

Food Service Guidelines: Healthy Product Supply Chain

Securing healthy products for vending, concessions, micromarkets, cafeterias, and institutional feeding can be a challenge for some operators. Barriers include identifying healthier products, reformulating recipes and menus, securing healthier products, and managing inventory and costs. Below are strategies and resources for advocates working with vendors and food service operators to help overcome some of those challenges.



Finding Healthier Products

It can be helpful to look at **existing product lists** to get ideas for healthier products. If your nutrition standards are different, these lists can still provide a starting point and you can assess these products against your standards. Lists include:

- [List of products](#) that meet the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA), American Heart Association (AHA), and General Services Administration and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (GSA/HHS) healthy vending standards.
- [The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's list of products](#) that meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Smart Snacks standards for school snacks and beverages. The Alliance also has a [product calculator](#), through which product nutrition information can be input to determine if they meet the Smart Snacks standards.
- Products complying with the New York City standards for [snacks](#), [kosher snacks](#), [refrigerated items](#), and [frozen items](#).
- Work with your distributors to identify snacks and beverages. Major distributors, such as US Foods, Performance Food Group, and Sysco, are likely working with other jurisdictions to comply with food service guidelines.

Tips for Healthy Vending

Healthier Vending Options

You can start by assessing the contents of your vending machines to determine how many and which healthy items are already stocked. The [Nutrition Environment Measures Vending Survey \(NEMS-V\)](#) can be used to take vending inventory.

A number of vendors market themselves as providing healthy options. While these companies may offer a healthier mix of products and be more willing to work with you to provide healthier options, not every product sold by these companies is likely to meet your nutrition standards. You can work with these vendors to increase the number of healthy choices. Examples of healthier vendors include:

- [H.U.M.A.N. Healthy Vending](#) provides a variety of options, many of which meet NANA and other nutrition standards.

- [Vend Natural](#) offers healthier options than standard vending. They are willing to work with customers to meet their needs.
- [Fresh and Healthy Vending](#)'s products department will create a specialized menu for your location and help you meet or exceed their nutrition guidelines.
- [Fresh Healthy Vending](#) allows you to select from over 6,000 products.
- [Healthy You Vending](#) offers a vending machine system that is geared toward healthier vending options.

It may be possible to purchase products from "big box" warehouses like Sam's Club and Costco, but it can be challenging to find products that meet nutrition criteria. In addition, some compliant products are bundled with non-compliant food items (such as variety packs), and some are not available in portion sizes that work for vending.

Revenue

Many vendors have found that revenue is unaffected by implementing healthier vending, and some vendors have experienced an increase in sales when they increased availability healthier options. See CSPI's [fact sheet](#) for more on financial issues related to healthy vending.

Cafeterias and Institutional Procurement

Institutional Procurement Approaches

- Most institutions purchase products using one of the following methods:
 - Self-Operators (self-ops) run their own food service operations, usually including staffing, menu development, and food procurement. Self-ops may have an easier time finding and purchasing healthier products from a wider variety of vendors.
 - Food Service Management Companies (FSMC) are contracted by institutions to manage all aspects of their food service operations.
 - Group Purchasing Organizations (GPOs) are companies that pool purchases of their member organizations to obtain savings from vendors and manufacturers. Both FSMCs and self-ops may participate in GPOs and utilize their list of contracted food products.
- Buying co-operatives can be formal or informal arrangements to aggregate purchasing to help secure lower prices and wider product availability from selected suppliers.

Healthcare Without Harm's [procurement guide](#) provides a helpful overview of supply chain partnerships (starting on page four). For more information on self-ops, FSMCs, GPOs, or buying cooperatives, see *Resources and Toolkits* below.

Tips for Procuring Healthier Products

- Consider joining or establishing a collaborative workgroup to ask suppliers for a greater variety of healthy options, for specific products, and to secure better prices.
 - Examples: [The Market Transformation Group](#), [School Food Focus](#)
 - School districts are required to meet updated standards for meals, snacks, and beverages. Partner with your local school district to gain access to healthier options at better prices or ask them where they purchase healthier options.
- Create or join a formal or informal buying cooperative. Purchasing as a cooperative can result in greater access to healthier products and reduced costs.
 - Join with other localities, hospitals, universities, or other institutions serving healthier options.
- Join a Group Purchasing Organization (GPO) or work with your GPO to secure healthier products as a part of your contract.
 - Buying healthier items can be challenging if the GPO does not carry a healthier product you want to serve or sell. Review your GPO purchasing goals to determine if and at what ratio you are allowed to make outside purchases.

Resources and Toolkits for Cafeteria and Institutional Food Service

- CDC's [Creating Healthy Hospital Food, Beverage, and Physical Activity Environments](#) is a step-by-step approach to implementing policy changes including working with stakeholders, conducting a policy and food environment assessment, developing implementation plans, and evaluating progress.
- CDC's [Smart Food Choices: How to Implement Food Service Guidelines in Public Facilities](#) guide includes action steps for implementing food service guidelines in a government worksite or public facility to increase the availability of healthier food and beverage options at food service venues, including cafeterias, concession stands, snack bars, and vending machines.
- [Encouraging Healthier Choices in Hospitals](#) is a joint report by CSPI and Health Care Without Harm providing examples of health institutions that have made healthier policy

changes, largely related to removal of soda and other sugary drinks. The report details challenges faced and tips for success.

- Food Research and Action Center's [Buying Groups](#) resource provides an in-depth look at buying groups, including benefits, challenges, and how to join a buying group.
- The Food Trust's [Building and Implementing Healthy Food Services](#) covers implementation strategies, including procurement guidelines, business planning, determining which foods fit your standards, and healthy food marketing.
- Health Care Without Harm's [Health Food in Health Care](#) covers contracting with a GPO that supports healthy purchasing, and instituting purchasing and vending policies to meet your goals.
- [Healthy Kansas Hospitals Toolkit II](#) highlights how to determine which policy options will work for your institution, how to develop effective food and beverage vending and procurement policies, and how to implement menu labeling.
- [Setting the Table for Success](#), with a focus on local food purchasing, this toolkit by Fine Farm to Institution New England provides an introduction to institutional purchasing, the differences between food service management companies (FSMC) and self-operated food service management, as well as detailed advice for hiring a consultant, creating an RFP, establishing a FSMC contract that is appropriate for your institution, and developing tools to implement and evaluate your contract.

Healthier Menus and Recipes

The recipe sources provided are generally healthier options. However, you will need to assess if individual recipes meet your nutrition standards.

- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health [Food Service Recipes](#) follow HSPH's Department of Nutrition's guidance and each yield 100 servings.
- Health Care Without Harm's [Balanced Menus Recipe Toolkit](#) provides entrée recipes submitted from healthcare centers across the country and are designed to yield 50 servings.
- USDA's "[What's Cooking?](#)" is a recipe database designed to meet national school nutrition standards. However, many recipes could be useful to other institutions and it provides the option to filter recipes by calories, sodium and/or saturated fat.
- The Humane Society of the United States' [Plant Strong Entrée Recipes](#) are largely adapted from schools. Each recipe has directions to yield 50 or 100 servings.

- www.foodservicedirector.com includes under "Menu Development:"
 - "Healthy Recipe Revamp:" Tips for altering recipes to make them healthier.
 - "Recipedia:" Database of recipes designed for use in food service. The nutrition standards that the recipes meet vary.
 - "Creating Healthier Menus:" An index of articles on topics ranging from menu alteration to overcoming challenges to increase customer acceptance.
- The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's [Smart Food Planner](#) includes resources for schools and programs that serve youth, including tips to develop healthy [menu plans](#) and [recipes](#), a [tool](#) for determining if snacks meet the USDA's [Smart Snacks standards](#), and [training support](#).

Tips for Recipe Modifications and Meal Preparation Techniques

- Adding **fruits and vegetables**:
 - USDA's [Tricks of the Trade: Preparing Fruits and Vegetables](#) includes tips for handling, recipes, training for staff, and preparation.
- Managing **calories**:
 - Cut portion sizes, place healthy foods at the beginning of buffet lines, eliminate deep fat frying, use smaller plates, and use smaller serving utensils.
- Addressing taste, while reducing **sodium**:
 - CDC's Under Pressure resources identify strategies to reduce sodium at [worksites](#), [hospitals](#), [school environments](#), and for [institutionalized populations](#).
 - Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health's [Tasting Success with Cutting Salt](#).
 - Institute for Child Nutrition's (ICN) [Reducing Sodium Intake](#) fact sheet is designed with school food in mind, but useful for other institutions.
 - USDA's [What's Shaking?](#) is a resource bank for food service professionals including tips for reducing salt, using seasonings, culinary skills for produce, and recipes with reduced sodium content.
- Offering and cooking with **whole grains**:
 - USDA's [Cooking with Whole Grains](#) toolkit is designed for schools but useful for other food service institutions.
 - [Whole Grains Council](#) foodservice recipes and tips has at the bottom of the page videos with tips for cooking and using whole grains, as well as a couple of recipe banks highlighting whole grains.

- ICN's [whole grain training](#) can help with identifying whole grains and determining the proportion of whole grains in a prepared dish.
- [InHarvest Recipes](#) is a recipe bank of whole grain, rice, and legume options.
- Moderating **saturated fat**:
 - Use vegetable oil in place of butter for sautéing, offer vinegar based salad dressings, switch to low-fat dairy options, limit servings of cheese, serve smaller portions of red meat or substitute chicken, fish or vegetable-based proteins.
- Using **local foods**:
 - University of Wisconsin's [Video Series](#) demonstrates how to use local produce in meals including culinary techniques, menu ideas, and using visually imperfect produce. It is designed for school food service but many tips are applicable for other food service.
 - FINE's [Leveraging Contracts for Local Food Procurement](#) includes tips for defining "local," developing an RFP with local foods in mind, and items to include in a contract to ensure local food goals are met.
 - FINE's [Sample Language for Local Foods in RFPs](#) includes example language defining sustainability, setting food priorities, and building accountability into the RFP.
 - Johns Hopkins' [Instituting Change](#) (starting on page 21) includes a discussion of progress and barriers related to regional food procurement.
 - ASAP Connection's fact sheets for [Incorporating Local Food in Your Cafeteria](#) and [10 Ways to Incorporate Local Food](#)

Providing Healthier Options without Increasing Costs

As you figure out the right mix of healthier products, recipes, and menus, some may be concerned about increased cost. However, healthier food is not necessarily more expensive. Many changes are cost-neutral, for example, switching from whole milk to skim milk or from soda to water. Some institutions that have adopted healthier food procurement policies have experienced a revenue decrease over the first six months that eventually returns to or exceeds prior levels as they work out changes to recipes and adapt menus.

- See CSPI's [Tips for Serving Healthier Food for Less](#) for strategies to manage costs as you move to healthier foods and meals.

- See [CSPI's fact sheet](#) that shows that moving to healthier vending options does not have to mean less revenue.

Training

The needs for training will vary depending on staff experience, as well as the extent of food changes needed and the strength of your nutrition guidelines.

- Be sure to educate personnel about the importance and rationale for moving to healthier foods. Successful implementation is more likely if food service staff are supportive.
- ICN's webinar [Back to Basics: How to Incorporate Scratch Cooking Techniques Into Your School Kitchen](#), while focused on school meals, could be helpful to other institutions. It walks through challenges including: employee training/skill level, labor costs, and food safety.
- ICN has a [Lesson Plan](#) for standardizing recipes.
- ICN's [Chapter on Staff Training](#) can guide development and implementation of a training plan for a food service facility.

Inventory Management

Providing healthier, less processed options can mean that food service needs to manage inventory more strategically.

- ICN's [Inventory Management and Tracking](#) Reference Guide, addresses best practices for inventory control (see pages 27–38).
- Foodservice Organizations, 5th ed. by Spears and Gregoire, Chapter 6, Food Production at wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/1101/1128420/Chapter06.ppt.
 - Slides 5 to 16 cover forecasting and forecasting models to optimize the quantity of food ordered.
 - Slides 20 to 52 address ingredient control, including ingredient assembly and recipe standardization—both in an effort to reduce waste and increase efficiency.

For additional resources, please visit <http://bit.ly/CSPIprocurement> or contact CSPI at 202-777-8352 or nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org.