

SICK PATIENTS NEED TO EAT REAL FOOD, TOO

Taylor Hood & Lauren Brasher | March 30, 2026

EAT REAL FOOD: HEALTHY EATING AT HOSPITALS

Americans, including the sickest hospital patients, need real food to prevent and manage chronic disease. Yet many hospitals still serve highly processed meals that do not fully support healing or long-term recovery.

ENSURING THE SICKEST PATIENTS EAT REAL FOOD

After the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture released the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs), 2025-2030*, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Nicklaus Children's Hospital [announced](#) a first-of-its-kind, voluntary, statewide pledge to change hospital food procurement. The goal is to serve more foods that comply with the DGAs and are locally sourced from Florida farms. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) also encouraged all hospitals nationwide to align with the DGAs through a Quality & Safety Special Alert Memo.

On March 30, 2026, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Nicklaus Children's Hospital launched a statewide pledge to have patients Eat Real Food and Make Americans Healthy Again.

- ★ The pledge is a statewide Food is Health initiative led by the Florida Department of Agriculture to bring more fresh, locally sourced, nutrient-dense food into hospitals—without increasing taxpayer costs.
 - The Florida Department of Agriculture invited all Florida hospitals to join the Food is Health initiative to ensure that all patients receive real food that supports recovery.
 - Nicklaus Children's Hospital will be the first to sign, setting the standard.
 - The pledge is open to all Florida hospitals, and the Florida Hospital Association encourages participation.
- ★ Hospitals, including Nicklaus, often rely on institutional procurement to source food for patients with diverse needs. Through the Food is Health initiative, Nicklaus has committed to sourcing 5% of its food from whole-food, local sources in the first year, increasing this by 1% annually.
 - This builds on Kentucky's Food is Medicine [initiative](#), a partnership between the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the Kentucky Hospital Association, and systems such as Appalachian Regional Healthcare to expand local food sourcing in hospitals.
- ★ This decision supports Florida's local agriculture to enhance patient and workforce nutrition and aligns hospital practices with better health outcomes. It also removes barriers to healthy food, cuts red tape by bypassing hospital middlemen, and seeks to improve health outcomes.
- ★ The [American College of Lifestyle Medicine \(ACLM\)](#) has followed suit by formally calling on its Health Systems Council (HSC)—comprised of 126 health systems across 38 states and Washington, DC—to commit to the same institutional procurement standard: sourcing a minimum of 5% of total food procurement from local farms and whole-food sources.
- ★ This also directly fulfills one of the goals of the MAHA Strategy: fostering private sector collaboration to end childhood chronic disease.

In addition, CMS has encouraged other hospitals to follow suit, sending a memo to all Medicare-participating hospitals advising them to implement the DGAs for their own patients.

- ★ On March 30, 2026, Administrator Mehmet Oz sent a Quality & Safety Special Alert [memo](#) to all hospitals reminding them of their obligation under the Conditions of Participation to adhere to federal nutrition guidelines, including the DGAs.