainable menu practices (see the appendix for a printable version) aim to present these recommendations to menu managers in a clearly understandable framework. It is worth noting that many of these recommendations are consistent with the new Canada's Food Guide⁸, released in early 2019, which recognizes that "Food choices can have an impact on

7 Mason, P., Lang, T. (2017). Sustainable diets: how ecological nutrition can transform consumption and the food system. London and New York: Routledge.

8 Government of Canada (2019). Canada's food guide. <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>. Retrieved Winter 2019.

the environment". Details to apply each of these menu practices will be found in each chapter of this guide.

There are international efforts moving in a similar direction, including the EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, and Health.⁹ In recognizing that world population is expected to reach 10 billion by 2050, this report urgently recommends a "planetary health diet": a diet that every person around the world should consume "to highlight the critical role that diets play in linking human health and environmental sustainability." The principles that follow, adapted from Mason and Lang, are used to frame the recommendations of this Guide.

1 QUALITY

- Serve fresh, appetizing food.
- Use recipes that have been approved by a tasting panel made up of patients, residents, staff members, etc. that represents the eaters in the facility.
- Serve regional fruits and vegetables when they are in season.
- Serve food containing as few additives and preservatives as possible.

2 SOCIAL VALUES

- Offer recipes of varied cultural origins representing the population you serve.
- Undertake to learn the cultural importance of foods eaten by Indigenous groups in your community.
- Favour home-made/traditional recipes for enriched products.
- Commit to promoting your sustainable menu for educational purposes.
- Offer fair trade products when possible.

What is a sustainable menu



Adapted from and with the permission of
Mason & Lang, 2017
Sustainable Diets
Routledge, Chapter 9

QUALITY

- Taste
- Seasonality
- Cosmetic appeal
- Fresh (where appropriate)
- Authenticity

SOCIAL VALUES

- Pleasure
- Identity
- Animal welfare
- Equality & justice
- Trust
- Choice
- Skills (citizenship)

ENVIRONMENT

- Climate change
- Energy use
- Water
- Land use
- Soil
- Biodiversity
- Waste reduction

HEALTH

- Safety
- Nutrition
- Equal access
- Availability
- Social status/affordability
- Information & education

ECONOMY

- Food security & food resilience
- Affordability (price)
- Efficiency
- True competition & fair returns
- Jobs & decent working conditions
- Fully internalised costs

GOVERNANCE

- Science & technology evidence base
- Transparency
- Democratic accountability
- Ethical values (fairness)
- International aid & development

3 ENVIRONMENT

- Serve shellfish and fish from sustainable fishing or aquaculture.
- Reduce the use of processed foods.
- Serve certified or verifiable sustainably produced foods.
- Increase variety in order to contribute to biodiversity.
- Reduce the amount of red meats used and increase the use of proteins with a lesser environmental impact (legumes, organic and fermented soybeans, insects, chicken, nuts, seeds, whole grain).
- Cut waste by using surplus and adjusting serving sizes.
- Reduce the use of products supplied in single use or non-recyclable packaging.
- Offer water as the sole basic beverage.
- Compost and recycle waste.

4 HEALTH

- Define and adjust to the specific needs of each type of clientele served.
- Choose protein foods that come from plants more often (beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, tofu, etc.).
- Limit highly processed foods.
- Serve animal products from animals raised without routine or non-therapeutic antibiotics.

5 ECONOMY

- Manage an efficient (cost-effective) food service that contributes to the local economy.

6 GOVERNANCE

- Engage with all stakeholders and recognize their role (e.g. users, customers, suppliers, purchasing group).
- Make evidence-based decisions.

3

How to use the guide

As we seek to make our working methods and habits more sustainable, every little change can have a significant impact. This guide provides many tips to help organizations create sustainable menus. However, because some food items may not be easily sourced and because change takes time, putting all of the guide's suggestions into place at once may not be possible. Over time, as food service managers make increasing demands of their suppliers and distributors, the supply should improve and broaden, facilitating the transition to sustainability. **The important point is to begin introducing one change at a time, assessing it, adjusting it, promoting it, and then moving onto the next change.** The various steps should be put into practice at a pace that suits everyone's capacities. The following points indicate which sections of the guide cover which changes.

It is important to bear in mind that food sustainability research continues to evolve and change. Please be conscious that although this guide reflects recent literature, some sections may contain more dated sources than others.

DEFINING A NEW OFFERING FOR A NEW CLIENTELE

Chapter 2 sets out the major stages involved in creating sustainable menus, starting with an analysis of the clientele for the purpose of defining the type of food that best meets their needs. At each stage, choices can be adjusted in accordance with real needs and the food service department's capacities. This is vital to the creation of a sustainable offering (healthy, safe, appropriate, in sufficient quantity).

IMPROVING FOOD SERVICE FUNCTIONING AND EQUIPMENT

Chapter 3 presents some points to consider for the sustainability of a food service department when the time comes to:

- Build a new food service or reconfigure an existing one
- Define or rethink the production and distribution mode for the meal service.

- Repair or recondition old equipment or purchase new energy-efficient equipment.
- Introduce more environmentally responsible methods in the maintenance and the usage of equipment.

PUTTING SUSTAINABLE FOODS ON THE MENU

When making or reviewing menu choices, information on each major food group can be found in the corresponding chapter. Chapters are designed to be read separately, outlining all the considerations involved in choosing the most sustainable product. Chapters are ordered in the sequence in which a menu is generally created:

- Chapter 4. Choose your sustainable Proteins
- Chapter 5. Choose your sustainable Vegetables
- Chapter 6. Choose your sustainable Starches
- Chapter 7. Choose your sustainable Soups
- Chapter 8. Choose your sustainable Desserts
- Chapter 9. Choose your sustainable Condiments and other ingredients
- Chapter 10. Choose your sustainable Beverages and snacks
- Chapter 11. Choose your sustainable Supplement

Each chapter is written in the same way, containing the following sections:

Section 1 explains the importance of sustainable choices for the food type.

Section 2 is a table to be completed in accordance with the features of the healthcare facility and the types of clientele served.

Section 3 is the body of the chapter and contains all possible choices presented in approximate order *from most to least sustainable*. Consequently, foods near the top of the table's left-hand column should generally be used in preference to those at the bottom. Ideally, as a first step the menu should be analyzed to identify items that should be changed and demonstrate the impact of more sustainable products (before/after snapshots that can be communicated).

For each type of food suggested in the left-hand column of the table there are “Tips for choosing” and “Tips for inclusion in recipes.” The “Tips for choosing” provide information on the food’s characteristics needed to make a more sustainable choice. The number of characteristics can vary between two and ten. The chosen item does not have to have them all. If a food has only one more sustainable characteristic than the item it replaces, your menu will already be more sustainable.

Section 4 helps you plan your menu more effectively to prevent waste, and provide guidance on repurposing ingredients when surpluses do occur—wastage of food is a common challenge for any food service department.

Section 5 references foods that were traditionally eaten in this country before the arrival of European colonizers and the advent of industrial agriculture and livestock rearing practices. In those days, local foods were eaten seasonally and with a view to maintaining biodiversity, completely in line with the principles of sustainable diets. Learning more about traditional eating habits generally, including the eating traditions of Indigenous Peoples of different locations in Canada, brings an important cultural and historical dimension to our current sustainability efforts.



Challenges and opportunities to adopting sustainable menus¹⁰

There are many real or perceived barriers to the implementation of sustainable menus. The following paragraphs present tips to help you and your colleagues understand and communicate the value of a sustainable menu.

Cost

Many managers assume that putting sustainable foods on menus involves increased costs. This is true in that local, organic and fair-

¹⁰ Dagenais B. & Mercille G. (2019). Discussion on the barriers to adopting sustainable menu practices. Nourish Healthcare’s Innovators Retreat. Montreal, Quebec. January 17, 2019.

trade products may be more expensive and challenging to source initially from existing suppliers. However, many sustainable choices are not in fact more expensive and can even be less expensive. Also, changes can be made to save in one area of the menu in order to spend more in another. Expensive products or processes can be targeted for cost reduction, including reducing waste, giving greater room to manoeuvre in the choice of more sustainable foods. Consequently, a step-by-step action plan must be drawn up, making one small change at a time, as our capacities allow.

A close look at the tables of foods in chapters 4 to 11 will reveal measures that can be introduced without difficulty: those that favour the more sustainable foods listed at the top of the left-hand column will not have too great an impact on the budget. Sustainable proteins (e.g. organic and fermented soya, legumes and potentially insects) are often very affordable. Using the “Tips for inclusion in recipes,” plant-based proteins can be used to reduce the quantity of meat per serving without compromising palatability. This can bring down the per-serving cost of meat dishes, and the resultant savings can be used to purchase ingredients that are slightly more expensive but considerably more sustainable.

The section on controlling waste in chapters 4 to 11 will also enable you to make savings. Menus can be designed to facilitate the use of surpluses or the reuse of leftovers. Another key part of creating a more sustainable menu is aiming to increase the satisfaction of those who eat the food (gathering and integrating feedback), thus increasing consumption and minimizing plate waste.

Shortage of resources

A change of any kind requires an investment of time, and some changes also involve a reorganization of tasks in the department (placing individual portions in reusable dishes, making products in-house, using untrimmed fresh vegetables, etc.).

This guide will also help you find changes that can require little time to set up. You can start with changes that fit into your normal routine (replacing an ingredient or changing a recipe when updating the menus, for example). The guide makes information easy to find and gives tips for including more sustainable practices.

If an opportunity arises to introduce bigger changes (department reorganization, renovation, etc.), then it makes sense to formulate a long-term action plan based around the changes. What’s more, involving employees by consulting and informing them of the

positive impacts of a change can motivate them to implement it despite a high workload. Also, getting other departments involved in a sustainable development committee can push the entire organization into setting up a sustainable-development culture that may help provide the resources needed.

Negative perception by the clientele

Eating habits are difficult to change, especially if users are fearful of certain foods due to a lack of knowledge. For example, changes towards sustainable menus may be well accepted by young, healthy adults but may be more challenging for the sick and elderly. It is a good idea to introduce small changes that will have less of an impact to begin with and can be promoted as an initial success to build on. Educating clientele through proper communication of changes can help make improvements acceptable to them. One change that is always seen positively is the purchase of regional and seasonal produce. Beginning with items that are appreciated by the clientele (desserts, beverages, fruits, vegetables) can lay the foundations for progress towards a more sustainable menu.

Discussions of sustainable food often involve talk of reducing the consumption of meat and increasing plant proteins as recommended by Canada's Food Guide. There are two things to keep in mind when marketing vegetarian options¹¹. First, do not focus on advertising that you are taking away all meat, because the vast majority of people like the taste of meat and don't want to be reminded that what they are about to eat contains none. Second, if a dish does not contain meat, make sure it sounds delicious.

Older members of the clientele will also be more satisfied when they are given familiar, comforting meals. This means it may be better to introduce changes such as increases in plant protein first to younger generations who will find them easy to accept. Otherwise, make use of the "Tips for inclusion in recipes" in chapters 4 to 11 for a gentler introduction (for example, a mixture of vegetable proteins and meat).

Lack of control

Many food service departments must contend with procurement or service contracts that restrict their ability to make more sustainable choices. Chapters 4 to 11 provide a host of suggestions for changes made within the constraints imposed by existing contracts. The purpose of the guide is to make it possible to introduce

more sustainable menus without necessarily having to search for products or require new clauses in contracts. The information is available and can be shared with suppliers so that they can adapt to new demands gradually.

Organizational support

Food service managers (FSM) recognize the importance of having motivators and agents of change from inside and outside the organization. Without proper support, it is often difficult to know where to begin and how to take steps towards a sustainable menu. There are approaches you can take within your organization to facilitate the adoption of a sustainable-development culture by broadening the understanding of sustainable food.

- Ask to sit on the sustainable-development committee of your own organization. If there is no such committee, discuss the possibility of setting one up with the director and seek allies in the finance and procurement departments.
- Start with small changes that do not create major upheavals.
- Educate decision-makers on the benefits of sustainable menus and the changes they entail.
- Involve all actors in the food chain:
 - Increase the awareness of your purchasing groups by asking questions about the criteria for more sustainable food.
 - Ask manufacturers whether they can supply items that meet your nutritional guidelines and contain desired ingredients.
- Add an item on sustainable foods to the agenda of every meeting at which food service is discussed: with managers, coordinators, the menu committee, dietitians, etc.
- Connect with other food service managers in your province and across Canada (via online forums or peer learning circles) to facilitate searching for sustainable products, local companies offering sustainable products, etc.

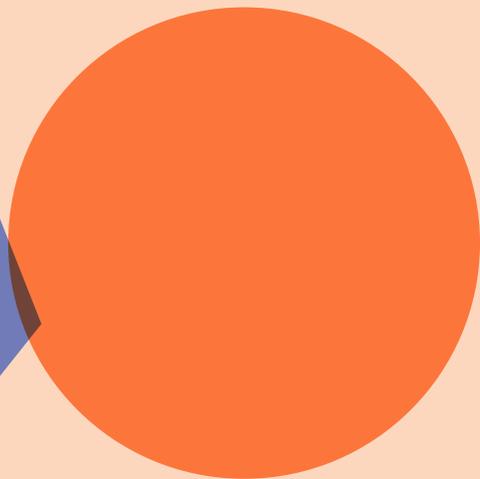
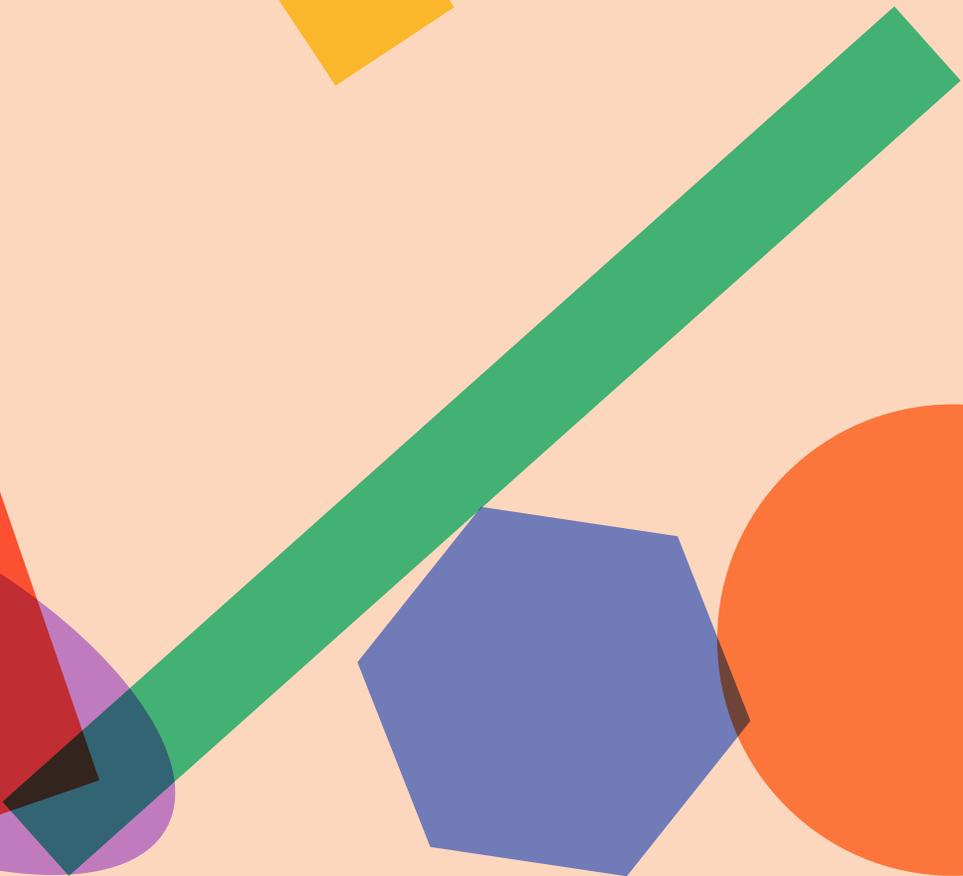
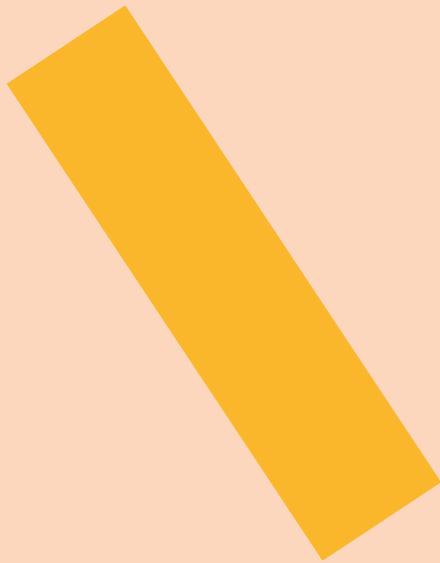
- Inform, train, consult and involve employees of the food service department—and other departments that have anything to do with food for users—in order to find more sustainable solutions and working methods.
- Highlight the efforts of food service employees who contribute to making the service more sustainable.
- Promote sustainable initiatives that increase user satisfaction.



Information you will not find in the guide

- Nutritional analyses for making choices based on treatment plans. The choice of plans and guidelines is specific to each facility and must be done ahead of menu creation in collaboration with clinical nutritionists. The choices offered should therefore suit the majority of the clientele in your facility—including those with specific treatment plans.
- Sustainable procurement procedures. The guide provides information needed to make more sustainable choices from among foods generally used by food service departments, as opposed to choices that require suppliers to make significant changes. Many criteria cannot currently be met because calls for tenders do not generally include sustainable-development criteria. Here are some reference documents on the subject:
 - MSSS: *Cadre de référence en approvisionnement responsable* (to be published in 2019)
 - Foodsecurecanada.org: Purchasing Power: 10 Lessons on Getting More Local, Sustainable, and Delicious Food in Schools, Hospitals and Campuses. March 2017

- Greenhealthcare.ca: Green Hospital Procurement Policy and Procedure Manual, and Implementation Guide. January 2016
- Health Care without Harm: Leading the transition to healthy and sustainable food in healthcare. August 2018
- Nourishhealthcare.ca: see documents in Reference section under [Sustainable Procurement](#).
- Ways to introduce Indigenous foods. National and/or provincial legislation currently prevents the inclusion on healthcare menus of foods without food hygiene and safety certification, making procurement of wild game and fish difficult. However, serving traditional Indigenous foods can show respect for traditional cultures and their deep connection to the land, in addition to being a comfort food for vulnerable Indigenous patients. This guide provides a description of such foods in each chapter so that you can include them when possible (e.g. wild blueberries). For more information:
 - Nourishhealthcare.ca: see Resources section under [Traditional Foods](#)



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