



Meaningful Meals at UPMC Somerset

A pair of initiatives underway at UPMC Somerset are making food service more sustainable for both inpatients and customers at the hospital cafeteria.

Last April, the Food and Nutrition team at UPMC Somerset launched Leanpath, a program designed to drastically cut food waste in large kitchens across the food service industry. The program tracks food waste and offers solutions to reduce landfill deposits as well as greenhouse gas emissions, all while saving labor and cutting food costs.

Team members at UPMC Somerset were trained to identify food waste and how to use the Leanpath tracking system. The process involves tracking daily food waste, monitoring the data and using the results to engage employees and make changes to drive the reduction. Every time a staff member records food waste with Leanpath, they also note the reason for the waste, which empowers staff to turn their food waste data into actionable items.

Since the program launched last year, UPMC Somerset has seen positive results, including saving more than 2,500 pounds of food from going to the landfill. This not only saved the equivalent of nearly 2,200 meals but also helped eliminate eight metric tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. Overall, UPMC Somerset has reduced food waste by 51%.

"This is a unique opportunity to drive meaningful change that transcends our day-to-day tasks," said Jill Thomas, director, Food and Nutrition. "Watching our team take active steps to reduce food waste and contribute to a healthier community gives us a profound sense of purpose. This mission drives us to rethink our approach to operations and inspires us to strive for continuous improvement"

The second initiative will soon find six plant-based meal offerings available for patients at UPMC Somerset. Plant-based items are both healthy alternatives for patients and are beneficial for the planet. The new menu items will be available along with regular selections. The new items span breakfast, lunch and dinner, and include options such as shepherd's pie, blueberry pancakes, vegetable carbonara, mediterranean veggie burritos, southwest chimichangas and enchiladas. The menu items are specifically geared toward UPMC Somerset patients and can be adjusted or replaced with different items depending on their popularity.

"UPMC Somerset is excited to partner with the UPMC Center for Sustainability to champion ways of bringing environmental awareness to our hospital," said Jeanette Croner, UPMC Somerset's Director of Quality. "UPMC is known for world-class healthcare, and now part of that care at UPMC Somerset is providing healthy, environmentally friendly plant-based food alternatives for our patients. This menu is just the latest step we've taken to become a more environmentally sustainable facility."

Recently, employees had an opportunity to sample the menu options and provide feedback before the items launch. Once the program is established and gets off the ground, Jill hopes to add some of the offerings to the regular rotation at the cafeteria.

many hands make light work. Thanks to the support of UPMC Somerset leadership and with a buy-in from employees, more sustainable practices are regularly being evaluated and implemented.



“Being part of this environment with such a devoted team is incredibly motivating,” Jill said. There’s a collective pride in our commitment, and it has become integral to our team identity. This focus has uplifted morale and fostered a shared sense of pride, knowing that the actions we take today will benefit future generations.”