

Sustainable Prisons: Con or Pro?

by Roberta Cruger, Los Angeles on 08. 6.09



Photo via Flickr by [azrainman](#)

As the US tries to close Gitmo, yet expects other countries to take our detainees, the town of Standish, Michigan is standing up to save the day and save its devastated economy by offering its maximum-security prison to the Feds. It could keep its prison up and running and residents employed. There's a form of reuse. Meanwhile, one of the onerous financial culprits, [Bernie Madoff](#), is locked up in a LEED-certified big house. What's wrong (or right) with this picture?



Photo via Flickr by [Tim Pearce, Los Gatos](#)

[Conman Madoff](#) is doing time in Butner Federal Prison, outside Durham, N.C., reports Stephanie Rogers of [MNN](#), who lists the facility's green features: bicycle storage, alternative fuel refueling stations, storm water management, an exterior design to reduce the heat island effect, water-smart landscaping, low-flow plumbing fixtures, optimized energy performance, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, locally sourced materials, and 70 percent of construction waste recycled. It also uses green cleaning products.

As indicated recently in a *New York Times* story about the [green prisons](#) by Beth Schwartzapel, this could be an indication of the future of correctional facilities – at least those that make a difference.

The Greening of Prison Farms

The organic farm at [Bastøy Prison](#) in Norway has been written about in Treehugger previously, but even high-security penitentiaries are now following its lead. Inmates at Cedar Creek Correctional Center in Washington State grow organic produce, compost food waste, participate in ecological research with nearby Evergreen College, and make honey from prison hives. Goodbye to painting license plates and cracking gravel.

Washington State has 34 LEED-certified facilities. At Stafford Creek Correctional Center near Aberdeen, there's a greenhouse where inmates sprout plants from seeds and compost prison garbage, reducing landfill by 1000 tons annually. In a report by Amanda Wills in [Earth911](#), she explains how the plants are transferred to Fort Lewis Army Base for its native landscaping project. This isn't about cheap labor picking strawberries in 100-degree heat with a big agribusiness contract.

Inmate Daniel Smith, who's in for manufacturing meth, spoke to [Oregon Public Broadcasting](#) about the Sustainable Prisons Project: "I've really realized the damage that was caused by the chemicals [to the environment]...and I just feel I can use this to be a better person once I return to society."

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is also on board with 16 retrofitting projects to save \$3 million in energy costs each year with solar and wind power, and biofuel energy.

Besides the benefits of reducing energy and water, and recycling, if these programs train the more than two million people behind bars and prepare those incarcerated for a green economy when released, we're all better off.

