

# Hospital menus feature locally grown produce

## At Jean Talon Hospital, 20% of produce comes from West Island organic farm

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At the far western end of the island of Montreal, in the countryside setting of the Cap St. Jacques nature park, young adults grow fruits and vegetables at the D3 Pierres organic farm.

For the past six years, their produce has been served at Jean Talon Hospital, 30 kilometres away in the middle of Montreal. In 2012, 20 per cent of the fresh fruits and vegetables served at the hospital's cafeteria came from the D3 Pierres farm.

It started in 2007, when a microbiologist working at the hospital suggested it take part in a challenge issued by the environmental group Équiterre for institutions to use locally grown food.

Now, every week during the growing season, the hospital's food services team chooses from the farm's available produce — such as peppers, lettuces, cucumbers or onions — and places an order to be delivered to the kitchen the next day.

The vegetables are used in anything from salads to soups, and signs and posters in the cafeteria identify which foods contain the local vegetables, said Chantal Bouchard, head of food services at the CSSS de Coeur de l'île.

Sometimes the vegetables

offered by the farm are more unusual — like Jerusalem artichokes or kale, Bouchard said. Luckily, the farm, Équiterre, and even the Internet are ready to help out with recipe ideas, Bouchard said.

In a new report published Monday, Équiterre says that the example of Jean Talon Hospital shows that it is possible for institutions to choose more locally grown food. The willingness is there, Équiterre says. A survey it did in 2011 found that 80 per cent of health institu-

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CHANTAL BOUCHARD, JEAN TALON HOSPITAL

tions were interested in using more local products.

There are many benefits beyond providing fresh nutritious foods, Équiterre said. It reduces the effects and cost of transportation, cuts down on packaging and helps stimulate the local economies where the producers are located.

The report looked at two local hospitals that increased the amount of locally grown produce in their food services — [Jean Talon Hospital](#) and [Cité de la Santé Hospital in Laval](#). At Cité de la Santé, produce grown

at Laval's Ferme d'Auteuil is used in such dishes as cabbage casseroles, fruit salads and homemade yogurt.

But it isn't always easy. Institutions face challenges, including higher prices for local foods, difficulty acquiring local foods out of season, and regulations that require them to go to public tender for large food contracts.

Équiterre suggests several solutions for institutions to lower the cost of buying locally grown food, such as buying fresh produce in season and frozen produce during the winter, and using produce that might not look perfect, such as a crooked cucumber that could be sliced and used in a salad.

It also points to institutions that have inserted clauses into the contracts requiring a certain amount — 10 per cent for example — of frozen vegetables must be from Canada or that the cost of locally grown produce can be 10 per cent higher than other produce.

At Jean Talon, the hospital has contracts in place for prepared foods, but has more leeway when it comes to purchasing fresh foods, Bouchard said. She said the hospital offsets the higher cost of buying organic produce during the summer by carefully managing its food budget during the winter.

“It's very important for us and we're very proud of it,” Bouchard said.

The Équiterre report is at [equiterre.org](#)

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