



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 17, 2009

Contact: Jamie Harvie, 218-525-7806

C 218 340 6442; harvie@isfusa.org

Eileen Secrest, 540-479-0168; esecrest@hcwh.org

American Medical Association Passes Resolution Supporting Sustainable Food System

Health Care Role in Prevention and Food-Related Health Emphasized

(Chicago, IL) The American Medical Association (AMA) has approved a new policy resolution in support of practices and policies within health care systems that promote and model a healthy and ecologically sustainable food system. The resolution also calls on the AMA to work with health care and public health organizations to educate the health care community and the public about the importance of healthy and ecologically sustainable food systems that “provide food and beverages of naturally high nutritional quality.” The policy was approved today at the 158th annual meeting of the AMA in Chicago, IL.

“As our country wrestles with health care reform, the role of health care providers and facilities in providing education and leadership to help the population understand the link between the way we produce food and individual health is significant and cannot be overstated,” said Jamie Harvie, director of the Health Care Without Harm Sustainable Food Work Group. “Preventing disease is paramount in the provision of health care. Hospitals, physicians and nurses are ideal leaders and advocates for creating food environments that promote health. This policy is an important contribution to a prevention-based healthcare delivery system.”

The AMA’s new Sustainable Food policy builds on a report from its Council on Science and Public Health (<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/475/refcomd.pdf>), which notes that locally produced and organic foods “reduce the use of fuel, decrease the need for packaging and resultant waste disposal, preserve farmland . . . [and] the related reduced fuel emissions contribute to cleaner air and in turn, lower the incidence of asthma attacks and other respiratory problems.” Industrial food production is a significant contributor to increased antibiotic resistance, climate change, and air and water pollution.

The new AMA policy states:

- That our AMA support practices and policies in medical schools , hospitals, and other health care facilities that support and model a healthy and ecologically sustainable food system, which provides food and beverages of naturally high nutritional quality.
- That our AMA encourage the development of a healthier food system through the US Farm Bill and other federal legislation.
- That our AMA consider working with other health care and public health organizations to educate the health care community and the public about the importance of healthy and ecologically sustainable food systems.

“Physicians now recognize that one cannot easily separate the health of food from how healthfully that food is produced,” said Dr. David Wallinga, an attendee at the meeting, the Wm. T. Grant Foundation Distinguished Fellow in Food Systems and Public Health at the University of Minnesota, and a member of Health Care Without Harm. “The profligate use of antibiotics and fossil fuels in today’s food system, for example, is directly linked to climate change and to the epidemic of antibiotic resistant infections, in hospitals and in communities.”

President Obama, who spoke to the AMA meeting on June 15th, reiterated the importance of developing a sustainable healthcare system that leads to better patient outcomes. “If doctors have incentives to provide the best care instead of more care, we can help Americans avoid the unnecessary hospital stays, treatments, and tests that drive up costs,” Obama stated. During his visit with AMA he spoke on the White House victory garden, which was planted to help educate children on the importance of fresh healthy food.

In addition to providing fresh, nutritious food choices, health care food services across the country are implementing new initiatives such as sourcing organic food and meat produced without the use of antibiotics, buying locally produced foods, and sponsoring farmers markets and food boxes for staff. More than 240 hospitals have signed the HCWH Healthy Food in Healthcare Pledge. Signers pledge to work toward developing sustainable food systems in their facilities. In Congress, Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT) has introduced a “Blueprint for Health,” legislation that calls for incentives to prevent chronic diseases, including investments in healthy and sustainable local and regional food systems.

HCWH is an international coalition of more than 430 organizations in 52 countries, working to transform the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment. For more information on HCWH, see www.noharm.org.

###