

Farm to Hospital Case Study: Haywood Regional Medical Center



Background-Haywood Regional Medical Center is located in Clyde, North Carolina and has been in operation since 1927. The food service at Haywood Regional is managed by Morrison Healthcare Food Service, a member of the Compass Group, which is a private contractor of the hospital. Like many hospital food service, Morrison contracts with a large national distributor for the majority of their product. Chef Mohr, Director of Food Service for Haywood Regional, was dissatisfied with the fresh produce he was receiving and began to source locally grown fruits and vegetables. It was a challenge to deviate from his contract obligations but found being in a rural location to his advantage. “Many of our approved distributors would not deliver to Clyde so I was able to work with a local farm/distributor and I couldn’t be happier” Says Mohr.

Partners- Christopher Produce- local farm/distributor, Buy Haywood-an organization managed by the Haywood County Economic Development Commission to support agriculture in Haywood county, and Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project- a nonprofit based in Asheville, NC that supports local family farms by helping to create a viable local food system.

Food Service- The cafeteria serves between 600 and 700 meals per day. They source 15% of their total food budget locally when in season. Local food is in both patient food and in the cafeteria and the price is comparable to a large scale distributor “We priced it and it is just as cheap for most of the seasonal fruits and vegetables” Mohr said “We don’t mind paying a little more for some items, because they are worth it. The service from our vendor, Christopher Farms is great”.

Local Sourcing-Christopher Produce is a fourth generation farm/distributor located in Haywood County whose relationship with the hospital dates back to 1962. They began selling to Haywood Regional when it was located in east Waynesville and are pleased the relationship picked back up in 2008. Christopher Produce not only grows their own produce but also supports local farms in Haywood County “A lot of local farmers grow beans and other vegetables for us,” says Doug Christopher who manages Christopher Produce. Mohr, who was not able to purchase directly from multiple farmers, liked being able to support additional farms through Christopher Produce. “I like being able to support our local economies/farmers and it’s a better quality and fresher product” says Mohr.

Logistics-Christopher Produce indicates on the invoice which products were grown on their farm or other Haywood County farms allowing Chef Mohr to promote locally made dishes in the cafeteria. ASAP provides Haywood Regional with Appalachian Grown Stickers that are placed on food items made using products from Christopher Farm. Christopher Farm is certified by ASAP as an Appalachian Grown family farm which means they grow or raise food and agricultural products in Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian region. The stickers are part of a larger local branding effort by ASAP and have recognition throughout the region. ASAP is working with Christopher Produce to certify other local farms they purchase from to allow Chef Mohr to use the Appalachian Grown stickers on additional menu items.

Marketing-ASAP provided Haywood Regional with a Christopher Farm profile poster for the cafeteria along with table top profiles with the same message. This allows customers to put a face with the food and reinforces the message of supporting local. “I still think there a lot of people that don’t know we

buy local but the signage will help tremendously to that end” says Mohr. This sentiment is echoed by Doug Christopher who says the marketing pieces have increased business. “I have new people coming to the farm store saying they saw our poster or read about us and the hospital in the paper”. Buy Haywood along with Haywood Regional’s in house Communications Specialist has sent press releases with local buying information that have been featured in several publications. This marketing effort helps to build community support and defends Chef Mohr’s decision to buy local. Haywood Regional is planning to place a series of newspaper advertisements promoting their local buying program with assistance from ASAP’s Farm to Hospital promotional money. “We would not be able to place ads without the help of the promotional money. It is a great opportunity to thank Christopher Produce and let the community know what we have been working on” says Peggy Manning Corporate Communications Specialist for the hospital. Doug and Eugene Christopher have also made farmer appearances at the hospital cafeteria.

Health and Wellness- In addition to purchasing locally grown fruits and vegetables Haywood Regional has hosted two Farmers Market Days where Christopher Produce has sold products from their farm directly to hospital staff. The two markets were such a success they are considering hosting a weekly market June-September in 2010. They are hoping to attract additional Haywood County growers for the market. In promotion of the farmers market Haywood Regional sent out email reminders to the staff and included it in the employee newsletter. There was also a write up about the market in the local paper.

Conclusion- Sourcing local food has been a success for Haywood Regional in part to the dedication of Chef Mohr and excellent customer service from Christopher Produce. Although Morrison’s has a contract obligation to a larger distributor Chef Mohr was able to negotiate purchasing local food and plans to increase that amount in 2010. The combined marketing effort of Haywood Regional, Buy Haywood, and ASAP has helped to gain community awareness and support for the farm to hospital initiative. The hospital and the farm feel this is a successful partnership they both look forward to continuing.