



Compassionate care and nutritious local food all part of life at St. Joseph's Health Centre Guelph



St. Joseph's Health Centre Guelph (SJHCG) is a mixed long-term care (LTC) facility and hospital, located in the rural city of Guelph, Ontario. It is a medium sized facility, with 91 specialty hospital beds and 240 LTC beds, and has developed a strong reputation for serving high quality, fresh, local, and sustainable food.

SJHCG values resident- and patient-centred care and strives to support the greater community it serves. One way SJHCG has been able to support both these values is through its food purchasing policies.

The hospital views food as critically important to the overall operations of the health centre because of food's impact on the client experience and resident/patient well-being. As Jennifer O'Brien, VP of Human Resources says, "Food is one thing [patients]

have control over. It's entertainment, it's pleasurable, it's self-sustaining. You obviously need nutrition to continue to thrive, and the lack of good nourishment can cause all kinds of issues such as other clinical problems."

Considering food ranks extremely highly on the hospital's list of overall priorities, it's not surprising the Nutrition and Food Service Department's mission focuses on fresh, healthy, and appealing foods. Their Mission Statement states they will "provide nutritious and delicious home-style meals to [their] residents/patients and clients."

As part of this mission, SJHCG has committed to serving as much fresh, whole food as possible. Leslie Carson,

head of the department, believes foods that are closest to nature are more nourishing, healthy, and delicious. It is her opinion these foods should be front and centre on the patient plate. Leslie also strives to use food as a way to support the greater community through a meals-on-wheels program, by donating meals to shelters, and by purchasing as much local food as possible.

Purchasing local food is good for the agricultural community, and is appreciated by the patients and residents at SJHCG. "A lot of the people who are here as residents and patients at St. Joe's were raised on a farm," says Jennifer O'Brien, "so supporting their heritage is important." She also mentions that farmland and agricultural production needs to be protected, and purchasing local food is one way to help accomplish that.

20% spent on
local food results
in \$140,000
injected back into
Ontario farms





“A lot of the people who are here as residents and patients at St. Joe’s were raised on a farm, so supporting their heritage is important.”

SJHCG strives to serve their clients healthy foods they like to eat. In a sector dogged by the stigma of bad hospital food, such a focus is both admirable and refreshing. It is also greatly appreciated by the health centre’s patients and staff.

When Leslie was hired in 2005, she made it a priority to change how food was prepared at SJHCG, which prior to her arrival had included a lot of pre-made outsourced meals. Such foods are heavily processed and are often not well received by patients. Leslie has since transformed SJHCG into a health facility that, from her estimates, now prepares up to 70% of their meals from scratch.

The reception to these changes has been very positive. After the transition to fresh and whole foods, patient satisfaction soared to 87%. Staff morale also improved

because they found cooking from scratch to be both rewarding and meaningful work.

As part of their focus on supporting the local community, SJHCG tries to source as much local and sustainable food as possible. In fact, one of their top priorities in 2011 was to increase the use of locally grown food, along with improving patient treatment/recovery, reducing food waste, and

reducing operating costs.

Unfortunately, supporting local food can be problematic in the health care sector because of very tight food budgets. The purchasing model in health care favours low costs, bulk purchases, and economies of scale. However, it has been Leslie’s experience that buying fresh food and cooking on-site is more cost effective than buying pre-made meals. She also balances daily food costs by

pairing expensive menu options like local and sustainable roast beef with less expensive options such as casseroles.

SJHCG also has successful retail operations that include a cafeteria, vending machines, and a meals-on-wheels program. Through the latter program, SJHCG prepares hundreds of meals each day for participating Guelph residents. The program is run through the Red Cross, and while it is technically a retail operation, only the vending machines and cafeteria produce any notable profits. These profits make an important contribution to the Nutrition and Food Services Department's operating budget, through which they spend approximately \$8.40/resident/day on raw food costs.

In 2011, local food procurement became a formal goal for SJHCG after receiving a grant from Ontario's Broader Public Sector Investment Fund for a project to increase their purchases of local food. The grant was received in conjunction with their Group Purchasing Organization (GPO), St. Joseph's Health System-GPO (SJHS-GPO).

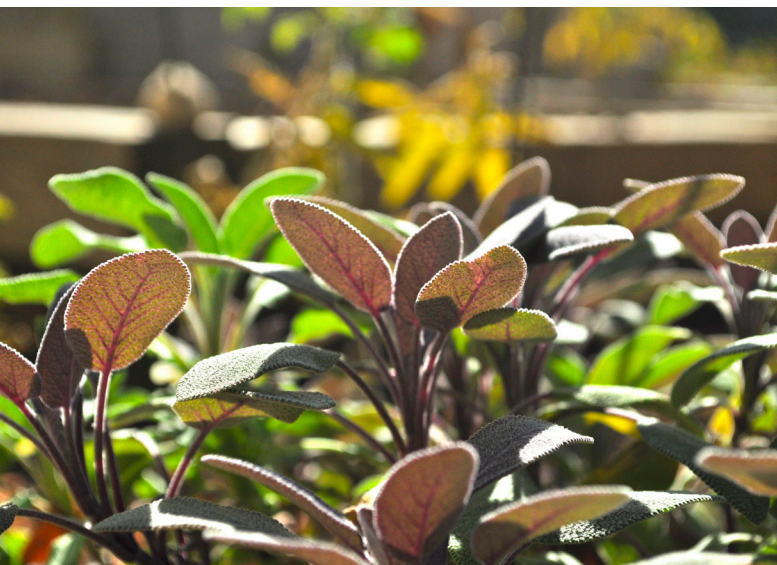
Managed by the Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care (the Coalition) and My Sustainable Canada, the program had the goal of increasing the amount of local food purchased by SJHCG and the SJHS-GPO. The project began with an investigation into the origin of the food currently purchased by SJHCG and the 27 other members of SJHS-GPO.

In order to increase the amount of local food purchased by the health care facility, they first had to determine the current purchasing level. This was done by using a food origin audit process developed as part of the project. Although it was a lengthy process, acquiring baselines for local food purchases was vital to measuring the success of the local food procurement project.

For purposes of the audit, "local" was defined using Foodland Ontario's definitions of local food. Definitions vary by food type, but in general, local food means it was grown or raised in the province of Ontario.

Provincially, the food origin audit revealed Ontario health care facilities purchase very little local food outside of dairy, egg products, and fresh produce. For example, only 13% of audited meat products purchased through SJHS-GPO were local.

The results were more positive for SJHCG specifically, where outside of dairy and eggs, their largest percentage of local food was in the produce and protein categories. They also purchase a large portion of their bread from a local bakery, but not all the bread is a local food. The wheat bread is made with flour from Western Canada, falling outside the 'local food' definition. However, the rye bread is considered local because it is made with grains from nearby farms in Southern Ontario.



“The food origin audit revealed Ontario health care facilities purchase very little local food outside of dairy, egg products, and fresh produce.”

Compassionate care and nutritious local food

With a local food baseline in hand, SJHCG then worked with their GPO to increase the volumes of local food in select categories including eggs, cheese, and dairy. Ultimately, SJHCG was able to increase their local food purchases by 15%.

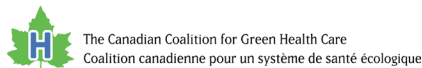
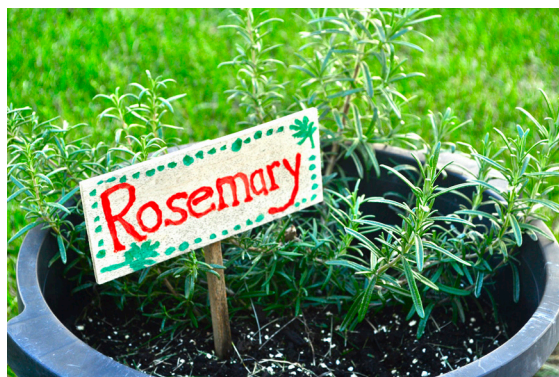
SJHCG also sourced local products for many of the foods they purchase outside of their GPO contracts. These included foods from a small, local distributor in Southern Ontario, and Rowe Farms, a local producer of sustainable beef, pork, and poultry.

Leslie chose to buy from these vendors because their products are of consistently high quality. The sustainable practices employed on some of the farms, and the freshness of product means the foods taste better, and the meats produce higher cooking yields.

SJHCG now estimates approximately 20% of the food they serve is local. In terms of financial impact, it is estimated through both their GPO and non-GPO purchases, SJHCG leaves at least \$140,000 in the local economy per year.

Contact Information

Leslie Carson Rd MBA
Manager Food and Nutrition Services
St. Joseph's Health Centre Guelph
100 Westmount Road
Guelph, Ontario
N1H 5H8
1-519-824-6000 x4254
lcarson@sjhcg.ca



As national not-for-profit organisations, My Sustainable Canada and the Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care are committed to increasing the sustainability and resilience of our food systems through collaborative partnerships.



This project made possible thanks to financial support from the Broader Public Sector Investment Fund, the Province of Ontario, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Government of Ontario. La Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario est un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario.

Images courtesy Brendan Wylie-Toal

