

Idaho's Bounty - Bimonthly Feature - Expanding Food Perspectives

December 20, 2009

Healthy Food Makes Healthy People

Large national companies and organizations are starting to look to food as a way to prevent disease and obesity, and lower health care costs. Although it may seem obvious, food hasn't always been associated with preventative health care. Locally to multi-nationally, the theme is starting to take hold.

Here's the scoop....

LOCAL EFFORTS

The Wood River Valley's local hospital has made a recent change to consciously serve healthy food. The November 20th Idaho Mountain Express article, [Making Hospital Cuisine Green](#), highlighted St. Luke's Wood River Medical Center and their new mission to serve healthy meals made daily, from scratch, with fresh, local food.

St. Luke's hired Sustainable Food Systems, a company founded and presided over by John Turenne, who guided the change to what the hospital is calling "Green Cuisine."

This is a fantastic switch, for the staff and patients in the hospital, as well as for the environment. In addition to giving diners nutrient-rich food, by buying locally the carbon footprint is substantially lower, and organically produced food contributes few toxins to the soil and water.

NATIONAL EFFORTS

Nationwide there have been similar movements, at Head Start pre-school centers, and among many corporations attempting to have a healthier workforce, not to mention the lower health care costs that come along with it.

A recent study highlights the efforts of Head Start, the national school readiness program that provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. The study, reported on in Science Daily, was done by Temple University researchers, and found that Head Start exceeds the current federal recommendations for promoting healthy eating and exercise habits among enrolled children, who are at high risk for obesity. Published in the December issue of the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, the study's researchers surveyed all 1583 Head Start programs in the country about healthy eating practices and physical activity. They found:

- * Three-quarters of programs reported having children participate in at least 30 minutes of adult-led physical activity per day.

- * Ninety-four percent of programs reported serving some vegetable every day, other than French fries.

- * Ninety-seven percent reported serving some fruit every day, other than 100% fruit juice.

- * More than half (56 percent) provided children with at least 60 minutes each day of unstructured physical activity in addition to the 30 minutes of adult-led physical activity.

"The obesity epidemic has reached even the youngest children, and many Head Start programs say they are trying to address this problem with practices that go beyond what is required by federal regulation," said Robert Whitaker, the lead author of the study.

Other organizations are looking at the problem as well. Many CEOs and other executives have been shocked by the rising costs of healthcare and the difficult choices created for their businesses. A few have decided to try something new to cut costs. In the case of Safeway, IBM, and Pitney Bowes, the answer has been investing in health incentives for employees that result in huge health care savings.

"I.B.M., for example, says that from 2005 to 2007 it invested \$80 million in what are broadly defined as employee wellness programs, and thereby saved \$190 million in health care costs. Some \$79 million of that was in fewer medical claims; the rest came from reduced absenteeism and "presenteeism" - a measure of lost productivity when employees are sick on the job. "A relatively small investment can have a big payoff," says Joyce Young, I.B.M.'s director of well-being."

Idaho's Bounty is fortunate to have worked with John Turenne, and honored to assist St. Luke's on their "Green Cuisine" campaign by providing the hospital with fresh local food each week.

I.B.M.'s wellness programs included cash rebates for completion of online programs in physical activity, nutrition and preventative care, which are intended to inspire employees to exercise more and focus on nutritional eating.

Pitney Bowes uses similar cash incentive programs, as well as plans to help employees quit smoking and loose weight. The company's facility houses eight health clinics for treating common illnesses, and they offer reduced co-payments for certain medications.

Safeway is widely considered have the most successful health care program, as costs haven't risen since 2005. Safeway accomplished these savings by encouraging cheaper generic drugs and through the company's voluntary Health Measures plan, in which employees are checked for their weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels and whether they smoke. For each health test passed, workers are rewarded with reductions in their payroll contributions to health care coverage, which for individual plans, can save employees almost \$800 a year.

THE FULL YIELD

But as it is difficult to entice people to change their habits, a start-up company called The Full Yield has stepped in to make the transition easier. As described in the New York Times article, [Health Care Savings Could Start in the Cafeteria](#), "The idea is to help companies move their employees to better diets that, the logic goes, will ultimately reduce their visits to the doctor's office and the operating room - thus cutting costs."

The Full Yield's program has two parts: eating a diet of fresh, natural, whole foods (as much as you need to feel full) and tracking progress, which is analyzed by insurers.

"A study in the January-February 2009 issue of the journal Health Affairs concluded that 75 percent of the country's \$2.5 trillion in health care spending has to do with four increasingly prevalent chronic diseases: obesity, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Most cases of these diseases, the report stated, are preventable because they are caused by behaviors like poor diets, inadequate exercise and smoking.

"As part of the program, the Full Yield will give employees access to nutrition coaches by phone, as well as personalized online health pages containing the biometric data, exercise and eating tracking tools and information on things like how to cook whole grains and make salad dressing."

THE SUMMARY

The Full Yield's simple premise is: Eat healthier food and you'll become healthier. As with Head Start and the Wood River Valley St. Luke's, the connection is being made that health can't solely be taken in pill form, but includes a diet of fresh, healthy food, and regular exercise. And the more people who take part in creating better health for themselves, their employees, their children, or their patients, the better we all will be. The goal here isn't simple weight loss, it's about feeling better physically as well as psychologically and adding balance to people's lives, one healthy bite at a time.

SOURCES

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