

Healthy Eating in Real Life: Nourishing Families on a Budget

By Margaret Igne,

Healthy food choices are one of the most powerful tools we have to support long-term health, prevent chronic disease, and improve overall well-being. Yet for many families, especially those living under financial pressure or managing demanding work schedules, making healthy choices is not always simple. During a recent presentation by sustainability and nutrition advocate **Giorgio Mariano**, he highlighted that our food systems are at a crossroads: we must rethink not only what we eat, but how we access food, prepare it, and prioritize it in our day-to-day lives.

Giorgio reminded us that the foundation of good nutrition does not need to be complicated. “If we return to the essentials — whole foods, seasonal produce, simple preparation — we heal both our bodies and the planet,” he said. His message was clear: healthy eating can be accessible, sustainable, and affordable when communities, institutions, and families work together.

But as I often say, **knowing the value of healthy food is one thing — living it every day is another**. In my work with families, mothers, health-care workers, and community organizations, I have seen firsthand how challenging it can be for people who are working long hours, juggling family responsibilities, or depending on limited budgets.

“We cannot talk about healthy choices without acknowledging the reality in which people live,”

I stated during the discussion.

“A parent who works all day, arrives home tired, and still must cook for the family needs solutions that are fast, affordable, and realistic — not idealized.”

Giorgio emphasized that affordability and accessibility are central to any sustainable nutrition strategy. He highlighted that simple, low-cost staples — such as beans, lentils, rice, oats, frozen vegetables, eggs, and seasonal produce — can form the backbone of a nutrient-dense diet without straining a household budget. He also explained how processed foods, although convenient, often cost more in the long run due to long-term health consequences.

To bridge the gap between knowledge and daily practice, he recommends three practical strategies:

1. Plan meals around inexpensive nutrient-dense foods

Families can reduce cost and increase nutrition by planning meals around: beans and legumes, whole grains, seasonal or frozen vegetable and affordable protein options.

2. Cook once, eat twice

Preparing larger quantities in advance helps busy families avoid fast food, save time, and reduce stress. Giorgio calls this “batch cooking as a form of self-care.”

3. Build community support

Schools, hospitals, and workplaces play a critical role.

“Healthy eating should not depend only on individual effort. Institutions must support people with better food environments.”

This includes offering healthier cafeteria options, affordable choices in hospital settings, and community programs that teach families how to prepare simple, nutritious meals at home.

The intersection of health, sustainability, and affordability is where real change happens. Good nutrition reduces disease, supports mental health, improves energy, and strengthens families. But it must be inclusive, practical, and rooted in empathy.

“We must make healthy food a right, not a privilege,” I said in closing.

“Every family deserves access to nourishment that supports health and dignity, regardless of income or schedule.”

As the MMS Alliance continues its work with the MMS Nutrition Committee and community partners, we will keep advocating for policies, education, and programs that make healthy eating truly achievable for all.