

# Farm to Corrections

PROMISING PRACTICES FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

May 2023



## Introduction

State and federal prisons across the United States feed an estimated 1.2 million people<sup>1</sup> each day and are a largely untapped market for locally grown agricultural products. Because correctional facilities are often located in rural and agricultural areas, fostering linkages between prisons and local growers can offer many advantages - for example, increased access to healthy food for incarcerated people, access to expanded markets for local growers, and economic multiplier effects for local communities. Food quality is of significant importance to incarcerated people, and prisons may also benefit from improved morale among staff and residents in the short term and improved resident health and lower health care costs in the long term.<sup>2</sup>

This brief presents succinct case studies that highlight how correctional facilities have taken different approaches to increasing access to fresh local produce. Findings are presented in three sections: (1) contracting and procurement; (2) sourcing and relationships; and (3) supplemental food. Through this resource, we seek to lift up those efforts and promising practices and also demonstrate that prisons can successfully source local food, as other large institutions, such as school districts and hospitals, have been doing for many years.

## Methods

The information presented in this brief was gathered by researchers at the University of California Nutrition Policy Institute and Impact Justice as part of an effort to increase procurement of local produce by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. We interviewed 52 key stakeholders across the United States, representing a broad range of organizations, including corrections staff at state and facility levels, produce distributors, nonprofit organizations, grower organizations, prison reform advocates, and sustainable procurement experts. The interviews were conducted by Zoom and telephone and lasted approximately one hour. They sought to identify successes, challenges, lessons learned, and promising practices with respect to prison procurement of locally grown agricultural products. The Institutional Review Board at the University of California, Davis (protocol ID 1690090) approved all aspects of this study.

To learn more about farm-to-corrections efforts in California, please review our report [Farm to Corrections: Opportunities & Challenges in Integrating California-Grown Produce into the State Prison System](#) and our fact sheet [AB 822: California's Preference Policy for Agricultural Products Grown Within the State](#).


## Promising Farm-to-Corrections Practices

Pathways to increasing the use of fresh local produce in correctional facilities include rethinking processes for contracting and procurement as well as developing relationships with local food sources.

### Contracting & Procurement

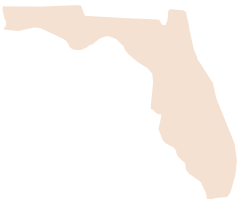
Contracting and procurement policies provide the framework that large food purchasers like correctional facilities use to decide from whom to purchase and at what price.<sup>3</sup> These policies can include parameters such as requirements to purchase produce that is grown within the institution's home state or preferences for purchases from businesses owned by people from specified groups - for example, women or veterans. In the remainder of this section, we present two examples of how correctional institutions and their partners have leveraged contracting and procurement processes to increase access to fresh and local produce.

#### Pennsylvania



In 2014, the City of Philadelphia adopted comprehensive nutrition standards<sup>4</sup> providing guidance for food procured and served by city agencies, including the Philadelphia Department of Prisons (PDP). The standards promote increased “freshness and variety of fruits and vegetables.”<sup>5</sup> The adoption of these standards involved the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) partnering with PDP in their food procurement process. In particular, PDPH takes part in reviewing and scoring food service requests for proposals in order to ensure compliance with the nutrition standards. To our knowledge, this is the only instance of health department staff involvement in food procurement contracts in a correctional setting. PDPH provides other forms of technical assistance, including menu review and recommendations for meals. PDPH staff note that although the standards were adopted by a citywide executive order, initiation of the implementation process and ongoing facilitation by upper-level administration at the facility level and the contracted food service provider have been critical to success. PDPH staff continue to meet with PDP and food service provider staff quarterly to review menus, ensure compliance with the standards, and discuss other opportunities to promote healthy menu options in PDP facilities.

#### Florida



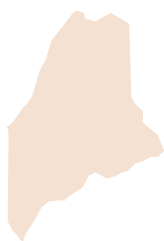
In Florida, multiple stakeholders - including the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Farm Bureau - collaborated to develop the Farm to Inmate Pilot Program,<sup>6</sup> an innovative effort that arose during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when supply chain disruptions affected prisons' ability to source fresh produce and growers struggled to find markets for their products. During its brief four-week existence, the program distributed an estimated 500,000 pounds of fresh local produce to 38 Florida state prisons. A key factor in the success of this effort was the state's ability to fast-track approval for growers to sell to state agencies, reducing the timeframe from several weeks to several days.

Producers, correctional staff, and incarcerated people all expressed satisfaction with this initiative, which offered fresh produce at competitive prices. This partnership between the

public and private sectors demonstrates that it is possible for correctional institutions to quickly pivot and fill a market gap for producers. It also shows that by aggregating product, local growers and distributors can effectively meet demand from large institutional purchasers. The effort ended after supply chain disruptions were addressed and previously existing contractual relationships resumed.

## Sourcing & Relationships

A key ingredient in purchasing local agricultural products is developing and maintaining relationships with local producers.<sup>7</sup> Correctional institutions can source directly from local producers, cooperatives, and food hubs or through distributors that carry local products.<sup>8</sup> Here, we present two examples of how correctional institutions can source directly from local producers.



### Maine

In 2020, Maine's government instituted a law mandating that all state agencies purchase 20% Maine-produced food by 2025. Even before the law, however, the Maine Department of Corrections' (MDOC) Mountain View Correctional Facility had a history of local purchasing practices, largely due to the efforts of one food service manager who has actively sought to build relationships with producers.

Now, during Maine's six-month growing season, MDOC's facilities purchase fresh fruits and vegetables directly from local farmers and distributors, negotiating affordable prices for items that grocery stores turn down for their imperfect appearance but still lend themselves to sauces, salads, stir-fries, and stews. Some items, like potatoes and apples, can be purchased locally year-round. MDOC staff also appreciate that their large corporate distributor indicates which items on order lists are Maine-grown, making it easy to select local items.

Mountain View Correctional Facility's food service manager, who has instigated local purchasing efforts department-wide, explains that the time and energy he has spent to build local relationships has been a meaningful investment, leading to producers who are willing to sell even high-value items, like local fresh mushrooms, at a mutually agreeable price point. Growers are pleased to have the extra income for produce they might not otherwise sell, and prisons seize the opportunity to provide more varied and nutritious meals.



### Montana

Montana Women's Prison (MWP) has developed relationships with a number of local producers who supply the facility with a range of locally grown agricultural products. The prison also procures from local distributors, who prioritize locally grown products. MWP estimates that approximately 90% of the fruits and vegetables served in the facility are fresh. The prison has a popular self-serve salad bar; residents can serve themselves and can take as much salad as they want.

A benefit of direct relationships with local producers is the ability to purchase excess product at deeply discounted rates. When storage capacity is limited, the prison rents freezer space from a nearby business, which is still cost-effective. MWP is unique in that

the food service manager writes nutritionally compliant menus based on what is available rather than making purchases based on pre-written menus. This practice allows the facility to take advantage of seasonally available products and cost savings on excess product from local farms. The food service manager estimates that procuring from local producers entails an additional half hour to one hour of work each week. The food service manager noted that the facility is small - 200 residents - which makes this approach more feasible.

## Supplemental Food Options

Incarcerated people can purchase food at canteens (also known as *commissaries*) located in prisons and can also receive food in care packages purchased from friends and family. Canteens and care packages may offer dried fruits and vegetables; however, to our knowledge, with one exception, none offer fresh produce. Here is an example of a vendor whose care packages include fresh produce:



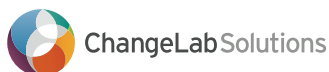
### New York

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) works with a vendor that offers fresh local produce in care packages that family and friends can purchase for incarcerated people. As in other states, these packages must be sent through approved vendors that comply with all guidelines; they cannot be sent directly by families. To our knowledge, however, New York is the only state that permits inclusion of fresh fruits and vegetables in care packages. One DOCCS vendor works with distributors that source from local growers. This vendor reports high demand for fruits and vegetables, which account for an estimated 20% of sales. Although this effort benefits only residents who receive care packages, New York's policy offers an innovative model for increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables for incarcerated individuals. In addition to improving access to fresh produce in provided meals, correctional systems in other states should also consider offering affordable fresh produce through supplemental avenues like care packages and canteens or commissaries - a desire expressed by many who have experienced incarceration.

## Conclusion

The examples in this report represent creative approaches to building relationships between prisons and local growers and increasing incarcerated people's access to a wider variety of fresh local fruits and vegetables. We hope that these examples will serve as inspiration and models for stakeholders who are promoting a more sustainable food system and working to improve food environments in correctional settings.

## Acknowledgments



ChangeLab Solutions is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that uses the tools of law and policy to advance health equity. We partner with communities across the nation to improve health and opportunity by changing harmful laws, policies, and systems. Our interdisciplinary team works with community organizations, governments, and local institutions to design and implement equitable and practical policy solutions to complex health challenges.



The Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI) envisions a world in which healthy food, beverages, and opportunities for physical activity are accessible, affordable, equitable, and sustainable for everyone. NPI's mission is to conduct and translate policy-relevant research to transform environments for healthy children, families, and communities.

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