

Local Food as Holistic Health: Park Ridge Hospital

Park Ridge Hospital is a 100 bed facility, employing more than 200 people in Henderson County, NC. A member of [Adventist Health System](#), the largest not-for-profit Protestant health care organization in the United States, Park Ridge's holistic health care philosophies are rooted in the Seventh Day Adventist tradition. A privately operated dining service, Park Ridge takes pride in offering high quality, fresh, healthy food that tastes more like a restaurant than a cafeteria.



Red Apple – NC Prevention Partners

NC Prevention Partners (NCP) successfully built relationships with hospitals across NC through their “Focus on Healthy Hospital” campaign to create smoke-free campuses. With every hospital in NC smoke-free, NCP is now working with the North Carolina Hospital Association on a healthy foods initiative, funded through the Duke Endowment. This initiative works closely with hospitals to:

- increase access to and availability of healthier foods and beverages;
- Implement nutrition labeling, and promotion of healthier foods and beverages in hospitals;
- Decrease the availability of high calorie, low nutrient foods and beverages; and
- Provide education to employees, patients and visitors.

Through this program hospitals are publically rated and competition drives them to work with NCP to create individualized actions plans to meet these goals and strive to be acknowledged as a Center of Excellence (Red Apple).

Promotion of fresh and local foods has been a component of several action plans in our region. Through the establishment of this program and relationship building, NCP has created a favorable environment for ASAP's Farm to Hospital program. Park Ridge has earned Red Apple status, which means they are implementing their action plan to make making healthy (and locally grown) food more available, visible and affordable for employees and visitors.

Sourcing and labeling

Park Ridge sources local product through Mountain Food Products (a local distributor that identifies local through the distribution chain) and directly from local farms including Blackbird Farm and Hickory Nut Gap Meats. Local purchasing and labeling has been expanded with Park Ridge's participation in Farm to Hospital.

Now a certified Appalachian Grown handler, Park Ridge identifies locally grown foods on their menu with the Appalachian Grown logo and displays promotional materials created by ASAP, which inform diners about the farmers who grow the food.

Expanding Market Opportunities for Farmers

In addition to expanding institutional markets for farmers, Farm to Hospital has become a popular avenue for cross market promotions. Black Bird Farms supplies the hospital with fresh produce for the cafeteria, and promotes the farm's CSA subscription to hospital patients and staff. This promotion was not only beneficial for the farmer, but provided a positive workplace wellness offering. Park Ridge is also interested in coordinating and promoting a farmers market on the hospital campus next year.

Commitment to Community

Park Ridge, located between Asheville and Hendersonville, is in an area rich in agricultural resources. Black Bird Farms in Henderson County is one of the cafeteria's suppliers of fresh produce. The farm

has been owned and operated by the Haynes family since 1933. Current owner, Billy Haynes, Jr., says of his work with the hospital, “It’s a great partnership for me and an important way to supply fresh produce to the community.”

Park Ridge Hospital takes a holistic approach to health that incorporates nutrition, but also takes pride in connecting to community. “We want to help our employees and patients learn where their food comes from, and how to find and prepare fresh foods,” says Special Assistant to the President, Graham Fields. “And we want to be a part of the community, because community is part of healing and prevention.” Farm to Hospital is a natural promotion for this hospital that has a commitment to community and sees healthy food as part of preventative medicine. In addition to incorporating local foods into their cafeteria, Park Ridge is also distributing Market Bucks (coupons that can redeem at a local farmers market for fresh, local products) in an effort to connect hospital staff and patients to sources of fresh healthy food that supports local farmers. In partnership with ASAP, Park Ridge is also participating in a Park Ridge Day at the Market, in which hospital chefs provide a cooking demonstration and hospital outreach materials at a local farmers market.

Park Ridge Hospital has become a model for Farm to Hospital in our region not only in what they have implemented to date, but also in their enthusiasm and foresight into what more they can do. Annie Ager from Hickory Nut Gap Farms noted “They have been a great way for us to move a large amount of our ground beef locally and we only see that relationship growing”.

Lessons Learned

Common to all the hospitals we worked with across Western North Carolina, the development and expansion of the Farm to Hospital program at Park Ridge has been about relationship building. The most reported obstacle is simply time. Whether it be food service directors, hospital administrators, marketing directors, chefs or health and wellness staff, the key people that need to be engaged in program development and implementation are extremely busy, trying to meet a broad range of needs and requirements. The demand for local and level of consumer awareness, in combination with this hospital’s commitment to holistic health, provided a head start in building relationships with key players at Park Ridge.

Being an independently run food service simplified their ability to purchase locally, but much of their local buying is driven by committed food service staff and supported throughout the hospital administration. Food Service ability and willingness to purchase directly from individual farmers as well as request local through distributors sets them apart from many other institutions. Food service staff has not only been willing to offer seasonal menus, but has also done an exceptional job at communicating with farmers and incorporating what is available into the salad bar, hot bar, sandwiches, Gourmet-to-Go and patient food. Because much of their local procurement is driven by a select group of staff, the next level may be incorporating local procurement language into food policy.

While local food and farms promotions have been incorporated in Park Ridge’s food service program, there is great potential for expansion into health and wellness. Park Ridge’s understanding of holistic and preventative health makes this an easy next step, but requires relationship building across program areas and the commitment to make it a priority. Park Ridge’s work in this area is above and beyond other hospitals in the region, and could be a model for Farm to Hospital across North Carolina. This level of commitment requires comprehensive approach and could benefit from a committee that represents diverse stakeholders within the hospital and community. This committee could help drive the development and implementation of innovative short and long term goals and a model Farm to Hospital program.