Health, Nutrition and Education

A Food Service Industry Perspective

Unidine®

Putting our expertise on the table®

©2008 Unidine Corporation

Putting our expertise on the table®

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 2

Introduction 3

Consumer Education in the Workplace 4

Developing Healthier Menus 5

Eliminating Trans Fat 7

Incorporating Organics 7

Supporting Sustainable Agriculture and Local Growers 9

Conclusion 9

Table of Contents

Introduction

Eating healthier. Making better decisions regarding nutrition. Leading a more active lifestyle. Eliminating health-busting culprits like “trans fats”, which are clearly linked to obesity, higher cholesterol and other ailments. For a long time, these messages came primarily from our doctors, the media, and more recently, the Internet. Now, with obesity in America reaching alarming rates, even the commercial food service industry has begun to tackle nutrition-related issues head on. Urged on by health-conscious employers and administrators, the food service industry has not only acknowledged, but embraced, its responsibility to provide Americans with healthier offerings in the workplace, hospital, and school cafeterias where we eat every single day. More importantly, the industry is recognizing the critical role it plays in educating consumers so they can make more informed choices in order to lead healthier lifestyles.

The primary consequence of decades of poor eating habits is obesity. Results from the Centers for Disease Control’s 2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) indicated that 32% percent of U.S. adults are obese and 17% of American children are either overweight or obese. The simplest reason for this worrisome trend is that we continue to consume more calories while decreasing our physical activity patterns. However, obesity is a complex issue with lifestyle, environment, and genes all playing a part. Many underlying factors linked to the increase in obesity include: increased portion sizes; increased frequency of dining out; increased consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and low fat (note: not low calorie) foods; increased physically inactive habits (driving, television, computer, electronic gaming), etc. Currently, only 20% of adults get the minimum recommended amount of exercise, which is 45 minutes a day, three days a week.

Obese adults are at increased risk for developing many chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, type II diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and certain cancers. Besides individual health risks, the burgeoning percentage of overweight Americans has significant economic consequences. Healthcare costs have doubled since 2000 according to Blue Cross Blue Shield. Researchers at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control estimate that healthcare costs attributable to obesity reached $75 billion in 2003. There is no free lunch, as taxpayers are incurring about half of this cost through programs like Medicare and Medicaid.

While obesity is associated with a number of serious medical conditions, for most it is a treatable and manageable condition. One of the national health objectives for 2010 is to reduce the prevalence of obesity among adults to less than 15 percent. But individual and societal change will only come with major adjustments in attitude, behavior and knowledge. The best chance to reduce obesity is through education and promotion of healthier eating habits.

While the decision has been made to tackle societal issues such as obesity, inactivity, and the related diseases they cause, what is the food industry doing to address these issues? How is the industry helping concerned employers and administrators strike a balance between what they would like to serve and what their guests want to eat? What is being done to educate consumers? What programs have been created and implemented? These issues are discussed below.

Consumer Education in the Workplace

Nutritional education must play a critical role if such a profound attitude and behavioral shift is to take place in our society. Though we have access to health and nutrition information through our doctors, trade associations, the media, and the Internet, our consumer education efforts must extend to our workplaces and schools - where most Americans spend a majority of their waking hours.

For years, health insurance carriers have embraced this notion. Many insurers extend yearly fitness club rebates and discounted nutrition counseling to their members in addition to other perks. Well-being product discounts on everything from exercise equipment, dietary supplements and fitness DVDs, to athletic clothing and even aroma therapy candles are becoming standard benefits.

Corporate decision-makers are now weighing in and embracing efforts aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles for their employees. For some, healthier menus and proactive consumer education programs are the #1 factor in choosing a food service company - not cost. Some have even established health and wellness departments complete with a registered dietician to provide guidance and promote a healthy work environment. Food service contractors have responded by developing a host of creative initiatives designed to educate consumers about the role of food and nutrition.

Many organizations have partnered with trade associations to develop joint consumer education programs that will inform and educate, and make a greater impact on the public's health. Unilever United States, one of the world's largest consumer products companies, has recently agreed to become the first partner of the American Dietetic Association. As an ADA Partner, Unilever will work closely with ADA to develop a national platform through events and programs that will help influence leaders and decision-makers in the food and nutrition marketplace.

Here at Unidine, we have built our company on the belief that that flavorful, nutritious and satisfying food starts with fresh ingredients. We cook-from-scratch all our meals and our food production techniques and signature recipes are designed to use fresh, locally-grown, seasonal

ingredients to create great tasting meals that are also nutritious. Freshly roasted meats, homemade salad dressings, and organically grown vegetables are a few examples of how we offer tasty and nutritious foods to our guests.

In addition to menu offerings, employee relations can be instrumental in delivering a healthier workplace environment. Many food service management companies work directly with a client's health and wellness department to provide nutritional education to employees. There are many creative ways to generate interest while incorporating good nutrition into a dining program. Offering chef-taught cooking classes that focus on preparing creative and healthy meals, providing discounts on healthy menu choices, and making a registered dietician available are just a few.

Developing Healthier Menus

At a recent Wal-Mart Sustainability Milestone Meeting, a historic convergence of business, environmental, corporate responsibility, labor, and health care leaders, one of Wal-Marts' top executives was asked by an employee why Sam's Club workers can go to the employee cafeteria and purchase a gigantic slice of pizza and a super-sized soda for $2.60 while a salad and bottle of water cost $5.00. It is a question that surely has employers and employees around the country scratching their heads, but is another of the many issues that is starting to receive national attention.

FoodService Director recently reported that several American companies are reducing the price of healthy menu choices in their cafes in an effort to encourage employees to make healthier food choices. This can have a dramatic impact to the bottom line of cafes and often will require an increased subsidy in order to accommodate healthy-eating initiatives. At Stamford, Connecticut-based Pitney Bowes, the program started when the company's medical department began to examine ways to emphasize wellness among employees. Frustrated that the "value meals" offered in the company cafeteria were often the least healthy options on the menu, officials started to look at ways to encourage healthy eating habits.

The company began lowering the prices of certain items they deemed smarter choices. The price of whole fruit was reduced. A heart-smart daily lunch special, sold at a discount, was introduced. And now, once a week, the salad bar becomes an all-you-can-eat deal for a reasonable price. The company has made other changes as well, adding a made-to-order sushi bar and skillet station that have also helped sell healthier alternatives.

At Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida, prices of items deemed "healthy" by the company have been reduced 25%. The result has been a 42% increase in the sale of more nutritious menu

items. The company has a three-to-five year plan to achieve a healthier employee base. Other incentives there include on-site Weight Watchers classes, a web-based walking program, and a plan to establish an on-site fitness center in collaboration with the local YMCA.

In Illinois, the “Fresh Start” program at Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Systems received a Spotlight Award from the National Association for Healthcare Foodservice Management for encouraging healthy eating. Foods that meet criteria set by the hospital’s dieticians are priced at 25% below their overall average menu price list. All Fresh Start foods are labeled, and Point-of-Sale signage alerts customers to the price, calories, and fat grams for each item. Providing this information is critical for consumers who wish to monitor their caloric and/or nutrition intake.

Unidine has embarked on a number of initiatives to provide healthy alternatives at all of our food stations. These options include low fat cheeses, home-made low fat calorie salad dressings, condiments, turkey bacon, low-carbohydrate breads, and fruit or a small side salad in place of potato chips. For dessert, healthy choices include fresh fruit, yogurt parfait, Jello and puddings.

Vegetarian menus are also getting renewed attention from many in the food service industry. One New York-based company that specializes in parks and resorts recently hosted a vegetarian conference for its chefs. Its focus was to show that vegetarian menus can go beyond salads and pasta. The company hired a renowned French chef to teach them how to prepare creative non-meat entrees that combine hearty protein, whole grains and unsaturated fat.

Some organizations have even turned their attention to reducing portion size. At the University of Massachusetts’ flagship campus in Amherst, an array of student and faculty health initiatives have been introduced, including reduced portion sizes. A chicken breast is now three ounces instead of four, and five ounce portions have been reduced to three to four ounces. At Unidine, half-portions are available at certain stations.

One food service contractor in the education sector has even introduced a healthy alternative to celebrate milestone events in the classroom. Instead of cakes, cookies and cupcakes, parents and teachers can order nutritious party packages that include trays of fruits and vegetables. Offering these types of healthy menu alternatives is just another way the food service industry is helping to combat childhood obesity.

One area often overlooked is vending. Ironically, even as American companies promote healthier lifestyles to employees, most vending machines continue to offer high sugar and fattening snacks. It may be some time before there are widespread changes in this area, but one initiative food service management contractors, including Unidine, have embarked on is posting nutrition information on vending machines to better inform consumers.

Eliminating Trans Fat

Eating healthy all begins with food preparation. This is the key to good health. Healthier menus start with fresh, not processed, ingredients. One item receiving a large share of national media attention is trans fat. Some restaurants, like fast-food chain Wendy's, have voluntarily eliminated trans fat-containing oils from all of their products. Other American companies have followed Wendy's lead. J.M. Smucker Company has reformulated its line of Crisco shortening products after 95 years to contain zero trans fats grams per serving. In other cases, the government has intervened. In 2006, New York City became the first city in the nation to outlaw the artery-clogging fat in its restaurants, decreeing that all city eateries must stop using trans fat-filled frying oils and shortenings by July 2007. A bill introduced in Philadelphia recently would do the same. Other U.S. cities, including Cleveland, are also looking into a ban.

The commercial food service community is responding but more slowly. The number of food items containing trans fat numbers is in the thousands and trying to find alternatives would be very costly and result in supply shortages. Where possible, Unidine has begun eliminating trans fat-containing cooking oils from its kitchens. Some companies have even taken oil out of the equation all together, replacing them with more healthful ingredients such as chicken or vegetable stock.

Incorporating Organics

The perception among consumers is that organically-grown produce is healthier than conventionally grown produce. There is mounting evidence that organically grown fruits, vegetables and grains may offer significantly more of several nutrients including vitamin C, iron, magnesium and phosphorus, and less exposure to nitrates and pesticide residues than their counterparts grown using synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. (*The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine)*. Research by students at Truman State University in Missouri found organically grown oranges contained up to 30 percent more vitamin C than those grown conventionally. (Source: *Science Daily Magazine*)

Organically grown fruits and vegetables show significantly higher levels of cancer-fighting antioxidants than conventionally grown foods, according to a study that appeared in the 2/26/06 edition of the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Chemical Society, the world's largest scientific society. For example, the levels of antioxidants in sustainably-grown corn were 58.5 percent higher than conventionally grown corn. Organically grown strawberries showed about 19 percent more antioxidants than conventionally grown strawberries. According to this research, increases in antioxidants can have a significant

impact on health and nutrition, and are beginning to change the way people think about their food.

But organics alone do not create behavioral changes. As evidence, The Organic Trade Association reports organics is now a $10 billion industry and growing – but only accounts for only about 2% of the U.S. market, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And Gene Kahn, head of Sustainability at Kellogg, says it will be a long time until organics impact most of our diets. Kahn believes our focus should be to produce healthier food while educating Americans about the benefits of these better choices. The organics trend is also evident at most companies and institutions. While the contract food service industry has written extensively on this topic over the past year, only recently have companies and institutions begun asking food service providers to offer organically grown produce. While more expensive, companies like Unidine are able to meet client demands for this offering.

Some of the nation's grocery chains are aiding in these efforts, supporting sustainable agriculture and educating consumers so they can make informed choices about what they are buying. Maine-based Hannaford Supermarkets, which operates 150 food and drug stores in New England, has a new nutritional rating system. Hannaford's "Guiding Stars" is the first-ever storewide nutrition navigation system. It gives consumers a quick, at-a-glance tool to help find the most nutritious items in the store. When consumers see the Guiding Stars icon, a runner and stars, on shelf tags, it indicates greater nutritional value. Massachusetts-based Roche Brothers has a brochure of all organically produced foods available and is now running separate flyers for these products.

Whole Foods, the world's leading retailer of natural and organic foods, with close to 200 stores in North America and the United Kingdom, goes a step further, with its unique commitment to both sustainable agriculture *and* consumer education. The company participated with industry and governmental agencies to establish the National Organic Standards and created its Good Organics program, enabling it to become the first nationally certified organic grocer. Whole Foods has helped organic farms in the US and Canada grow to represent nearly half of the $31.9 billion world organic food industry. Because of its philosophy to educate consumers about natural and organic foods, health, nutrition and the environment, Whole Foods this year became one of America's most admired companies.

The website http://www.organicconsumers.org/action.htm provides a list of actions consumers can take right now to help build a strong economy, based on sustainable agriculture, while protecting your health and the environment.

Supporting Sustainable Agriculture and Local Growers

But it is not just about organics. It's also about selecting seasonally produced, locally-grown foods. At Unidine, we support organic farmers, growers and the environment through our commitment to sustainable agriculture and by expanding the market for organic products. Establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with local growers is one way Unidine promotes sustainable agriculture. As an example, we've initiated an important relationship with a community-supported agriculture program at a western Massachusetts farm. With this partnership, we are coordinating the receipt and distribution of organic produce from the farm to a select group of clients during the May to November growing season. This fresh, locally-grown produce will be incorporated into our daily menus and salad bars. The program serves as a model for embarking on other similar partnerships throughout the company. Unidine is also working with its largest vendors to ensure organic and locally-grown alternatives are available.

Conclusion

More and more, the commercial food service industry is beginning to focus its resources to position itself as a change agent. By eliminating unhealthy ingredients from its menus, choosing fresh, locally-grown, and organic products whenever possible, and developing menus that incorporate creative vegetarian and low-fat dishes, contractors have embraced the opportunity to create a healthier America.

Most importantly, by developing innovative nutrition education programs, and making critical resources, like registered dieticians, available, the food service community is helping to change our attitudes and perceptions about food and provide us with the tools we need to make meaningful changes in our diets and our lives.

Putting our expertise on the table®

Unidine Corporation
One Gateway Center, Suite 751
Newton, MA 02458
1.877.UNIDINE (1.877.864.3463)
www.unidine.com