

Bell column: Making nutrition work at work

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Our food environment focuses on convenience, fast foods and large portion sizes, neglecting fresh fruit and vegetables. We eat on the run, in the car or between meetings. Unfortunately, by and large, readily available options typically are not very healthy. It is primarily because of our challenging food environment that we consistently fall short of consuming the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables each day and are seeing increasing health issues related to poor nutrition.

The workplace is oftentimes the last place healthy foods are considered, but it is the perfect site to encourage healthy eating. Even small changes can have big impacts on health, and worksites can greatly influence healthy behaviors. When attempting to make healthy food choices easier and more accepted, it is important to consider the kind of foods served in cafeterias, at meetings or at events, and the adequacy of food storage, preparation space and tools for foods brought into the environment. A supportive environment for eating healthy can help with work-related issues like alertness and [productivity](#)

and can lead to fewer sick days and happier employees. However, how to best to incorporate healthy food choices at the worksite is a consistent issue in worksite wellness promotion.

In March, the Central Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Network focused on how organizations can support healthy nutrition and eating at work. Professionals from throughout Central Wisconsin gathered to discuss the challenges and opportunities of providing healthy food options at work, listened to experts provide helpful information about advancing nutrition through worksite wellness programming and shared their experiences through a speed-networking session.

Central Rivers Farmshed was highlighted as an important community resource. Farmshed's mission is to expand connections between people and their food by providing opportunities for participation, [education](#)

, cooperation and action to support a local food economy. For companies and organizations, Farmshed also provides important education to help make informed decisions about food and food choices. The organization assists companies in developing relationships with producers, identifying where to buy locally grown foods, and making the business case for providing fresh locally grown foods.

How can this impact wellness at work? One of the ways is to bring the food to the people. Since 2010, in a partnership between the Marshfield Clinic and Aspirus, an on-site farmers market has been available to employees from June to September at the Marshfield Clinic Wausau Center.

This special opportunity allows the organization to encourage healthy food consumption while also providing local farmers an opportunity to sell their locally grown fruits, vegetables, fresh-cut flowers and herbs. Along with the farmers market, [educational](#)

opportunities also help people choose new foods or utilize their favorites in recipes. This opportunity has helped employees increase their vegetable and fruit intake while appreciating the convenience.

When a farmers market is not an option, another avenue is community supported agriculture. CSA describes a partnership between producers and community members in which people purchase "[shares](#)

” of the farm’s produce. Most CSAs will provide shares weekly, summer through fall. Shares usually amount to a container about the size of a copier paper box full of fresh, locally grown goods.

To help bring this type of service closer to their employees, Aspirus provides special opportunities to win a [CSA share](#)

purchased by the Wellness Committee. Through the Aspire to Be FIT program, participants complete an activity to be entered into a drawing. Weekly winners are chosen and can enjoy the great quantities of fresh foods. Some winning departments will even host a potluck to share in the spoils. In addition, education and recipes are shared, encouraging people to use these foods daily in fun and creative ways.

During the meeting, CWWWN participants also explored practical ways to incorporate locally grown and fresh foods into their lives. For most, utilizing all of a CSA share, or making sure to not waste fresh foods, is important. To help, Flexible Nutrition Solutions provided simple tips to help make fresh foods an exciting and easy-to-manage venture, including:

- Eat the spoilers early – have plans for the ingredients that will go bad first.
- Bring whole veggies to work – consider replacing other snacks or lunch items with the fresh foods you now have, like putting together a simple salad.
- Share – Give vegetables and fruits to others, or make community areas at work to share.
- Freeze – Save for later.
- Can it – Try simple ways to make your foods last and new recipes for your freshly canned items.

These simple ideas can help people make smarter and healthier choices and make it easier for companies and organizations to support locally grown foods.

The Central Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Network meets quarterly to [share ideas](#)

on wellness programming. The next CWWWN Meeting will be June 10 at Ministry Health Care, 2501 Main Street. The focus of the meeting will be on physical activity and wellness programming. For more information on the CWWWN or Portage County CAN, please visit www.portagecountycan.org/worksite-wellness.

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