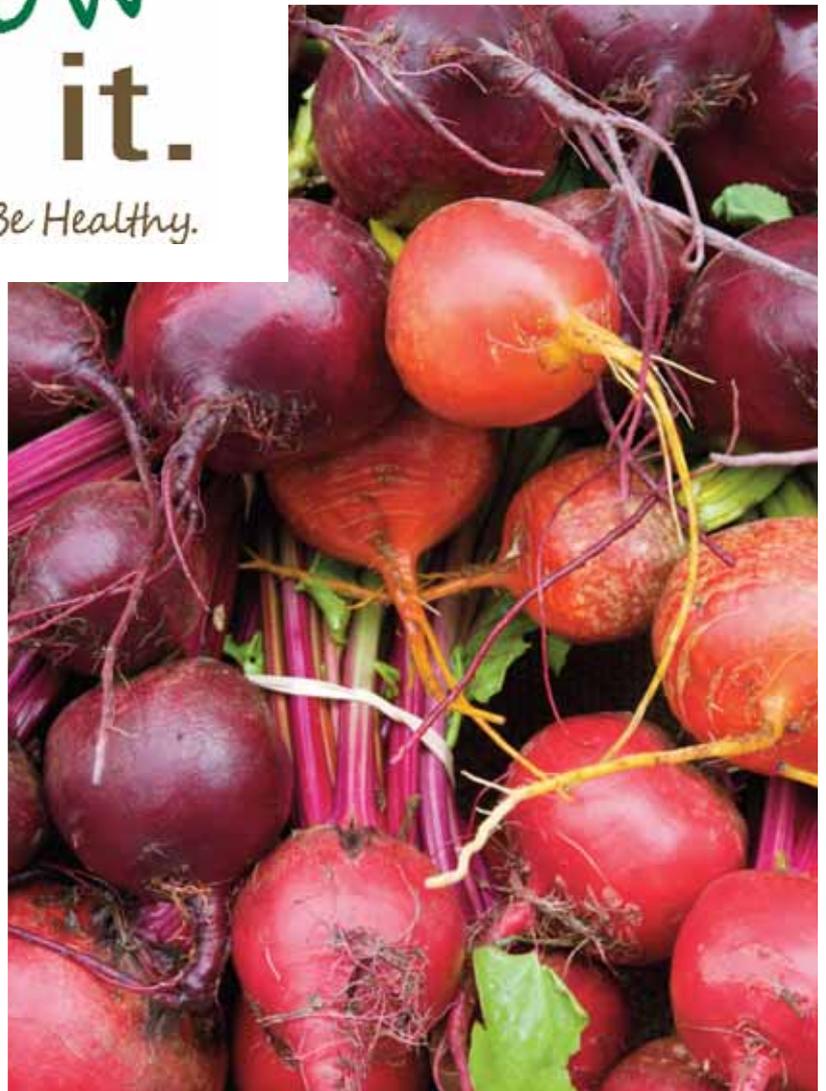
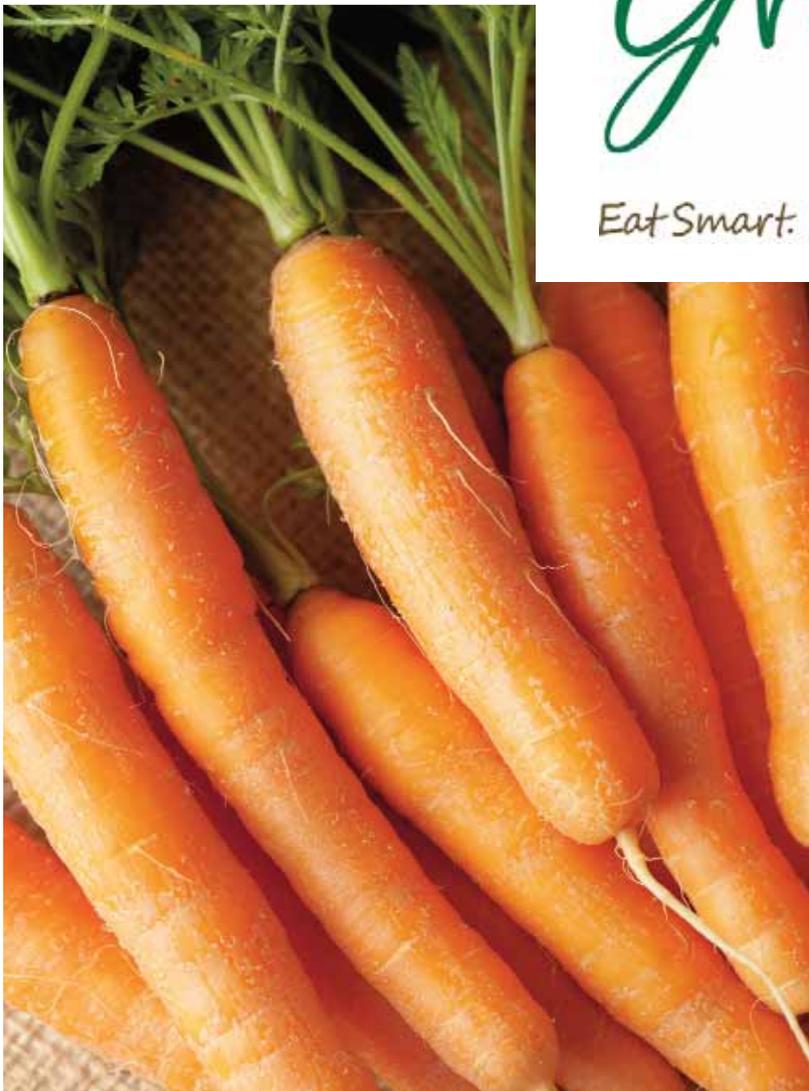


Just
Grow
it.

Eat Smart. Be Healthy.





Eat Smart. Be Healthy.



Fighting the War on Obesity at Work and at Home

During the past several decades, our relationship with food has changed, and not for the better. With two out of every three Mainers either obese or overweight, the harmful effects of our poor food choices are increasing our rates of life altering diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer and driving employer's health care costs to unsustainable levels. In 2004, the health care costs of obesity in Maine was estimated at \$357 million.

The "Just Grow It!" program, a menu of options to increase employees' connection to fresh, nutritious produce, is designed to use the power of the workplace to engage, inspire and activate staff in a war against consumption of non-nutrient rich food. Inspired by the Victory Gardens of WW I and WW II, an era when pressure on the public food supply enlisted Americans in a movement to grow vegetable fruit and herb gardens in back yards or public parks, "Just Grow It!" enlists employees in a lifestyle movement that re-connects them to their physical well-being, through gardening and purchase of locally grown produce.

As an employer-supported "wellness" program, "Just Grow It!" will activate healthier eating habits, boost morale and productivity, and serve as a foundational prevention strategy in the war on chronic disease and ever-rising health care costs.

Healthy Employees Build Healthy Companies

Whether your company has an established wellness program or is looking to begin one but isn't sure where to begin, encouraging healthy, local food choices doesn't have to be expensive or difficult to establish.

The *Just Grow It!* program can be customized to each employer. It can be as simple as bringing baskets of fresh fruit into break

rooms to encourage healthier snacking, or it can be as comprehensive as building onsite raised bed gardens.

Whether they grow it themselves or buy it from a local farmers' market, the ultimate goal of *Just Grow It!* is to raise awareness of healthy choices and the benefits of natural, locally grown food.

↑ Health Risk = ↑ Health Care Costs

↓ Health Risk = ↓ Health Care Costs

Focusing on the health and productivity of your workforce will help you realize significant gains over the short and long term. Employees who are stressed, unhappy, or unhealthy have a much-greater chance of becoming ill. When they do get sick, companies pay the cost in lost productivity and higher insurance premiums.

Beyond the monetary returns on investment in wellness programs—which range from a low of \$1.87 to a high of more than \$6 for every dollar spent—the benefits to your employees and your company are significant, including:

- Retaining hard working employees;
- Recruiting healthy, productive workers;
- Reducing absenteeism;
- Reducing health care benefit claims expenditures;
- Decreasing workers' compensation claims expenses;
- Reducing presenteeism; and,
- Enhancing job satisfaction.

An unexpected by-product of such activities is the enhanced morale, increased goodwill, and better teamwork established by offering programs and services that improve your workforce's quality of life. And should you choose to do so, donating all or part of your harvest may also fit into your charitable giving and community involvement activities. Above all, promoting a healthy workforce is the right thing to do!



CULTIVATED FOR YOU BY LEADERSHIP MAINE'S TAU CLASS:

Melanie Baillargeon; Carol Colson; Fred Diehl; Gail Evans; Dennis Lajoie; Guy Langevin; Anne Morin; Alistair Raymond; Caroline Segalla; Becky Thibodeaux

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Locations

Your business can participate in the “Just Grow It!” program even if on-site gardening space is unavailable or the business’ facilities are leased and not owned. If your business is in an urban setting or lacks suitable on-site gardening space, consider partnering with another organization with suitable space. Many communities offer plots in community gardens, which are available to local businesses. For businesses that lease facilities, landlords and co-tenants will more than likely be supportive of raised beds or container gardening program once they see how attractive, low-impact, and beneficial gardens can be.

Raised Beds & Containers

Raised beds and containers are two ways to grow fruits and vegetables in a workplace environment. Both methods have the advantages of improved drainage, higher yields, and a longer growing season compared to ground-level gardening. Raised beds are simple to build and tend to cost less than container systems, with an estimated cost of less than \$100 for materials and soil. Raised beds also tend to require less watering than containers. Containers, however, are transportable, can be elevated to reduce bending, and are less accessible to pests. Their capacity may also be limited relative to raised beds (see Resources page).



see reverse...

MORE OPTIONS

Farmers' Markets & CSAs

With more than 160 farms and 6,500+ shares, Maine's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) community is transforming relationships with food and farms. There is no formula to a CSA. Each is as unique as the community supporting it. The bottom line is that people make commitments to farms, and in return farmers make commitments to grow for their members the freshest, most flavorful, highest quality food possible. CSAs build a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship between local agriculture and community.

Maine farmers' markets offer high quality, delicious foods and agricultural products, harvested fresh and sold direct to you by your neighbors, the farmers. Markets are located throughout the state, and each offers a unique blend of personalities and products. Visit more than one to enjoy all the flavors of Maine!

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association website (see Resources page) can help you locate CSAs by town and/or county; learn how to start a CSA if one does not exist in your area; and, find a complete list of Maine farmers' markets. Other good resources are the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets (www.MFFM.org) and Get Real Maine (<http://www.getrealmaine.com/>).

Several Maine farms, farmers' markets and farm stands now accept cards from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (www.benefits.gov). SNAP provides food assistance benefits that help low income households buy the food they need for good health. The amount of food assistance benefits each household receives is based on the Thrifty Food Plan, the model diet plan the U.S. Department of Agriculture (www.cnpp.usda.gov) uses to project the cost of food for one month for different household sizes.

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Challenges & Incentives

Challenge your employees by identifying activities that focus on practicing a desired behavior, in this case gardening. Challenges should focus on specific outcomes such as the amount of food produced from the garden. Create an incentive strategy that will motivate and reward employee participation and goal completion. Incentives show the organizational commitment to the program and motivate employees to participate. Incentives commonly vary, but can include such things as time off, reduction in health insurance premiums or co-pays, or the obvious, free produce from the garden.

Educational Opportunities

Empower your employees with knowledge in an atmosphere of participation, creativity and fun through activities such as "Lunch & Learn" sessions. Invite a Master Gardener to your workplace to answer questions, provide helpful hints and encourage your employees to develop gardens in the workplace and/or at home. Create a sense of community and sharing within the workplace through recipe swaps. Share experiences, knowledge and resources for canning and preserving the harvest. Knowledge of the variety of fresh produce and ways to prepare and preserve them will promote a sustainable healthy future for your employees and their families, and support their consumption of five fruits and vegetables each day.

Community Outreach

"Just Grow It!" is an opportunity for your business to partner in philanthropy with businesses and nonprofits in your community. At any given time, 15% of Maine families lack access to adequate food. An estimated 200,000 Mainers are living with hunger. Food pantries and soup kitchens are struggling to meet the need. Your business' gardening program can make a significant impact. The University of Maine's Harvest for Hunger program, for example (see Resources page), has donated almost 600 tons of fresh produce to hungry Mainers since 2000. A directory of Maine food pantries and soup kitchens is available at www.foodpantries.org/st/maine.





Successful Business Examples

Employer-sponsored gardens are cropping up to boost workplace morale and improve wellness through gardening. The Wall Street Journal recently covered this phenomenon, and Minneapolis-based public relations company Haberman was one of the primary case studies. In 2011, Haberman invested in a garden for its 30 employees; in exchange for their sweat and labor, they can take home the fruits (and vegetables).

Locally, IDEXX (www.idexx.com) employees were able to grow hundreds of pounds of produce – all of which is donated to local food pantries – through its campus gardening program launched in 2011.

Working with MaineGeneral Health's wellness coaches (www.maine-general.org) to enhance existing wellness efforts, as well as a local Cooperative Extension Partnership liaison, employees at Kennebec Technologies (www.kennebec.com) in Augusta built six raised beds and a 6' by 8' green house in the fall of 2011, for an initial investment of approximately \$1,500. The company will begin its first planting season in the spring of 2012.

Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (www.harvardpilgrim.org) reports that its worksite garden has built teamwork, gotten people interested in the ingredients they use, and encouraged cooking instead of relying on takeout. The company also offers farmers market coupons and sponsors the Let's Go! / 5210 (www.lets-go.org) program. Employees donate excess produce and offer samplings in their cafeteria. Sharing recipes has become a common "water cooler" activity as well.

University of Maine Cooperative Extension

As a trusted resource for almost 100 years, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (<http://extension.umaine.edu/>) is the only entity in our state that touches every aspect of the Maine Food System. UMaine Extension helps support, sustain, and grow the food-based economy.

UMaine Extension's programs cover many aspects of agriculture; its impact on business and community; the Farm to Fork program; food and health; gardening; home, family and youth; insect pests and plant diseases; and, natural resource. There is also a collection of recipes to help you make nutritious meals and snacks from fresh produce that you can either grow yourself or buy locally.

UMaine Extension's "Harvest for Hunger" Program

Since 2000, hundreds of volunteers have donated almost 600 tons of fresh produce to hungry Mainers through UMaine Extension's Harvest for Hunger program (<http://extension.umaine.edu/harvest-for-hunger/>). An increasing number of businesses, schools, and civic groups participate in gleaning and growing food in gardens on site or at a community garden. Educating others within and beyond your group about hunger in Maine is a great way to help. Working together to support the community is a wonderful way to build your team and strengthen bonds among your group. Online resources (<http://umaine.edu/harvest-for-hunger/resources/#promote>) discuss a wide variety of topics, from organizing your garden to food safety. For more information about how your group can get involved, contact your local Maine Harvest for Hunger coordinator (<http://umaine.edu/harvest-for-hunger/home/coordinators/>).

Other Helpful Resources

Cultivating Community (<http://www.cultivatingcommunity.org>): Active in greater Portland and greater Lewiston, Cultivating Community is committed to creating sustainable communities by feeding our hungry, empowering our youth and community, and healing our planet. A community food project, it feeds hungry people with produce grown in its urban and school gardens and at its suburban organic farm. That community food work is also a platform for youth and community development — teaching Maine youth to grow and distribute food, to learn about sustainable agriculture and food systems, and to work together to solve problems and strengthen their community.

Healthy Maine Partnerships (<http://www.healthymainepartnerships.org>): Healthy Maine Partnerships strives to engage communities, schools, hospitals, businesses, and volunteers to work together at the state and local levels to make Maine a healthier place to live and work. Its Physical Activity & Nutrition Program works with health professionals, business leaders, the food industry, policymakers, educators, the media, and citizens to improve the health and well-being of Maine people. State-wide efforts support Maine people in achieving recommended levels of physical activity and proper nutrition in the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases.

Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (www.mofga.org): Formed in 1971, MOFGA is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. MOFGA helps farmers and gardeners grow organic food, fiber and other crops; protect the environment; recycle natural resources; increase local food production; support rural communities; and, illuminate for consumers the connection between healthful food and environmentally sound farming practices. MOFGA also coordinates more than 160 farms and 6,500+ shares that make up Maine's Community Supported Agriculture community, which is transforming relationships with food and farms. The bottom line is that people make commitments to farms, and in return farmers make commitments to produce for their members the freshest, most flavorful, highest quality food possible.

