

In the zone

When a community hospital in Hawaii wanted to reinvent its culinary offering, **Pam Eaton** FCSI stepped in to oversee the project, as she tells Howard Riell



Administrators at Kona Community Hospital (KCH) in Kealahou, Hawaii, wanted to focus on sourcing local food and fresh ingredients in order to address an approach to health that would emphasize “human, community and environmental health.” It would be accomplished by moving away from pre-prepared, partially cooked entrées to fully scratch-cooked entrées with locally sourced food products.

The administrators reached out to Chicago-based consultancy Beyond Green Sustainable Food Partners for assistance.

“We were brought in to help them fulfill their commitments for healthy food and habits for their Blue Zone Certification,” recalls project manager Pam Eaton FCSI. The Blue Zones Project is a community-wide well-being improvement initiative to help make healthy choices easier in Hawaii.

“We went into the operating kitchen and worked with the staff

to revamp the menus and purchasing procedures to include more locally sourced items and to use more unprocessed food items.”

The project began with an on-site assessment of the 94-bed acute-care facility’s foodservice operations during July 2018. Beyond Green started on-site training and consulting two months later, and provided weekly training through March of this year. A new café manager was brought in, and additional training by Beyond Green was scheduled for the summer of 2019.

Tracking and forecasting

The first phase of the project, which ran from September to December 2018, was to revamp the menus in the Ginger Café.

The second, from December 2018 to March 2019, was to start the process of transitioning patient meals to primarily scratch cooked.

“Since the cafeteria is the heart of the hospital, the goal was to reach as many employees and visitors as possible by introducing fresher, healthier food options,”

explains Judy Donovan, KCH’s regional director, marketing & strategic planning.

“Employees embraced the change to the monthly menus.

“The project required a complete culture change in our kitchen. But staff members recognized the benefit of better tasting, healthier food, so they were willing to adapt in order to be successful.”

To help the hospital achieve these goals, Beyond Green brought a vegan chef in to work with its founder and CEO Greg Christian as he taught the staff how to work with fresh foods, efficient cooking techniques, and kitchen operations.

“In addition to this, we tracked the food purchases to show how they were increasing local and fresh products in their procurement. Surveys were used, along with sales revenue, to demonstrate how the staff was reacting to the new foods,” explains Eaton. “While Greg worked on site to train the staff and establish all of the new entrées and procedures, I tracked data on purchases, revenue, sales, production, waste, and surveys to analyze KCH’s local and fresh >



Clockwise from top: Pam Eaton FCSI; Taking a tour of a local farm; Efficient food prep; Bottom far left: Kona Community Hospital

product purchases, the favorite meal items, and assisted with the forecasting for the production schedules.”

During the first month, taste tests were run on various entrées, with favorites added to the monthly menu. The recipes were designed to be modifiable so that local vegetables can be incorporated into the different stir-fries and other entrées as they are in season and available.

During phase one, the changes were focused on the Ginger Café patrons. Phase two looked at patient meals to

“It really and truly is a world-class project. I couldn’t help but want to go the extra mile for people who go the extra mile themselves”

attempt to offer scratch-cooked items to those without special dietary requirements. It also included a push to include more nutritious sides dishes such as quinoa or farro in place of white rice and mashed potatoes.

Eaton explains that a major part of the lessons Beyond Green teaches is how to run a more efficient kitchen, and how to better forecast production needs so those costs can be reduced thereby allowing more to be spent on potentially more expensive items.

Initially, the change in purchasing procedures was intended to obtain more local options through the vendors with which KCH already had contracts. As a second step, Christian contacted local farms and took the hospital’s staff on tours to discuss ways that KCH could begin buying from them.



“Time previously spent unboxing and stocking prepared, individually packaged items is now spent on food preparation”

Among the other steps were:

- Pre-cooked chicken items were replaced with raw chicken cooked on site
- Hamburgers are now mixed and formed on site in place of pre-made, frozen burgers
- Barbecue sauce is made in-house, and the pork sliced and cooked for use
- All fish is purchased fresh, with local product replacing the frozen fish previously used
- Dry-mix mashed potatoes have been replaced with real potatoes, steamed and mashed
- Recipes that once included canned or frozen vegetables now use only fresh produce, with some of them modified to make use of local options instead of those imported from the mainland
- Baked goods are being made from fresh ingredients rather than boxed mixes.
- Salad dressings are now made from scratch, and soups are slowly being switched from pre-made to house-made

In addition, production methods



were switched from tasked individuals to a group approach, “so that more than one person focused on a recipe, and it was completed as a group,” Eaton explains. “Time previously spent unboxing and stocking prepared, individually packaged items is now spent on food preparation.” Training on efficient food-preparation techniques has also reduced the time needed for the scratch-cooked items.

Weighing waste

The primary focus when it comes to eliminating waste has been on improved tracking of entrées served so that the daily production schedules can be tightened. “Weighing what is produced, and then weighing leftovers, is the key to stopping over production,” Eaton says. “That is where your money gets wasted in institutional kitchens.”

Additionally, more focus has been put on “healthy-sized” servings to replace a portion size that had increased over the years without close attention paid to calories, fat or food cost. Over-sized portions are not normally thought of as waste, but it

directly affects costs in both food purchases and labor to produce too much food,” Eaton points out.

Administrators feel the end result has been more than worth the effort. “We are thrilled with the results in the Ginger Café,” Donovan concludes. “The food is delicious and much healthier. Our leadership and board members have been supportive, and are proud of the food we’re offering to our cafeteria patrons and to our patients.” ■



Clockwise from top: Kona countryside; preparing local product, jackfruit; fresh ingredients. Top left: The hospital catering team