

20 Organizations Planting the Seeds for Food Justice in Prisons



*Image courtesy of West Virginia Division of Corrections
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Prisons and other organizations around the world are creating and implementing sustainable food programs to bring better nutrition to incarcerated people. Many inmates do not receive proper nutrition, with some facilities rationing meals on less than US\$1.20 per day.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that food “not only affects physical and mental health,” but is also key to an inmate’s successful rehabilitation and resettlement upon release. Recognizing this, many organizations and correctional facilities are striving to create a stronger and more sustainable food system among prison populations, which totaled more than 10.35 million globally in 2016, according to the World Prison Brief.

Food sustainability in prisons can help inmates receive more nutritious food, learn about sustainable agricultural practices, and obtain vocational training experiences that can help them integrate back into society. A 2016 study from Arcadia University notes that prisoners in the United States who participate in farm-based vocational training increase their likelihood of finding employment upon release—and decrease the chance of recidivism by 20 percent.

To highlight the favorable effects these efforts have on incarcerated individuals, Food Tank brings you 20 organizations planting the seeds for a future with food sustainability in prisons.

1. Australian Centre For International Agricultural Research, Papua New Guinea

The Australian Centre For International Agricultural Research extends its establishment of food secure systems among rural smallholders to correctional facilities in Papua New Guinea (PNG). In collaboration with the National Fisheries Authority of PNG, the Centre pays dividends to various correctional facilities to teach both officers and inmates the basics of fish farming. Additionally, inmates receive a reliable source of both income and food through partnerships with nearby markets.

2. Bastøy Prison, Norway

The Bastøy Prison in Norway is the world’s first eco-friendly prison, guided by the principles of normalization, which strive to make living conditions closely resemble that of society, and promoting a productive lifestyle among its inmates. The Bastøy Prison offers monthly stipends for ingredients that inmates buy, and later use, to assemble their own meals. Additionally, prison staffers provide educational guidance in environmental sustainability, agricultural development, waste recycling, and the production of organic crops.

3. Food Matters, United Kingdom

Operating within the borders of the United Kingdom since 2003, Food Matters is a nonprofit organization geared towards creating a sustainable, fair food system across all aspects of society. Recognizing that the limited physical exercise offered to U.K. inmates exacerbates their susceptibility to obesity, Food Matters coordinates with agencies on the local and national level to expand its programs that offer nutritious food access. Moreover, Food Matters incentivizes participation in its in-prison workshops that both educate selected groups of inmates on healthy eating and train prison staffers to better meet the nutritious needs of those inmates.

4. The Ghana Prisons Service, Ghana

The Ghana Prisons Service equips inmates with modern cultivation skills to create agricultural activity in Ghana's prisons and make the standards of its prison system consistent with internationally recognized norms. The Service provides resources to create in-prison farms and teaches inmates how to harvest a diversity of crops. This model of teaching sustainable agriculture practices aligns with the government's goal of increasing food security in the country.

5. Harvest Now, United States

Harvest Now is a Connecticut-based organization that operates in more than 85 prisons across multiple states and aims to alleviate hunger in underserved communities by cooperating with correctional facilities. The organization supplies inmates with free fruit and vegetable seeds to teach prison populations agricultural skills that better prepare them for employment upon release. Simultaneously, Harvest Now donates the inmates' harvest to nearby food banks, with some counties receiving as much as 24,000 pounds of produce annually.

6. IDEP Foundation, Indonesia

By partnering with the Begli State Prison in Indonesia for more than two decades, the IDEP Foundation gives prisoners a chance to lead their communities in organic permaculture farming. The IDEP Foundation adopts a two-prong approach of combating both the environmental devastation of natural disasters and the growing trend of nearby tribal communities relying more on chemically based agriculture. To achieve this umbrella goal, the Foundation rehabilitates inmates, offers vocational training, and encourages the full integration of a permaculture farming system for Bali inmates.

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7. International Committee of the Red Cross, Zimbabwe

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) launched its Therapeutic Feeding Programme in 2009, with the Zimbabwe Prison Service, to improve the nutritional situation of the country's inmates. Serving those that are acutely malnourished, the organization provides the essential three daily meal portions to prison inmates. As of the publication of this list, the ICRC operates in 13 other Zimbabwe prisons and offers food assistance to 65 percent of the country's inmates.

8. Michigan Department of Corrections, United States

Going against the popular idea of prison privatization, the Michigan Department of Corrections ended its reliance on contracted food vendors and now incorporates locally grown produce into its prisons' cafeterias. The Department greatly improved the nutritional quality of the food it provides as a result of this transition, and it expanded its prisons' menus to include locally grown potatoes, carrots, collard greens, corn, cabbage, and beets. Now, 43,000 inmates are receiving nutritious meals daily, with the Department's decision to rely more on locally grown efforts increasing the efficiency of its services, as well.

9. Mission Minimum Institution, Canada

In response to many Aboriginal communities resorting to crimes provoked by a lack of food, the Mission Minimum Institution created a partnership with the Correctional Service of Canada to grow one of the province's most productive prison gardens. The Mission Minimum Institution employs its inmates in agricultural work programs that donate all harvested produce to nearby Aboriginal communities. The Mission Minimum Institution currently collects more than 150,000 pounds of organic produce each year and is a vital component in meeting the food demands of local communities and food banks.

10. Monroe Correctional Complex, United States

The Monroe Correctional Complex is a Washington State Department of Corrections men's prison with an expansive vermiculture program for its inmates. The program offers education in sustainability and vocational training for its housed offenders, who repurpose discarded materials into homes for more than 5 million worms. Most proudly, the Monroe Correctional Complex credits their vermiculture program for processing thousands of pounds of food scraps every month. This processing, in turn,

reduces food waste disposal costs and produces castings (worm manure) that create high-quality organic fertilizer.

11. Montana Women's Prison, United States

The Montana Women's Prison strives to increase both life-skill training and nutritional intake among its inmates by consistently putting locally grown produce on its cafeteria menu. In addition to sourcing from local food vendors, the prison has an in-facility greenhouse and garden that enhance the nutritional variety offered to its inmates. To incentivize participation, the Montana Women's Prison offers inmates who work in its food sustainability program the ability to earn a Master Gardener Certification.

12. Northeastern Correctional Center, United States

In West Concord, Massachusetts, the Northeastern Correctional Center is the only public prison restaurant in the U.S. As part of its culinary training program, the Correctional Center teaches inmates how to professionally prepare food and obtain restaurant skills that better their chances of finding a "decent paying job" when released. The Center is open on weekdays and serves meals at a reduced cost—roughly US\$3.20.

13. Planting Justice, United States

Planting Justice is a nonprofit organization in the San Francisco Bay Area that provides educational programs on environmental sustainability, builds gardens to help identified food deserts, and assists inmates in finding well-paying jobs once they serve their sentence. Planting Justice also occasionally hires ex-convicts themselves to encourage community involvement in food sustainability.

Such efforts are part of the organization's greater goal of creating jobs in urban food production, as it is an underemployed sector of many local communities' economies.

14. Prison Harvests Project, Malawi

The Prison Harvests Project provides sustainable land management training in various Malawi prisons to teach inmates how to grow their own nutritious food. The Project emphasizes coaching inmates on how to achieve a successful harvest with a diversity of crops. Through these efforts, inmates' health are set to improve as they move away from eating a diet solely consisting of maize.

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15. Prison Voice Washington, United States

Prison Voice Washington is an advocacy group striving to improve the lives of Washington state's inmates and keep surrounding communities safe by expanding opportunities for convict rehabilitation. The advocacy group relies on publications and policy proposals to continually update and enforce the executive orders and regulations toward Washington's Department of Corrections, including efforts to improve Washington's prison food system. Prison Voice Washington creates educational opportunities within prisons, as well, focusing heavily on providing job training programs to inmates.

16. Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, United States

San Diego's Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility promotes its Farm and Rehabilitation Meals (F.A.R.M.) program as a measure to combat the connection between prison violence and a poor prison diet. The Correctional Facility establishes farmland and hires inmates to grow and harvest produce. Staffers then distribute this produce in the prison's cafeteria. The F.A.R.M. program also opens up its positions to inmates with physical disabilities by creating tasks that require less physical exertion, such as raising garden beds.

17. San Diego Prison, Colombia

The all-women San Diego Prison is one of the most successful prisoner reintegration programs in Latin America. By setting up an in-prison restaurant that is open to the public, inmates gain culinary skills through a series of workshops and the occasional celebrity chef visit. The restaurant goes by the name of Restaurante Interno and inspires women to pursue a career in the culinary sector upon release. Moreover, constant social interaction with people who dine help ease the reintegration process for inmates.

18. Sustainability in Prisons Project, United States

The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) is a partnership established by the Evergreen State College and the Washington State Department of Corrections that develops sustainable food methods and green collar education programs within Washington state prisons. By coordinating with state-based organizations, the SPP fosters a collaborative environment among Washington's inmates. Although the partnership's efforts reach far beyond food sustainability, the SPP gears all of its actions towards creating opportunities for inmates to actively participate in sustainability projects.

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19. Taiwan Technical Mission, Asia-Pacific Region

The Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) establishes sustainable agriculture programs by encouraging food cultivation in both correctional facilities and psychiatric centers. The TTM partners with governmental institutions all throughout the Asia-Pacific Region to create projects that give inmates the ability to grow healthier crops and produce higher yields. All the while, TTM uses inmates' surplus yields to help local communities by providing nutritious school meals and raising residents' understanding of healthy eating concepts.

20. Vermont Department of Corrections, United States

In partnership with Salvation Farms, the Vermont Department of Corrections leads as an example to other penitentiaries in the state by offering its inmates hands-on experience with food processing. Updating its prisons' sustainable infrastructure and kitchen facilities, the Department not only creates a surplus of food for its inmates through various greenhouses on prison grounds, but also serves as the country's first prison to ban landfilling its food scraps. Instead, the Department establishes significant collaborations between local agencies to reserve all of its food scraps for composting.