

Commissioner Jonathan Shell

Talking Points – Make America Healthy Again Kentucky Task Force Meeting

October 15, 2025

Overview

- In May 2024, the **Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA)** and the **Kentucky Hospital Association (KHA)** partnered to launch a statewide effort connecting agriculture and healthcare through the **Food is Medicine (FIM)** initiative.
 - Since then, we've been on the road—meeting with hospital staff, doctors, dietitians, farmers, extension agents, and health advocates across Kentucky.
 - Everywhere we go, the message is clear: *Food is Medicine* is working, and people want more of it.
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How It Works

- **KDA brings the farmers.**
- **KHA brings the hospitals.**
- Together, we're building local food systems that improve both patient health outcomes and the economic health of our farm communities.
- One of the first to join this effort was **Appalachian Regional Healthcare (ARH)**—and they've become a state and national leader.

Note: Hollie Harris and her team at ARH are doing outstanding work—creating real, scalable models for how hospitals can implement Food is Medicine programs. Hollie will share more details in her presentation today.

Accomplishments

- We are united under a shared mission: to make **Food is Medicine** a statewide framework that aligns **agriculture, healthcare, and public policy**.
- **41 of Kentucky's 129 hospitals** are now implementing or preparing to implement Food is Medicine programs.
 - 16 hospitals joined in the past six months alone.
 - 7 more are in the onboarding process.
- Examples of FIM in action:

- **Medically tailored meals** using local ingredients (Russell County Hospital).
 - **Farmers markets** hosted in hospital parking lots (ARH, Owensboro Health).
 - **CSA boxes** for hospital employees (Russell County Hospital, CHI St. Joseph, St. Elizabeth).
 - **Pilot programs** demonstrating measurable health improvements (Russell County Hospital again).
 - **AdventHealth Manchester** is planning to grow produce in container gardens for their cafeteria and patient meals.
 - Three systems—**CHI Saint Joseph Health, Taylor Regional, and UK King's Daughters**—have formally embedded Food is Medicine in their community health and strategic plans.
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National Recognition

- Kentucky is now recognized nationally as a **leading state model** for agricultural-healthcare integration.
 - Federal agencies like **USDA, HHS, and SBA** have highlighted our progress and collaboration.
 - We have significant hospital buy-in to make measurable progress against Kentucky's chronic disease burden, but additional agricultural infrastructure support will be needed to scale successful outcomes.
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Barriers and Complexities

Our challenges aren't about philosophy—they're about structure, regulation, and funding.

- **Fragmented and short-term funding:** Most programs rely on grants and philanthropy.
 - **Procurement barriers:** Current distributor contracts and regulations make it hard for small farms to supply hospitals.
 - **Limited infrastructure:**
 - Not enough aggregation hubs or cold storage.
 - Need consistent food safety and labeling standards for hospital compliance.
 - With anticipated federal cuts under **HR 1**, these challenges will only grow. Now is the time to act—because Food is Medicine can *reduce healthcare costs* and *improve population health*.
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Next Steps / Call to Action

1. Establish a Food is Medicine Infrastructure Revolving Loan Fund

- Create a fund through the General Assembly to help hospitals invest in local food infrastructure—like cold storage, kitchens, or aggregation hubs.
- Provide low- or zero-interest loans, prioritizing rural and critical-access hospitals.
- Replenish the fund through repayments tied to cost savings and procurement targets.

2. Align State and Federal Policy

- Work with **CHFS**, **USDA**, **CMS**, and **HHS** to integrate SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid reimbursements for medically tailored meals and food prescriptions.
- Clarify compliance questions and make Kentucky a pilot state for FIM reimbursement innovation.

3. Prepare Legislative Readiness for 2026

- Develop legislation to:
 - Fund and authorize the revolving loan program.
 - Strengthen CHFS–KDA–KHA coordination.
 - Encourage hospitals to embed Food is Medicine in their CHNAs.
 - Leverage Medicaid innovation for sustainable funding.

4. Continue Public Engagement

- Keep raising awareness through hospital and farmer recognition, media engagement, and public events.

One of My Favorite Ideas

- Integrate **CSA boxes** into the **Kentucky Employee Health Insurance Plan**:
 - Let state employees opt in to receive Kentucky-grown produce boxes as part of their wellness program.
 - Offer premium incentives for participation.
 - Use it as a pilot to show how *food-based wellness* can reduce chronic disease and healthcare costs.
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Closing Message

When **agriculture and healthcare work together**, we do more than improve diets—we build stronger communities, lower costs, and give farmers new opportunities.

Kentucky has the partnerships, the willpower, and the proof of concept.

Now, we just need the investment and policy support to make **Food is Medicine** a permanent part of how we care for Kentuckians.

KY Hospitals that have made a FIM Commitment as of 10-10-2025:

1. AdventHealth Manchester
2. ARH – Big Sandy
3. ARH – Kentucky River
4. ARH Our Lady of the Way
5. Baptist Health Corbin
6. Baptist Health Deaconess Madisonville
7. Baptist Health Louisville
8. Baptist Health Madisonville
9. Baptist Health Louisville
10. Baptist Health Paducah
11. CHI Continuing Care
12. CHI Flaget Memorial
13. CHI Saint Joseph Berea
14. CHI Saint Joseph East
15. CHI Saint Joseph
16. CHI Saint Joseph London
17. CHI Saint Joseph Mount Sterling
18. Cumberland County
19. Harlan ARH
20. Harrison Memorial Hospital
21. Hazard ARH
22. Highlands ARH
23. Mary Breckinridge ARH
24. McDowell ARH
25. Middlesboro ARH
26. Morgan County ARH
27. Murray-Calloway County
28. Norton West
29. Ohio County
30. Owensboro Health Regional Hospital
31. Paintsville ARH
32. Pikeville Medical Center
33. Russell County Hospital
34. Taylor Regional Hospital
35. Tugg Valley ARH
36. UK Albert B. Chandler
37. UK Good Samaritan Hospital
38. UK King's Daughters
39. UK St. Claire
40. UofL Health – South Hospital and 41. Whitesburg ARH