



PRESS RELEASE

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Local food supply means fresher food in London hospitals

January 4th saw the launch of a new two year London Food Link project, in partnership with the Soil Association to increase local and/or organic food into London NHS hospitals.

The project aims to increase the amount of local and/or organic food served in four London NHS hospitals to 10% of their routine catering provision, and through this firstly to help promote health by providing fresher food for patients, staff and visitors and secondly to support farm and food businesses in the South East and London.

Much catering in the public sector is for vulnerable groups who deserve the highest quality food. However, food may not be as fresh and nutritious as it could be, as length of time between farm and plate can be many days. The vitamin C content of fruits and vegetables, for example, starts to decline immediately after harvest. So improving the freshness of food supplied to hospital wards and canteens is likely to affect the nutritional health of hospital staff as well as the people to whom they offer care.

Four London hospitals have volunteered to participate in the project; one general hospital, one teaching, one specialist and one mental health hospital. These broadly represent the diversity of NHS catering operations in London. Ealing General Hospital and St. George's Hospital, Tooting due to their larger size and the nature of their catering operations will focus on provision of local and/or organic food in hospital canteen areas. The Royal Brompton Hospital, Chelsea and The Lambeth Hospital, Stockwell which have smaller patient numbers will include both canteen and ward catering.

Mike Duckett, Catering Manager, Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Trust, commented: "The team at Royal Brompton is looking forward to participating in the London Food Link project. By increasing access to local suppliers we can help to promote health by providing fresher, seasonal foods for our patients."

The NHS purchases over 300 million meals a year across the UK¹ spending a huge £500 million on food a year. If a greater share of this was spent on local supplies of food, local economies could have a significant boost, hopefully increasing farm incomes from the 2002 U.K. average of £11,000.²

Mike and Avril Gray of Watts Farm, Orpington said "It is possible for us to supply locally grown produce into London and be competitive on price, as we have no middle men and we harvest our products fresh which means our storage costs are low."

¹ Department of Health. *The NHS Plan: A plan for investment, a plan for reform*. London HMSO, 2000.

² Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2003/030130a.htm>

The project hopes to connect hospitals with local and/or organic food suppliers in order to establish:

- A workable local/organic supply chain which can deliver a proportion of hospital food needs.
- An administrative system which helps hospitals to buy local food where appropriate.

Support will be offered to help hospitals set supply tenders which improve chances of local and/or organic suppliers and to develop menus which favour seasonal and/or organic food. Specialist supply chain and technical training events will help food suppliers in London and the South East and hospital catering staff optimise conditions for getting local and/or organic food into wards and staff canteens. The Soil Association is providing telephone support for enquiries from interested suppliers wishing to take part in the Hospital Food Project. Contact the Soil Association Public Procurement Helpline on 0117 914 2424.

Peter Melchett, the Soil Association's Policy Director said, "There is now a real enthusiasm to change the food served in schools and hospitals with a drive from the Government. With poor diets and the resulting serious ill-health epidemic now firmly on the political agenda, we have opportunities to make meals nutritious, healthy, popular and enjoyable."

As well as fostering better opportunities for supplying local food, the Hospital Food Project will also commission research on local food infrastructure and distribution needs in London, and on the viability of a new local food centre. The project will also measure the health and economic effects of increasing local and/or organic food supply to participating hospitals. Additionally, a network will be established to replicate the projects successes in other areas of public sector catering such as schools.

This project is supported under the England Rural Development Programme by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

London Food Link is also grateful to the King's Fund for providing a grant to help with this project. Any views expressed in this are those of the authors are not necessarily those of the King's Fund, which is not responsible for them.



Editors Notes:

1. London Food Link is a project by *Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming*. Sustain advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent over 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. www.sustainweb.org
2. London Food Link aims to help producers, consumers and retailers make a positive choice for sustainable, local food. This means better access to affordable, high quality and seasonal food, shorter supply chains and campaigning for policies which promote a thriving local food economy and culture. www.londonfoodlink.org
3. The Hospital Food Project evolved after initial encouraging research in 2002/3 by the Soil Association in conjunction with the Foundation for Local Food Initiatives on the feasibility of adapting catering procedures in St George's Hospital, Tooting to include organic food.
4. For further information, contact Fiona Cairncross, Hospital Food Project Co-ordinator at London Food Link.

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5. The Soil Association is the UK's leading certifier and promoter of organic farming and food and as a charity also works to make local organic food available to all within a thriving local food culture. For information about current projects or to find out more about sourcing local and organic food, contact the Soil Association's Local Food Links Department on 0117 914 2424 or visit their local food website at: www.localfoodworks.org

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