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# Food, Farming, and Freedom : Promoting a Sustainable Model of Food Justice in America's Prisons

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# FOOD, FARMING, AND FREEDOM

## Promoting a Sustainable Model of Food Justice in America's Prisons

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# ABSTRACT

Prison farms date back to the origins of America's penitentiaries. Though initially the farms were meant to discipline and reform prisoners through hard labor, after abolition the farms became a means to harness newly liberated black labor power. Despite this exploitative intention, prisoners that worked outdoors were healthier, and less aggressive. Throughout the next century and the major prisons that came with it, many states maintained farms as cost-effective means to feed prison populations and as vocational programs with proven success. However from the 1970s to the 1980s, prison farms suffered the same fate of small-scale agriculture across the nation. Reagan's policies brought both the death and rebirth of rural America. While deindustrialization produced serious economic decline in rural towns and independent agriculture, the War on Crime promised America's redemption: a rural prison industry.

A mass prison construction boom swept through the American countryside. While prison farms vanished due to the disappearance of local farming infrastructures with deindustrialization, former independent farms became prisons in a self-perpetuating cycle that wiped out deeply rooted generational and agricultural traditions. In this context agribusiness was born. Corporations bought up excess farmland to produce the mass

agribusiness farms we see today. Corporatization of agriculture fueled greater corporate monopolies on food and foodservice, and subsequently, these very foodservice corporations have come to serve the prison populations that were once entirely self-reliant and sustainable. Not to mention, the disappearance of these prison farms further depleted the few educational and vocational programs that genuinely rehabilitated prisoners.

The UN defines food security as a universal human right. Food security means both physical and economic access to healthy food, as well as *long-term* access. Privatized prison foodservice is neither: it severely constrains prisoners' access to healthy food (and actively encourages consumerism of *un*healthy food), and the mode by which this prison food is produced is entirely *un*sustainable. Furthermore, privatized foodservice neglects individual agency in food choice, production, and preparation as inherent aspects of an individual's self-identification and social embodiment processes, both of which are integral to human dignity. This paper examines how the prison industrial complex has transformed the prison food system to serve its own economic interests in violation of prisoners' human rights, and how food and sustainable farming within the prison can undo this transformation in order to promote an empowered and rehabilitated prison population, and an autarkic American food system.

# METHODOLOGY

I approached this project with the hope of understanding the manifold interests at play in the construction and perpetuation of a privatized prison food system. To accomplish this aim, I looked to the major players and those most affected by this system: independent

farmers and rural prison towns, agribusiness, policymakers, private foodservice corporations, and of course, the prisoners themselves. I began by researching the historical backgrounds of agribusiness and the rural American prison system, and searching for points of intersection. I consulted government documents, economic analyses, sociological studies, and theoretical analyses of the neoliberal transformations within both of these industries. This led me to focus on American prison towns, their agricultural heritages, and the economic and social changes that the rural prison construction boom affected within them. I relied heavily on the works of scholars such as Tracy Huling, Marc Mauer, Angela Davis in this endeavor.

In trying to understand the effects of privatized prison food on prisoners, I conducted first hand research through a variety of approaches. Because of bureaucratic obstacles to working directly with prisoners, I was constrained to interviewing only ex-prisoners and the free citizens that are involved in food production, menu-planning, or project organizing within the prison food system. I interviewed the project managers and organizers involved in three alternative prison programs that I felt epitomized the rehabilitative potential of sustainable prison farms and gardens for prisoners and rural populations; these were GreenHouse at Rikers Island in New York City, the Sustainable Prison Project (SPP) in Washington State, and the Canadian prison farms program.

I conducted interviews with ex-inmates of Rikers Island currently working as GreenTeam interns (GreenTeam is the post-release work program that serves as an extension of GreenHouse) regarding their food and gardening experiences during their incarceration. To protect the privacy of these interns, I have kept all of their comments anonymous. In addition, I interviewed John Cannizzo, director of GreenTeam, and Mark Alan Hill, GreenTeam's project manager. I chose to study the GreenHouse project in order to illustrate

the rehabilitative potential of work with plants, and to show that horticultural skills can be applicable to prisoners from urban areas. In researching the SPP, I interviewed co-director Dr. Carri LeRoy and project manager Kelli Bush. I chose the SPP to elucidate how prison farming and gardening programs can synthesize diverse interests and goals to the benefit of prisoners, local communities, and the environment. For this purpose I employed the work of Dr. Nalini Nadkarni, who encourages connecting sustainable endeavors to non-traditional audiences.

Finally I studied the Canadian prison farms program and the ongoing campaign to protest their closure. I chose this case study firstly because of the lack of a contemporary national-scale prison farm system in the US, and secondly because the Canadian government's attempt to close the farms is part and parcel of a larger ideological shift from rehabilitation to punishment in carceral policy. Canada's contemporary political climate reflects the very same neoconservative forces that gave rise to the rural prison construction boom and the disappearance of America's prison farms decades ago. Yet whereas these transformations went unnoticed, unprotected, in the United States, Canadians are actively resisting the expansion of a punitive, costly prison system having seen the grim results of such policy on California and Texas. I chose these three models of prison farming and gardening programs because they illustrate promising modes of rehabilitation and resistance to a prison food system that exploits rural communities and prisoners for profit.

The geographical incongruity of this paper may initially seem unwieldy. However, the prison-industrial and food-industrial complexes are global systems. In order to understand their workings and thereby undo or amend these systems, we must think of them in global

terms. Aramark operates in over 15 countries worldwide,[1] and up until 2001, Sodexho Alliance (a Paris based foodservice conglomerate) was the largest shareholder in Corrections Corporation of America.[2] While I advocate change at the micro-scale, through prison farms and gardens at the local level, it is essential that we understand the macro-scale interplay of the political and economic forces that have produced the largest prison system and the greatest food monopolies in history. To keep in line with the global perspective this paper presents, I approach the issue of prison food justice through a human rights framework, drawing primarily on the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and on the work of Michael Jackson and Graham Stewart. Michael Jackson is human rights lawyer and professor of law, and Graham Stewart is the director of the John Howard Society, which connects charities that address issues of crime and prisoner rehabilitation.

[1] Aramark International Sites. Online. <http://www.aramark.com/InternationalSites.aspx>.
[2] Schlosser, Eric. "The Prison Industrial Complex." *The Atlantic Monthly*. 282.6 (Dec. 1998): pp. 71.

# I. INTRODUCTION

Henry Kissinger once said, "If you control food, you control the population."[3] Nowhere is this truer than in the prison. Food is integral to the prison as a disciplinary institution. In a setting where the body is so highly regulated, food can be a powerful source of domination. The dreaded and much debated "NutraLoaf" (a dehydrated composite of vegetables, grains, and milk powder) is substituted for normal prison fare as punishment for unruly prisoners because of its tastelessness. Yet for the prisoner, food can also be a source of empowerment and a vehicle of rebellion. Engaging in the production and preparation of food can serve as a meaningful form of labor and self-expression, while refusing food is a powerful (and sometimes the only) form of resistance for the prisoner. In today's social context, where the denial of the prisoners' basic rights and needs is triumphed as deserved punishment, food justice in the prison setting is often overlooked. But this was not always so.

For centuries the American prison system was self-sustaining. Prison farms and gardens served not only as an affordable way to feed prison populations, but also as a disciplinary and rehabilitative work program integral to the 19th century idea of the penitentiary. Work was the mode by which prisoners enacted their penance, so their labor was long and harsh but despite this severity, correctional officers noted that prisoners who worked outdoors and ate healthfully were better behaved.[4] As the years went on, the purpose of prison farm work shifted from penance to rehabilitation and vocational training. While this

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[3] Hudgins, Coley. "The coming decentralization of food production." The Resilient Family. Online. 17 Nov., 2011.

[4] Jiler, James. *Doing Time in the Garden: Life Lessons through Prison Horticulture*. Oakland: New Village Press, 2006: pp. 23.

tradition of prison farms has provided inmates with healthy, sustainable food and exercise, it has also bolstered local farmers by sustaining a strong farming infrastructure. With the long history of slavery in this country merging seamlessly into a legacy of prison labor by a largely African American population, there is always a danger of prison farm work becoming exploitative. However, when coupled with education and focused on the personal growth of each prisoner, these programs can be profoundly rehabilitative and empowering for inmates—many of whom have never had steady jobs—who take pride in providing for themselves and the entire imprisoned population. Individual empowerment is the first step toward breaking the vicious cycle of criminality. The second is finding work upon release. The farms help prisoners find both with proven success. In spite of these benefits, this tradition is coming to a close.

Private foodservice corporations now dominate the prison food system as part and parcel of what sociologists call the prison industrial complex—"a set of bureaucratic, political, and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment, regardless of the actual need" in order to maximize private profits within industrial sectors.[5] But foodservice corporations are also part of what I call the "food-industrial complex." In this day and age, with the mass industrialization of agriculture, major corporations dominate every facet of the food system—from production (or importation) to processing to distribution. As such, these corporations monopolize the food industry and thereby determine the availability, nutritional values, and prices of the food we consume. This food-industrial complex exists in large part because of the birth of the prison-industrial complex with the rural prison construction boom in the 1980s. As prisons replaced farms as the economic

[5] Schlosser, 54.

development engines for rural communities, large corporate farms took the place of independent farmers as the primary suppliers of America's food. This paper examines the simultaneous emergence of a prison-industrial and food-industrial complex and their compounded effects on rural and prison populations where these complexes intersect in the privatization of prison foodservice.

While a significant portion of the free American population is food insecure due to this same food-industrial complex, I focus on prisoners' right to food security because prisoners are wards of the state for the duration of their incarceration, and because the prison is where human rights are most vulnerable. The prison exerts greater state power over citizens' rights and freedoms than any other government institution, in a forum almost entirely inaccessible to the public. In the tough on crime era, convicted persons' basic rights have become privileges and the prison has become a place *for* punishment, instead of incarceration itself serving *as* punishment. Healthy and adequate food has become one of these "privileges" despite the fact that food security—"the right to adequate food and the right to be free from hunger"—is defined as a human right in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. Furthermore, the UN recognizes the right to feed oneself as integral to human dignity.[6] When we deprive prisoners of the means to produce or choose their own food and transfer this responsibility to corporations, we deprive prisoners of their dignity and transform them into faceless mouths to feed, and costs to be minimized.

With the rise of agribusiness and consequently, private foodservice corporations (such as Vassar's very own Aramark) the prisoner's right to healthy food, and to self-identification through food choice, is secondary to cost-saving measures such as limiting hot

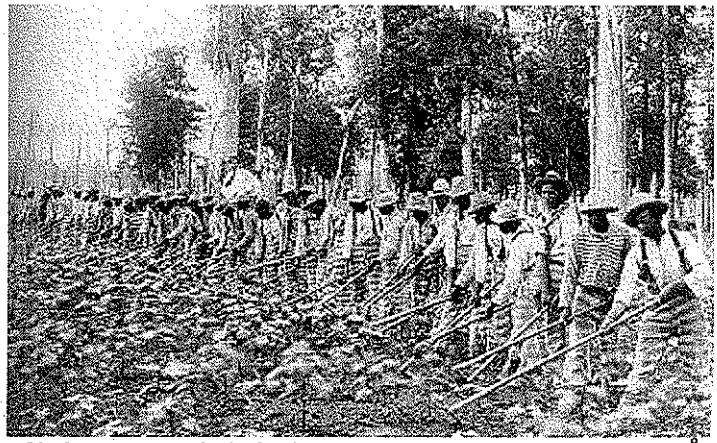
[6] Right to Adequate Food.

meals, converting to soy-based diets, or underfeeding prison populations. As Michael Jackson and Graham Stewart write in their critique of Canadian criminal policy, "Ultimately the preservation of rights for all citizens depends on our preservation of the rights of those in our prisons."[7] If society does not protect prisoners' rights, assuming that these "rights" lost their power once prisoners broke the law, human rights and our respect for human dignity become conditional and therefore contingent on human judgment and bias. Both the prison-industrial and food-industrial complex are ongoing processes that endanger human rights and public health through practices that reduce the human being to capital; capital which further bolsters an expanding prison system and an increasingly consolidated national food industry.

Prison food justice and food justice for America's non-incarcerated populations are not mutually exclusive. In fact, prison farms support community food security within and between prison and local rural populations. Excess prison farm food is donated to local food banks or soup kitchens, and prison agriculture supports a local agricultural infrastructure by purchasing farm machinery, seeds, and other supplies from local businesses and by hiring local farmers and educators to teach inmates basic farm skills. In arguing for a reformed prison food system, I am not demanding prisoners simply *be fed* better food. I am advocating the right for prisoners to feed themselves through hard work and dedicated effort, and use these generalized job skills and newfound self-esteem post-release to break the vicious cycle of recidivism.

[7] Jackson & Stewart, vi.

# II. PRISON LABOR



Chain gang at Mississippi State Penitentiary (Parchman Farm)[8]

The prison and especially prison labor, has been closely tied to the American legacy of slavery. Scholars such as Angela Davis argue that prisons are inherently racist institutions because of the penitentiary's outgrowth from abolition. However, debating this perspective is not the point of this chapter. Rather, I aim to illustrate through the course of this paper how prison farms that began as exploitative endeavors harnessing the labor power of captive populations have and can still be transformed into rehabilitative, sustainable institutions. This chapter describes how and why prison farms came into being, and goes on to show how prison labor has changed for better and for worse. My intention is to acknowledge the potential for exploitation within prison agriculture given America's history of racial oppression as it relates to the agricultural industry (in the form of the plantation), while illustrating how we can safeguard prisoners' labor from exploitation by grounding such work in education, empowerment, and community building.

[8] Chain Gang Songs. Kenyon College. Online. 28 Feb., 2012. <http://northbysouth.kenyon.edu/2002/Music/Pages/chain_gangs.htm>.

## ORIGINS

The founding of America's first penitentiaries institutionalized prison labor. Historically, prisons were merely detention centers for convicted people awaiting corporal or social punishment but the penitentiary redefined *imprisonment itself as punishment*. Early penitentiaries were designed to rehabilitate convicts by creating conditions in which they could reflect on and repent for their crimes. Inmates lived in total silence and engaged in congregate labor as forms of psychological and physical penance. Though triumphed as progressive, these institutions enacted the same authoritarian control over inmates' daily lives as slavery did for those enslaved. As with slavery, the prison disempowered its subjects by rendering them dependent on others for basic needs (such as food and shelter), by subjugating them to daily routines determined by their superiors, by isolating them from the public, and by coercing their subjects to work for less pay and longer hours than free people.[9]

## CRIMINALIZATION OF BLACK LABOR POWER

With abolition American industry lost an enormous free labor base. In response, the American South strove to craft criminal policy so as to severely restrict the rights of the newly freed black population. Many of these "Black Codes," such as absence from work or breach of a work contract, aimed to control the labor of (or criminalize unemployed) African Americans.[10] As blacks came to constitute a growing percentage of the prison population, prisons began to capitalize on this labor pool through work structures that replicated slavery;

[9] Davis, Angela Y. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Toronto: Seven Stories Press, 2003: pp. 27.
[10] Davis, 28.

namely, a convict lease system and the "chain gang." Both used group labor, intensive surveillance and discipline to once more harness black productive power for profit. It is the convict lease system that opened the prison population to corporate exploitation.

The exploitation of incarcerated black prison labor continues today, though it is not near as explicit as the chain gangs once were. It is no coincidence that the majority of for-profit prisons are located in the American South.[11] One example of the modern exploitation of prison labor lies in Louisiana State Penitentiary (also known as Angola). Angola is a prison farm and the largest maximum-security prison in the US. Even today Angola strongly resembles the slave plantation it once was. Approximately 70 percent of the incarcerated population is serving a life sentence and 75 percent are African American. Almost all prisoners work on the farm.[12] Other inmates with histories of good behavior maintain the golf course, which is exclusively reserved for use by the prison's correctional officers and employees.[13] As with traditional prison labor (that of the penitentiary era), work on Angola's farm is intensive and offers minimal skill development for inmates, in large part because these inmates are not expected to ever leave the prison. Yet even beyond Angola there is rarely any effort to connect prison work with employment opportunities post-release.[14] This disregard for prisoners' personal growth, for their mental or emotional health and education is what distinguishes an exploitative prison labor program from a genuinely rehabilitative one. It is not the labor itself, or the wages inmates are paid that is abusive (since prison wages across the board are so low as to be practically insignificant). Rather, it is the end toward

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[11] Wood, Philip J. "Globalization and Prison Privatization: Why Are Most of the World's For-Profit Adult Prisons to Be Found in the American South?" *International Political Sociology*. 1 (2007): pp 222.
[12] *The Farm: Angola, USA*. Dir. Liz Garbus, Wilbert Rideau, & Jonathan Stack. 1998. DVD.
[13] Jiler, 26.
[14] Jiler, 25-26.

which prison labor is put and who benefits from this labor that determines whether or not it is exploitative.

## EXPLOITATIVE PRISON LABOR

When prison labor serves as a means to corporate profit, or institutional cost-cutting in a vacuum that neglects the needs of the laborers themselves, it is exploitative. Without a foundation of education, job-training, or rehabilitation, these kinds of labor offer inmates nothing for their hard work, except maybe a meager 40 cents per hour. While this kind of labor gives the prisoner something to do during imprisonment, these jobs are often un-stimulating intellectually and physically. In the case of demanding physical labor (such as Angola), the work is effectively "discipline dressed up as treatment" rooted in the old penitentiary notion of hard labor as penitence.[15] Furthermore, exploitative prison labor reinforces the racist and classist divides between the prison population and the prison workers that discipline and surveil them. The golf course at Angola is one example of how prison labor reproduces oppressive divides. Another example is Aramark's "In2Work" vocational program, where inmates prepare "enhanced food options" (which they will never taste) for officers' dining rooms.[16] While both of these programs do offer job-training in landscaping or cooking, both reinforce the perspective that these prisoners will always be in a position of inferiority and service to a dominant white male culture.

## REHABILITATIVE PRISON LABOR

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[15] Jackson & Stewart, vi.

[16] Irizarry, Cindy. Personal Interview. 8 Feb., 2012.

In contrast, prison labor rooted in personal growth, education, or advancement in a skill or vocation empowers the prisoner to pursue the path to rehabilitation. Empowerment for prisoners can best be accomplished through labor that builds community within the prison, and simultaneously connects prisoners to communities beyond the prison's walls. Fostering this connection allows the prisoner to be a productive member of society during his incarceration, and thereby eases the re-integration process upon release. reduces the likelihood of recidivating, which currently stands at about 65% in New York State. Furthermore, this kind of labor allows the prison to serve a larger social function than merely warehousing society's "deviants."[17] Prison farms can provide unique opportunities to empower, educate and rehabilitate prisoners by connecting them to local communities around issues of sustainability and food security to the benefit of all.

While agricultural prison labor can be empowering and sustainable, it can only be so by adhering to certain standards. There is a huge contrast between prisoners milking their own herd of cattle and processing that milk at their own facility and prisoners in Florida toiling away at a meat processing plant supplied by multi-million dollar corporations. When coupled with education and focused on the personal growth of each prisoner, farm programs can be profoundly rehabilitative and empowering for inmates who take pride in providing for themselves and the entire imprisoned population. Though conservative critics of prison farms (such as those in Canada, who we will address in chapter six) argue that agricultural jobs are irrelevant in this day and age, there is a growing localist movement. Increasingly, Americans are looking to local, independent agriculture for their food needs. Though sustainable agriculture is still a relatively small field in the face of agribusiness, prisons offer the

[17] Jiler, 54.

conditions to explore alternative agricultural practices as the failings of the current food system come to light. Furthermore, the job and life skills that inmates learn through farming—teamwork, promptness, responsibility—are applicable to any type of work.

## CONCLUSION

With the long history of slavery in this country merging seamlessly into the criminalization of black labor power, there is always a danger of prison farm work becoming exploitative. While it is important to acknowledge the risk of racial oppression and exploitation while discussing any form of prison labor, it is equally important to understand that certain types of prison farm labor are rehabilitative and fulfilling, benefiting not only the prisoners themselves but also rural communities, public health, and the environment as I will discuss in more detail throughout this paper. Despite findings that prisoners who engage in educational or vocational programs while in prison have dramatically reduced recidivism rates, these programs are increasingly rare as they are often the first to go with budget cuts. Today only one-third of prisoners receive educational or vocational training while in prison.[18]

Much contemporary prison labor is little more than a means to occupy restless prisoners. However, the prison population has enormous potential in its untapped physical and intellectual labor power to enact resistance to the carceral system's progressive reliance on corporate goods and services. In terms of agriculture, sustainable prison farms cannot only empower prisoners by rendering the prison population self-sustaining, but they can also enact alternatives to corporate agribusiness. While some opponents argue that prison labor steals

[18] Jiler, 65.

jobs from free citizens, or causes declines in wages, these considerations fall outside the scope of my work. Rather than addressing the role of prison labor in the private sector, I focus exclusively on rehabilitative prison labor on prison farms and gardens as a means of sustaining the prison population and thereby minimizing the human and environmental costs of the prison food system. But before addressing these alternatives, we must explore the emergence of corporate agribusiness that gave rise to privatized prison foodservice in the first place.

# III. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE 20TH CENTURY FOOD SYSTEM

The United States is a nation founded by farmers. The homesteader, the yeoman, was the icon of 18th century American republican values and individualism. But the face of American agriculture has drastically transformed since the days of our founding fathers. Today the food industry is the second largest in the world, encompassing an estimated $404 billion a year in global trade.[19] As such, there are many stakeholders at play—from corporations to health officials to government agencies to farmers—but in the modern context of mass corporate farming and high tech farm machinery, the farmer's role is increasingly diminished. The number of small-scale farms in the United States has significantly declined since the 1930s.[20] In the past three decades, this decline has rapidly progressed as liberal trade policies and corporate de-regulation have fostered an agricultural economy dominated by big business, or agribusiness. "Agribusiness," as the name implies, is the modern business of agriculture that takes place in and beyond the farm. It encompasses all aspects of food production from the development of machinery and technologies to processing, packaging, and distribution. Though agribusiness has made the mass production of food possible through industrial methods, it is crucial to examine the external costs that such a system entails.

These costs are not measured in dollars, but rather, indirectly felt in the rising rates of obesity and associated diseases, in environmental degradation, in the economic decline of

[19] Germov & Williams, 12.
[20] Green & Hilchey, 8.

rural communities. But these external costs are brushed aside because agribusiness is motivated entirely by profits; not community food security, hunger reduction, or long-term sustainability. As John Ikerd, Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics, says:

> Corporations are not human; they have no heart or soul....Once corporate ownership becomes separated from management...a corporation becomes incapable of pursuing any objectives other than maximum profit and growth – its stockholders will accept nothing less.[21]

When we allow corporations to control our food, we put ourselves at the mercy of the market and lose our ability to sustain ourselves—we lose our human dignity that derives from self-reliance and we sacrifice the rights of the most vulnerable populations (the poor, the sick, and the incarcerated) to corporate exploitation. This chapter illustrates how the food-industrial complex as we know it came to be, and the repercussions that this corporate food system has produced for public health, the environment, and rural America.

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## THE RISE OF AGRIBUSINESS

Today's food system has become what I call a "food-industrial complex"—a system of intersecting political and economic forces that profit from the fulfillment of a basic human and social need by monopolizing food production and thereby controlling food availability and price. Modern advances in agricultural technology and practice have allowed farms to expand in size. With this expansion, corporate farms can produce in bulk and thereby drive

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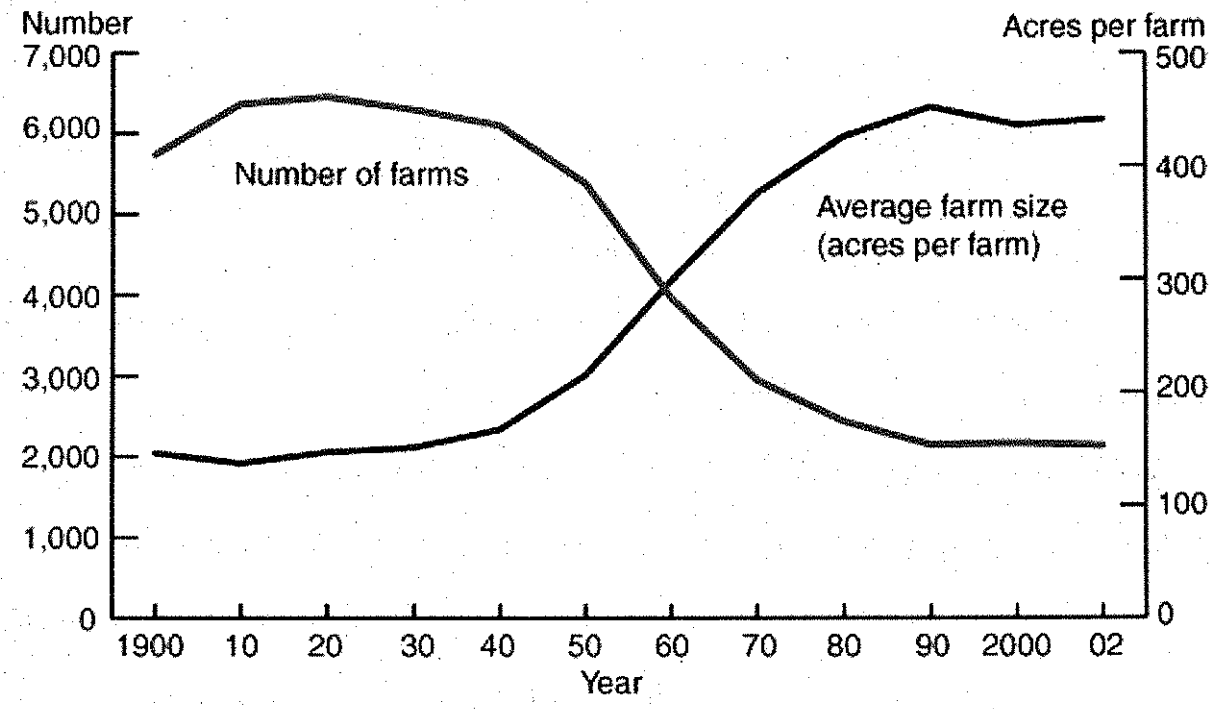
[21] Ikerd.

**Figure 1**

**As the number of farms declined, their average size increased**




Source: Compiled by Economic Research Service, USDA, using data from *Census of Agriculture, Census of Population*, and *Census of the United States*.

down the prices of farm goods to a level economically unfeasible for small-scale farmers. Farmers are forced to "get big or get out," to either sell their farms or become tenant farmers for agribusiness companies under unfavorable conditions. This process is called the "technology treadmill." Farmers are constrained to risk going out of business or continue pursuing further productivity-boosting technologies that in turn perpetuate the cycle of oversupply, lowered farm prices and loss of even more farms (Figure 1).[22] In this way, corporate farms have come to hold an increasingly large share of the agricultural market. As of 1987 "large farms, as defined by annual sales over $1 million, accounted for 27.8 percent of all farm sales." Just a decade later, "the large-farm share had risen to 42 percent."[23]

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[22] Dimitri, Carolyn, Nielson Conklin, & Anne Effland. "The 20th Century Transformation of US Agriculture and Policy." USDA Economic Research Service. Bulletin No. 3. June 2005.

[23] Green & Hilchey, 9.

Beyond the farm, corporations often control every aspect of food production—from processing to packaging—and thus, through their raw economic power, they are "able to extract virtually all of the profits in the system, leaving farmers with a subsistence level of income composed of very low returns to management, labor and capital."[24] Despite this decline in farm prices, horizontal and vertical consolidation within the food industry allows food companies to keep consumer prices high. It is because of this consolidation that, in the NAFTA era, farm prices for "grains, livestock, vegetables, flowers, fruit and poultry were falling to record lows" while "U.S. consumer food prices increased by almost 20 percent."[25] When we consider the modern food industrial complex's external costs—costs to public health, the environment, and rural America—we realize that the modern national food system is not advancing agricultural practice to the benefit of society, but rather exploiting vulnerable populations for corporate gain.

## HEALTH EFFECTS

The consolidation of the food industry allows agribusiness to cultivate cheap crops in bulk —such as soy, corn, wheat—to drive independent farmers out of the market, and then extensively process these goods into unhealthy derivatives with huge markups. For example, in 1998 the cost of a bushel of corn was under $4 whereas a bushel of Corn Flakes cost $133.[26] And this is just the markup for *unhealthy* foods. Despite added processing and packaging costs associated with unhealthy food, the markup on fresh produce is even greater, largely because of massive government subsidies to agribusiness that further incentivize the production of unhealthy foods. Since 1995, $17 billion in subsidies has gone toward staple

[24] Green & Hilchey, 9.
[25] Green & Hilchey, 6.
[26] Green & Hilchey, 3.

junk food ingredients like high fructose corn syrup.[27] Why then do Americans pay more for less nutritious, processed food? Because agribusiness has sizable influence over consumer choice through multibillion dollar advertising campaigns, and even greater, direct influence on politicians through corporate lobbying.

In 2004, the top five food and beverage corporations spent over $5 billion in advertising.[28] This advertising money shapes consumer preferences in order to accommodate and perpetuate mass production of the unhealthy foods from which the industry can glean the most profits. Television viewers are regularly bombarded with ads depicting brand cereals, high-calorie snacks and soda, but rarely do they see ads for fruits, vegetables, milk, or whole grains. Lobbying poses an even greater threat to public health because it allows corporations to directly affect the availability of various foods within particular markets. In 2008 alone, agribusiness spent $200 million on lobbying and campaign contributions.[29] In agribusiness, lobbying sustains mass government subsidies (mostly for junk food products) while in foodservice it protects certain food companies' monopolies on noncommercial markets, such as the public school system and the prison system. It is corporate influence such as this that defines pizza sauce as a vegetable in our public school system, and permits Aramark to extend prison contracts despite evidence of corporate malfeasance (as I will describe in chapter five). In this context, it should come as no surprise that between 1980 and 2008, obesity has doubled amongst American adults and tripled amongst children.[30]

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[27] "Put Junk Food Subsidies on a Diet." US PIRG. Website. <http://www.uspirg.org/issues/usp/stop-subsidizing-obesity>.

[28] Martinez, Steve W. "The U.S. Food Marketing System: Recent Developments 1997-2006." USDA Economic Research Report No. 42. May 2007: pp. 35.

[29] "Put Junk Food Subsidies on a Diet." U.S. PIRG. Website. <http://www.uspirg.org/issues/usp/stop-subsidizing-obesity>.

[30] "Obesity: Halting the Epidemic by Making Health Easier." Center for Disease Control. 26 May, 2011. 8 Feb., 2012. Website. <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/obesity.htm>

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Agribusiness companies have little incentive to use sustainable agricultural practices since they are motivated by short-term economic goals as opposed to long-term social and environmental well-being. Whereas small-scale farmers practice environmental stewardship and sustainability because it is in their best interest to keep the land viable as long as possible, corporate farms are bent on maximizing production and profits in the short term by any means necessary. Through the industry's heavy usage of fertilizers and genetically modified seeds, polluting factory methods, and repeated cultivation of fields that should be left fallow, agribusiness erodes and depletes the soil, contaminates ground water, and destroys the surrounding environment.[31] This irreparable damage matters little to agribusiness because in the worst-case scenario, agribusiness will buy cheap products from foreign countries rather than spend money rehabilitating the domestic environments it has destroyed.

A major argument in support of this form of mass-production is that it is more efficient than traditional methods. While agribusiness does yield larger crops (mostly because of sheer scale and technological innovation), the independent farmer typically yields four to five times more produce per acre because he uses intensive cultivation methods that integrate crop and livestock production in agricultural models that replicate natural ecosystems.[32] The result is that while independent farmers work to sustain and improve rural ecologies,

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[31] Ikerd, John. "The end of the American farm or the new American farm?" Presented at Partnerships for Sustaining California Agriculture. Woodland, CA. 27-28 March, 2001.

[32] Poole-Kavana. "12 myths about hunger." *Institute for Food and Development Policy Backgrounder.* Summer 2006, Vol.12, No. 2.

corporate farms buy up and decimate rural land through irresponsible practices that endanger the local environment and local communities.

## EFFECTS ON RURAL AMERICA

The modern transformation of America's food system does not merely affect farmers, but entire rural communities in ways that are both tangible and economic, as well as cultural and symbolic. We have already seen the encroachment of agribusiness in one of the historical bastions of independent agriculture, in our very own back yard: the mid-Hudson Valley. In the period from 1987 to 1997, the mid-Hudson lost 18 percent of its farmland. This figure represents 522 farms and 17 percent of the region's total farms.[33] Amongst the farms that remain, there has been a sea-change in agricultural practice. Since farmers can no longer compete with agribusiness in the production of low-value commodities (in the mid-Hudson specifically, these are dairy, corn and hay), farmers have switched to high-value, but land-intensive crops such as vineyards, nurseries, and greenhouses, which do little to promote community food security because of their high costs. Even traditional crops for which the Hudson Valley is renowned (like apples) are struggling to compete with importation and corporate farms on the West Coast.[34]

This decline in independent agriculture is troubling for New York because studies of New York state show that agriculture has the largest economic multipliers of all industries for both employment and income. In many cases these multipliers are "twice as large for those in sectors such as construction, mining, retail, and government."[35] Agribusiness and, as

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[33] Flad, Harvey K. & Clyde Griffen. *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009: pp. 344.
[34] Flad & Griffen, 345.
[35] Huling, King, & Mauer, 17-18.

we will see in the next chapter, the rural prison industry, have produced an influx of retail and government jobs in rural America at the expense of independent agriculture; in Franklin for example, the county saw a 50% decrease in farm employment and an 82% increase in government employment. These jobs have negative impacts on rural economies because they are typically low-skilled, and therefore offer little room for advancement, and in the case of retail, they draw funds out of the community to distant corporate headquarters. Furthermore, the replacement of independent agriculture and businesses with agribusiness and corporate grocery chains renders rural populations food insecure. As of 2010, 14.7% of rural American households were food insecure.[36] Thus the decline of agriculture has secondary and tertiary effects on rural economies that go beyond the farm.

These economic shifts produce social and cultural results. The biggest threat to rural culture is persistent underemployment and the gradual decline of skilled jobs.[37] As once independent rural industries (dairies, food processing plants, farm machinery manufacturers etc.) close down due to competition with their corporate counterparts, many rural American towns are losing their traditional livelihoods as well as their cultural heritage. Whereas in the past, skilled laborers—farmers, miners, etc.—passed skills and practical knowledge (or social capital) from generation to generation, thereby producing distinct cultural identities rooted in tradition, rural residents are now reduced to setting timers on high-tech farm machinery or flipping burgers.

As corporations encroach on the traditional livelihoods of rural residents, these people are constrained to take on low- or non-skilled jobs that reduce once vibrant, autarkic

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[36] Andrews, Margaret, Steven Carlson, Alisha Coleman-Jensen, & Mark Nord. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2010." Economic Research Report 125. USDA Economic Research Service. Sept. 2011: pp. i.

[37] Green & Hilchey, 13.

communities to mere company towns providing cheap labor and capital to distant corporate headquarters. The results are the decline of rural independent businesses (farming related and otherwise), loss of social capital and distinct cultural identities, increased need for social services, and influxes of low-wage laborers following on the heels of commercial chain stores that open in these economically declining towns.[38] (In the unique case of prison towns, these low-wage laborers are often family members of individuals incarcerated within those towns). Ultimately, rural communities are being robbed of their potential for self-reliance and sustainability, all for the sake of corporate profits.

## CONCLUSION

While some may argue that agribusiness is usurping the market because it is more efficient and cost effective, corporate domination over the US food system has long-term economic, environmental and social effects that are beginning to jeopardize public health and the economic viability of rural America. The enormous control agribusiness and foodservice corporations wield over the food system is threatening not only because they determine availability and cost, but also because these corporations determine how Americans perceive and consume food. This corporate power—through mass-marketing and lobbying—brings into question whether Americans' food choices are based on individual preferences or social determinants; whether food choice is an act of agency, or a response to the constraints and influences of American food industry's structure.

Clearly agency is not the sole factor because economic and social factors constrain an individual's food choices; low-income families may choose chips over bananas to get the

[38] Green & Hilchey, 14.

most "bang for their buck," while a person who identifies as Jewish may be restricted to buying "kosher" foods. Of course, agency and structure are not mutually exclusive. Agency operates within socially structured "rules" of behavior and the interweaving agencies of many individuals give rise to patterned structures. Yet, in a food system of increasing corporate consolidation, corporations are wielding dangerous control over what types of food are most accessible. Government is complicit in rendering unhealthy foods more economical and available through subsidized agriculture and through accepting lobbying money that buys certain foods (i.e. pizza sauce, or potatoes) a privileged place in "noncommercial" markets where "noncommercial" consumers (such as students) have limited choice. Furthermore this "choice" is strongly influenced by advertising, especially amongst youth who may not have the cognitive capacity to objectively weigh the nutritional costs and benefits of various foods.

Despite climbing rates of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes, the food-industrial complex continues to grow unabated, due (indirectly) to the transition from agriculture to prisons as a major rural American industry. The dismantling of independent agricultural infrastructures throughout rural America to pave the way for the rural prison construction boom in the 1980s created a vacuum that agribusiness gladly filled. As agribusiness grew, prisons gradually turned to foodservice corporation to fulfill their food needs, and thereby spurred the further decline of local farms. The rise of agribusiness and the prison industrial complex mutually reinforce one another so as to spur the demise of rural independent business and community self-sufficiency, and thereby serve the private economic interests of agribusiness and associated private prison services, primarily the foodservice industry.

# IV. THE RURAL PRISON BOOM

Over the past 25 years, the United States has undergone the biggest prison construction boom in human history.[39] Reagan's economic restructuring in the 1980s—which promoted deindustrialization and big business—had profoundly detrimental effects on rural economies. Deindustrialization took away the traditional livelihoods of many rural residents, while the rise of agribusiness drove independent farmers to sell their family farms or become tenant farmers to big business under unfavorable conditions. Concurrently, prison populations skyrocketed as the War on Drugs heightened policing practices. In this context, public officials promoted the construction of prisons as an economic development engine for rural towns that had lost their primary sources of income, namely, rural industry and small-scale agriculture. With the rural prison construction boom, politicians hoped to both flood decaying rural communities with government money and simultaneously accommodate the growing prison population.

In the US today, there are more prisons than Walmarts and more prisoners than farmers.[40] However the panacea of prisons did not hold up to its promise. Rather than stimulating local business and creating demand for local agriculture and services, the prisons used cheap rural land and labor while contracting out costly services to private corporations based in distant cities. As a result, independent agriculture further declined as private corporations swooped in to serve these prisons in the place of local businesses. These "prison

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[39] *Prison Town, USA.* Dir. Katie Galloway & Po Kutchins. Originally aired on PBS. 24 July, 2007. DVD.

[40] Huling, Tracy. "Building a Prison Economy in Rural America." From *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment,* Ed. Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, Editors. New York: The New Press, 2002: pp. 1.

towns" have seen no stimulus from the prisons at best. This chapter explores how the political and economic forces in the 1980s through the 1990s constructed a rural prison industry that exploits and endangers rural communities to the benefit of big business.

## THE RURAL PRISON CONSTRUCTION BOOM

Deindustrialization and the rise of agribusiness produced high rates of rural unemployment.[41] As such, policy makers sought new industries that could withstand the postindustrial rural economy. Prisons arose as the ideal solution. The thinking was that rural communities would provide cheap land and labor, while prisons would invest in local businesses for goods and services through the "Good Neighbor policy" in order to promote rural economic development and accommodate the rapidly growing prison population. Furthermore, prisons would enlarge rural populations by including prisoners in the census, thereby qualifying rural towns for extra government funds.[42]

With the promise of prisons cast in this light, rural communities welcomed prisons with open arms. Federal and state authorities went so far as to offer rewards to towns that built prisons in anticipation of being granted the rights to host them. Thus rural towns competed over prisons, outdoing each other with economic incentives in the form of tax breaks, infrastructure subsidies such as roads and sewers, and free land. Between 1980 and 1993, a total of 296 prisons were built in nonmetro areas nationwide.[43] At the peak of the construction boom in the mid-1990s, a new prison opened on average every 15 days.[44]

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[41] Wood, 224.

[42] Glasmeier, Amy K, & Tracey Farrigan. "The Economic Impacts of the Prison Development Boom on Persistently Poor Rural Places." *International Regional Science Review*. 30.274 (2007): pp. 277.

[43] Glasmeier & Farrigan, 275-279.

[44] Kirchhoff, , Suzanne M. "Economic Impacts of Prison Growth." Report for Congress. Congressional Research Service. April 13, 2010: pp. 15.

The rural prison construction boom began in New York state, and its effects stand in concrete testament—in the decaying prisons and the economically stagnating rural towns that host them—to the failure of mass imprisonment for profit. In the past, New York's rural northern region thrived on the logging, mining, agriculture and manufacturing industries, but with rural deindustrialization this region experienced serious economic decline. As such, the prison boom provided a huge infusion of state funds to this economically depressed region; an approximate $1.5 billion investment to build the correctional facilities, and an annual subsidy of $425 million for operating expenses, wages, etc.[45] This influx of new correctional jobs encouraged young people to stay in the region and gave people without college degrees access to middle class incomes. What's more, unlike other potential industries, the new prison-based economy was non-polluting.[46] In this way, the prison industry offered rural towns tangible benefits—at first. Now, decades later, we are seeing the long-term economic, cultural, and environmental costs of this immense prison project.

## ECONOMIC EFFECTS

In 2003, The Sentencing Project conducted a study on the economic impacts of prison construction on rural New York communities. Led by scholars Ryan S. King, Marc Mauer, and Tracy Huling, the project team assessed economic data from rural New York communities (New York being among the leaders in rural prison development). By

[45] Schlosser, 57-58.
[46] Schlosser, 58.

**Figure 1: New York State Unemployment Rates, 1976-2001**

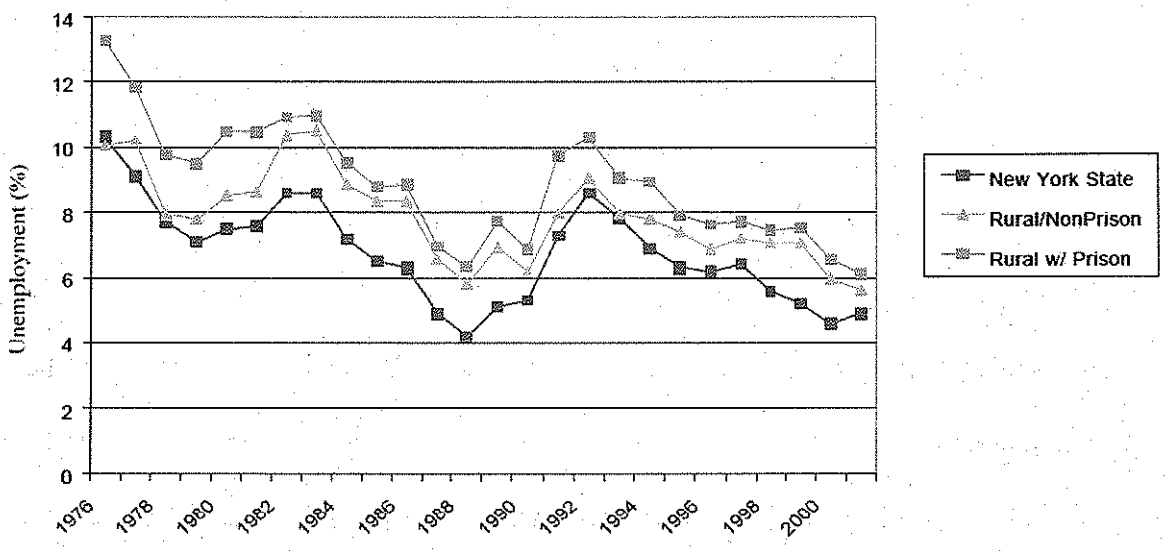
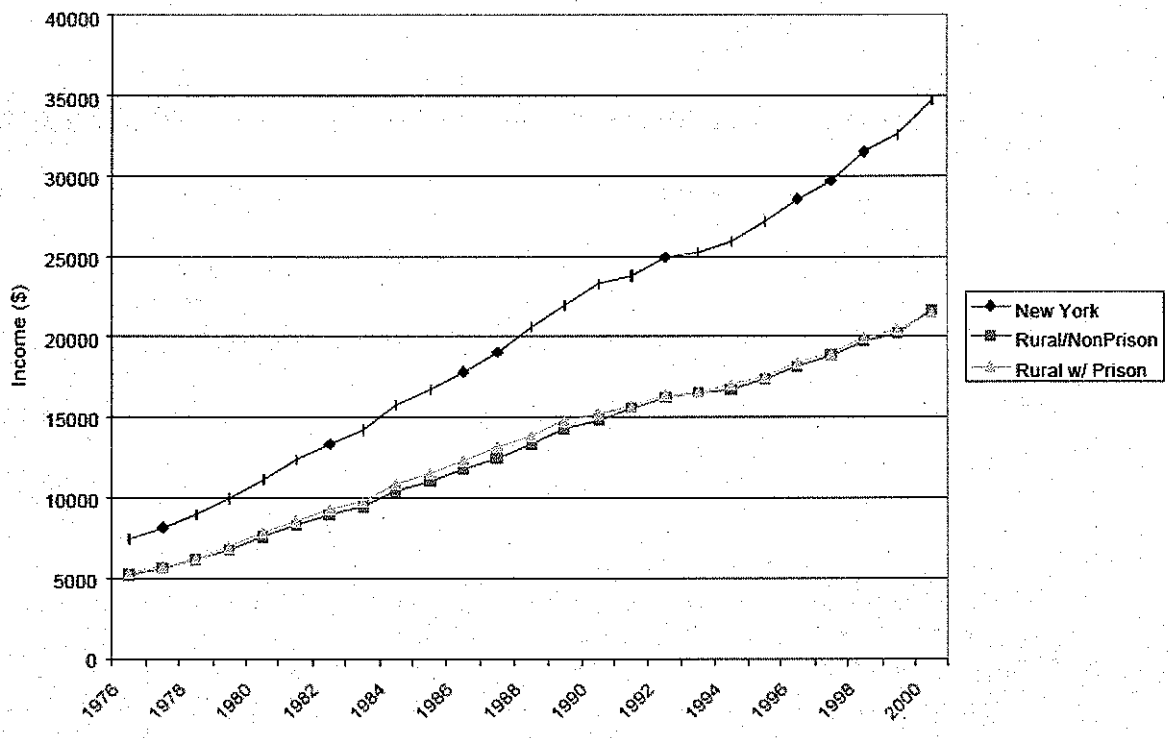



**Figure 2: New York State Per Capita Income, 1976-2000**



comparing communities that received prisons in the period from 1976 to 2001 with "twin" communities (comparable in economic/social conditions at the outset of this period), researchers hoped to determine whether or not prisons actually provided stimulus for economic growth by analyzing the effects of prisons on county earnings and degree of economic health.[47] Researchers controlled for external characteristics of these counties that might influence economic development, such as historical trends "or the existence of unobservable and county-specific factors that could potentially distort" the results.[48] The study showed that prisons did not significantly increase employment or income within these rural towns. Rather, as the charts above show, prison-hosting towns fared the same, if not worse than non-prison towns. Figure one shows that prison-hosting communities experienced higher fluctuations in unemployment as compared to towns without prisons, while figure two shows that prisons increased per capita income so marginally as to be insignificant.[49] These findings are consistent with other prison studies that show the economic impact of "prison development is at best neutral."[50]

How then, did the prison as economic development engine fail? A major factor in this failure is that most prison-related jobs go to people outside the local community. Higher paying management positions typically require levels of education or experience that local residents do not have. The jobs that do go to local residents are typically low-paying, or in less desirable facilities far away since the highly-desirable jobs in the new prisons are doled out based on seniority.[51] This negatively impacts the local economy because most

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[47] Huling, Tracy, Ryan S. King, and Marc Mauer. "Big Prisons, Small Towns: Prison Economics in Rural America." Wachington, DC: The Sentencing Project, 2003: pp. 4.
[48] Huling, King, & Mauer, 7.
[49] Huling, King, & Mauer, 8 & 10.
[50] Glasmeier & Farrigan, 279.
[51] Huling, King, & Mauer, 16.

correctional workers' wages are not reinvested in the prison hosting community. Another factor limiting rural economic growth is that prisons deter other forms of economic development. A rural prison dominates the local town's amenities (such as gas and water), as well as the town's social and economic spheres, thereby closing off resources for other industries.

The industry that suffered the biggest blow from prison expansion was agriculture. Most of the prisons that rose during the construction boom were constructed on devalued or unused farmland.[52] As prisons encroached on this former farmland, rural towns' farming infrastructres began to disintegrate. With fewer and fewer customers, farm supply and machinery stores went out of business which in turn drove more local farmers out of business. The result was that over time, most of the local farms and many local businesses disappeared. Moreover prisons contracted corporate suppliers for cheaper goods and services so that, contrary to the "Good Neighbor policy," prisons did not support local businesses. The only businesses that could fare alongside the prison were large-scale commercial retailers, such as Walmart, McDonalds, and other such chains.[53] While these businesses created new jobs in rural towns, these jobs were low-paying and low-skilled, and these corporations did not reinvest their profits in the region. Thus in the place of traditional, culturally rooted industries arose an opportunistic rural prison industry trailing with it generic commercialism that siphoned both social and financial capital out of already declining rural communities.

## SOCIAL EFFECTS

[52] Davis, 14.
[53] Huling, 3.

The prison industry compounded the decay of rural American culture and traditions that began with rural de-industrialization. Prisons dramatically impact rural culture by introducing racial diversity and "urban" problems that rural residents have neither the frameworks nor the resources to resolve. While diversity itself is not an issue, the sudden introduction of a large, racially diverse population produces stereotypes and tensions that rural communities do not know how to cope with. Families follow their loved-ones to the town where they are imprisoned and strain already limping rural economies by looking for scarce jobs or relying on welfare, and ex-prisoners who must live in these rural towns for the duration of their parole cannot find jobs, or if they start their own businesses, they are shunned by the town's law-abiding citizens. Furthermore, some studies argue that the high levels of stress associated with prison work lead to higher levels of alcoholism and domestic abuse in towns where a majority of the population is employed by the prison industry.[54]

As mentioned above, prisons tend to bring along with them a slew of commercial retail stores that provide low wage jobs to the local population. However, these stores often replace local "mom and pop stores" that cannot compete with these powerful mega-chains.[55] Furthermore the closure of independently owned farms and eating places threatens rural food security by dismantling a local infrastructure of farms and social capital related to food. Whereas locally owned farms and businesses are more likely to donate surplus food or aid neighbors in need, impersonal chains are unlikely to do the same. Rural towns become dependent on corporations to supply them with generic food, clothing, and services that undermine unique rural identities. Both the influx of a diverse, urban population and the

[54] *Prison Town, USA.*
[55] *Prison Town, USA.*

corporatization of these rural towns spur onward the decay of rural American heritage that the emergence of agribusiness catalyzed.

## CONCLUSION

In the 1980s, rural prison construction emerged as "a geographical solution to socio-economic problems."[56] In the context of deindustrialization and the "War on Crime," politicians and rural populations alike hoped the rural prison industry would simultaneously reduce crime and revive rural economies. The "War on Crime" and the resultant high demand for prison beds set the social climate for prisons to be accepted as a viable growth industry, and rural towns with rapidly vanishing industries and rising unemployment rates were eager to accept government funding. Contrary to expectations, the prison construction boom turned once vibrant, autarkic communities into prison dependent ghost towns.

Failing to provide the promised jobs and economic development, the prison industry worked against their initial intention to draw work out of the towns and ship them off to distant prisons to begin their careers in older, tougher prisons. Trailing on the tails of the prisons came Walmarts, McDonalds, and other corporate chains that pushed already struggling local farms and businesses out of the market. As the rural prison industry moved away from a "Good Neighbor" model, turning to private corporations for goods and services, the agricultural infrastructure of rural towns declined dramatically, rendering once sustainable rural food systems into food deserts dependent on generic foodservice corporations to supply them.

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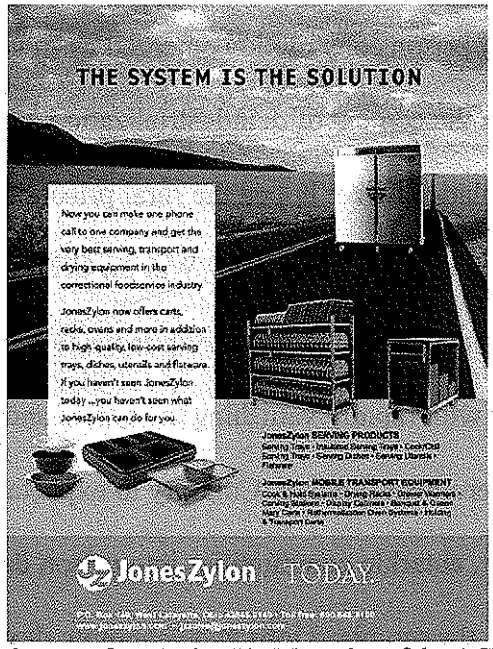
[56] Davis, 14.

# V. THE PRIVATIZATION OF PRISON FOOD

"If crime doesn't pay, punishment certainly does."[57]




Advertisement from INSIDER Magazine of the ACFSA[58]

A significant portion of the $64 billion of the industry's total sales derive from "noncommercial" services, or institutions such as military bases, schools, hospitals, and prisons. As more and more American farms fail, due to competition with agribusiness and the rural conversion to prison-based economies, public and private institutions alike turn to privatized food production and foodservice to meet their needs. In what are called P3s (public private partnerships) the government contracts private corporations to fulfill public functions, following the assumption that corporations can accomplish governmental functions for the public good more efficiently, and more cost-effectively than government

[57] Braswell, Michael C., Ronald E. Vogel, & John Francis Wozniak. *Transformative Justice: Critical and Peacemaking Themes Influenced by Richard Quinney*. New York: Lexington Book, 2008: pp. 115.
[58] *INSIDER Magazine*. Association of Correctional Foodservice Affiliates (ACFSA). Spring 2009: pp. 41.

itself. (A misguided assumption because the sole mode by which private companies cut costs is through hiring non-unionized workers, which produces negative secondary and tertiary economic effects). The reality is that foodservice corporations foster a noncommercial food system based on overpriced, unhealthy foods by exploiting political ties and the noncommercial consumer's lack of agency despite great costs to the environment, public health, and taxpayers.

As discussed above, agribusiness threatens the human right to food security and therefore sustainability because agribusiness corporations are bent on short-term profits (and environmentally damaging practices to achieve this aim) rather than long-term and higher quality food production. Likewise, foodservice corporations sustain agribusiness through partnerships that constrain food options within foodservice establishments to those that both companies stand to profit the most from. Choice is the only weapon the consumer has against the deleterious effects of this corporatized food system. Underlying this food system is the notion that the food market is democratic and the consumer has the responsibility to educate herself in her product options and choices. Termed "dollar voting" in economics, the idea is that the best products prevail since consumers choose to buy certain products and thereby "vote" to support and continue production of those products. Though even amongst the un-incarcerated population, educated "dollar voting" is severely constrained by income, and the influence of advertising. While this ideology is troubling in itself due to agribusiness and foodservice corporations' enormous economic and political power to promote their products, what happens when the consumer has no choice?

Prisoners have no choice. Foodservice corporations control what kinds of food are served and sold within the prison, and how much that food costs. Where prisoners do have

choice—such as in the commissary—that choice is extremely limited, and typically a matter of choosing between different kinds of junk food. While the national food system poses serious public health issues for the American population, these health issues are compounded in the prison, where inmates face limited dietary choice, poor quality food, disciplinary denial of certain foods, sedentary lifestyles, and psychological stress that can be manifest through eating disorders. Rendering food security a matter of privilege or price, the prison industrial complex and the "food industrial complex" converge in the prison food system to control prisoners' diet for personal profits. In so doing, these interlocking structures violate the universal right to food security and undermine prisoners' human dignity.

Where chapter three focused on the production aspect of the "food industrial complex," this chapter will explore "noncommercial" privatized foodservice in the American prison and its exploitative power over the imprisoned population using the example of Aramark Correctional Services. I argue first that privatized prison foodservice is wrong in principle because it allows corporations to profit off of inmates who have little to no agency in what they eat, and because this control inherently represses prisoners' self-identification through food. Secondly, I argue that privatized prison foodservice violates human rights in practice, through cost-cutting measures that privilege products and profits above prisoner health. While I strongly critique the practices of corporations like Aramark, I hope to show that it is not out of malevolence that private foodservice corporations operate as they currently do. Rather, Aramark acts out of rational self-interest within a system that entails minimal regulation or quality control.

## FOOD DEFINES US

The kinds of food we eat (and even how we eat them) have profound effects on our physical, emotional, and psychological health. On a purely physiological level, eating nutritious foods improves bodily health and mood. On a psychological level, the kinds of food we eat are integral to our processes of social embodiment and self-identification—an individual's diet can reflect religious, cultural, ethnic, or political affiliations, national or regional origins, which in turn construct and signal that individual's identity.[59] Thus when corporations hold the power to determine the diet of a large segment of the American population, they control not only the health of this population but also individuals' freedom of expression and identification through food.

Freedom of expression, of self-identification, is integral to human dignity. When the means to such expression are restricted, when the prisoner's food choices are controlled or denied entirely, the prisoner's identification—her sense of self and therefore, self-esteem—is repressed. By denying the prisoner this freedom of individuation (through food as well as other disciplinary mechanisms such as uniforms, and calling inmates by numbers instead of names), the prison dehumanizes its imprisoned population and thereby undermines the prisoners' potential for rehabilitation and personal growth. In this way, food is a foundational aspect of the prison as a disciplinary institution—from the stereotypical punitive diet of "bread and water" to the more contemporary Nutraloaf.

This repressive prison food system not only infringes on human rights, but endangers prisoners' health as well. The highly regulated nature of prison food can lead to unhealthy eating habits amongst prisoners as a means of coping with the stresses of imprisonment. Some prisoners develop eating disorders, either vigorously regulating their food intake to

[59] Sociology of Food and Nutrition

exert control in an environment where they have so little power, or binging on unhealthy foods as indulgent sources of pleasure in their lives of privation.[60] While outside the prison, these strategies are unhealthy eating *dis*orders, within the prisons walls these strategies are naturalized as a rational method of psychologically coping:

> When people are living in an environment in which everything else seems out of their control, where the expression of emotions such as anger and frustration carry their own penalties, certain behaviours, including those often considered 'risky' or 'unhealthy', can be understood as constituting a rational means of release, a way of coping and of holding on to a sense of self.[61]

Beyond the issues that the prison diet poses within prison, we must take into account the effects of the prison food system on inmates post-release. USDA statistics show that Hispanic and African American populations, and households 185 percent below the poverty line are at much higher risk of food insecurity—17%, 16.3% and 20% food insecurity respectively as compared to the national average of 14.5%.[62] Since most prisoners are from a low socio-economic class, and many have histories of drug abuse or disease, the prison provides an uncommon opportunity to educate target populations in nutrition and healthy eating. Instead, the prison fuels the progress of greater health problems through negligence of common prison diseases such as diabetes or hepatitis, and the provision of starchy mess hall food and sugary commissary snacks.[63] In the current prison food system, prisoners are trapped by the "paradox of responsibility without power;" inmates are responsible for their health and appearance, but are deprived of the resources to make healthy choices, constrained

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[60] Smith, 210

[61] Smith 210.

[62] Andrews, Margaret, Steven Carlson, Alisha Coleman-Jensen, & Mark Nord. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2010." Economic Research Report 125. USDA Economic Research Service. Sept. 2011.

[63] Jiler, 98.

as they are by levels of emotional and psychological stress, limited capital, restricted exercise opportunities, and finite food choice within the cafeteria.

If we do not give prisoners choices in and education on their diets, they will not learn the dietary responsibility necessary to maintaining a healthy lifestyle post-release. Many prisoners merely become so accustomed to a system wherein they have no agency over the minutiae of their lives that upon release, they are no longer capable of taking care of themselves. As one of the ex-inmates I spoke to noted, "The worst is when you come home, is adjusting back to life." He went on to describe how, in the hundred days since he had been out of prison, he was still not used to deciding his own sleeping and eating schedules and had difficulty cooking for himself.[64] A privatized prison food system that ignores prisoners' right to self-expression through food, neglects dietary needs or restrictions in order to push unhealthy products, encourages prisoners to practice unhealthy and even dangerous eating habits to psychologically cope with their imprisonment, and renders prisoners incapable of making their own decisions is clearly not in the best interests of public health. Who then is this prison food system serving?

## ARAMARK

Aramark is the world's third largest contract foodservice provider, operating at more than 600 prisons and jails in the United States, and serving over a million meals a day.[65] For all this vast coverage of the prison food system, Aramark hires twelve dietitians to plan the basic menus for correctional facilities, as well as alternative options for inmates with various health-related or religious dietary restrictions. In designing these menus, dietitians weigh the

[64] Anonymous Interview. 11/4/11.
[65] Kirchoff, 28.

demands and cost restrictions of their clients against state and federal nutritional requirements. The basic menu for each facility varies based on demographics so that menus catering to juvenile, male offenders will differ significantly than those for adult women based on these populations' state and federally mandated dietary needs. Single Source, a major foodservice distributor, supplies Aramark with food from across the country and carries out all food safety inspections at Aramark's warehouses before the food reaches the facilities where it will actually be served.[66]

As Aramark's regional dietitian for the northeast Cindy Irizarry affirmed, the principal benefits of contracting privatized foodservice are the assurance of product consistency (the same chicken patty, the same fruit cup) and that Aramark's menus will pass health codes; "Clients who contract Aramark can be assured that their menus will pass any audits."[67] Cast in this light, it seems as though Aramark's job is not so much to promote the well being of inmates, but rather to help correctional facilities avoid any litigations. In fact, with prison food law structured the way it is, this is the case more often than not with any menu-planning. Prison food law is distinct from standard food law in that laws regulating prison food arose in response to alleged violations of Constitutional provisions—specifically the First Amendment freedom of religious rights and the Eighth Amendment ban on cruel and unusual punishment—in order to safeguard prisons from inmate lawsuits.[68]

While these laws have ensured a diversity of religious and health specific diets within prisons, they have also blurred the definition of "cruel and unusual punishment" so that inmates cannot protest many of the regularly occurring food injustices done to them. For an

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[66] Irizarry.
[67] Irizarry.
[68] Gobert, James J, Donald T. Kramer, Michael B. Mushlin. *Rights of Prisoners*. Third Edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 2002: pp. 84.

inmate to sue, food conditions must be objectively "cruel and unusual," with such objectivity defined by the violation of "contemporary standards of decency."[69] In a society where the decent treatment of prisoners is lambasted as "soft on crime" liberal coddling, where contemporary standards of social decency do not apply to prisoners, there is clearly an issue in defining appropriate punishment against cultural norms. This punitive climate renders politicians unsympathetic to protests of poor food quality, especially when these politicians must consider mounting budget cuts. Marty Seifert, Minnesota State Representative, exemplified this attitude when he said, "We have to make sure the rapists and murderers sacrifice like everyone else."[70]

While these dietitians genuinely strive to accommodate the diverse health needs of the prison system's population, Aramark's contracts ultimately come down to providing foods that meet the minimal health requirements at the lowest possible cost. The primary objective of a corporation is to make money, and though prison foodservice is "noncommercial," Aramark is no different. Because of the corporation's economic incentives, Aramark is driven to buy cheap, processed food (since processed food lasts longer) and take cost-saving measures. Furthermore, limited resources and minimal regulation at the correctional facility level encourages foodservice companies to meet only the bare minimum nutritional requirements and health standards. As a result, prison food is not necessarily bad (though sometimes this is the case), but that does not make it good either.

In my interviews with ex-inmates from Rikers Island, they described the food they ate while incarcerated as "horrible," "atrocious," "bland," and monotonously repetitive. On nights where the cafeteria food was tolerable, such as Thursday chicken night, fistfights

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[69] Gobert, Kramer, & Mushlin, 30.

[70] Howe, Patrick. "Cash-Hungry States Cutting Prison Fare." *SEATTLE TIMES*. 14 May, 2003: pp. A6.

would break out over extra portions.[71] The poor quality of cafeteria food makes the snacks served in commissaries all the more desirable, and in fact encourages inmates to pay out of pocket for overpriced junk foods rather than eat the meals the cafeteria provides. Many of the ex-inmates I spoke to described how they stopped eating the cafeteria food entirely, opting for Ramen or the microwavable dinners that the commissary served day after day for a year or longer. It is here, at the commissary, that foodservice companies make their profits. As one inmate noted, "It's the prison's job is to see that the [food and foodservice] vendors make money."[72]

## WHERE THE REAL PROFITS ARE

A glance at Aramark's website enforces to this opinion. There is no information on the kind or quality of food that inmates are served through the cafeteria. Instead, links to commissary programs dominate the page, encouraging families to buy their incarcerated loved ones "comfort foods" and promoting incentive-based food points programs that permit "well-behaved" inmates to buy their favorite foods.[73] These external programs are marketed as improving inmate and correctional officer morale, inmate behavior, and adding an extra revenue stream for correctional facilities by "encourag[ing] more inmate commissary participation."[74] What is left unsaid is that these programs of course boost Aramark's revenue as well. Thus Aramark has an economic incentive to promote as much prisoner consumerism at the commissary as possible.

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[71] Anonymous Interviews. 4 Nov., 2011.
[72] Anonymous Interview. 4 Nov., 2011.
[73] ARAMARK Correctional Services. ARAMARK. Online. 29 Jan., 2012. <http://www.aramarkcorrections.com/Home/>.
[74] ARAMARK Correctional Services. ARAMARK. Online. 29 Jan., 2012. <http://www.aramarkcorrections.com/Home/>.

What is so insidious about these commissary programs is that inmates have an illusion of "choice" in whether or not to shop at the commissary. Yet this "choice" is within a context where inmates have very little power over their lifestyles and what is served for dinner each day of the week marks the passage of time. This monotony transforms the prisoner's food and consumer choices from a dietary decision to an assertion of agency, and a rare luxury in a life of such austerity. In an environment where there is little opportunity for individual control and psychological release, commissary consumerism becomes much more about managing the stresses of prison life than about personal health or money. Foodservice companies realize prisoners' dependence on food to serve as a reminder of home, an indulgence in a life of privation, an assertion of personal agency over one's body, and tailor their products to the prison population accordingly. Aramark advertises a "Connect Brands" service that promotes major name-brand products in commissaries as a means to capitalize on prisoners' pre-existing brand-loyalties:

> Offenders are consumers too, and they'll look for the brands they trusted and purchased before they arrived. Familiar retail brands and regular introduction of new merchandise drive sales and keep offenders coming back.[75]

While Aramark advertises this service as a means to ensure "customer satisfaction," it is ultimately a matter of using cheap brand products inmates are familiar with to promote as much prisoner consumerism and therefore as much profit as possible.

One could argue (and many of these foodservice companies do) that the prisoner's diet is still a matter of choice. Prisoners can choose the NutraGrain bar at commissary instead of the Ramen noodles (still a choice between two evils despite the false assumption of nutrition that comes with the bar). However, when we counter in the emotional and

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[75] ARAMARK Correctional Services. ARAMARK. Online. 29 Jan., 2012. < http://www.aramarkcorrections.com/Home/>.

psychological effects of the prison environment, the price differential that favors unhealthy over healthy food, and the limited nutritional education and exercise inmates receive, we see the paradox of consumer responsibility without power.[76] Prisoners are held accountable for their health and therefore, their food choices, yet every aspect of the disciplinary prison environment encourages them to make poor health choices. Bland prison cafeteria food triumphed as deserved punishment only motivates prisoners to buy flavorful, but unhealthy commissary snacks.

Prison food law's focus on avoiding litigation instead of health regulation and quality control engender an inherently exploitative prison food system bent on legal protection of prisons and corporate profit rather than prisoner health and well being. Private prison foodservice exploits prisoners' isolation from society and minimal legal power through cost-cutting practices that explicitly violate human rights to food security, and by limiting the quantity and quality of the cafeteria food provided, encourage prisoner consumerism. In addition, the commissary marketing practices of companies like Aramark take on the form of insidious consumer control. Prisoners are ideal consumers because they are, effectively, a population held hostage to the major food corporations that hold the most economic and political sway.

## CRIMINAL PRACTICES

The prison system is an expensive business. From 1993 to 2000 alone, the US foodservice industry made over $36 billion serving correctional facilities.[77] While this is chump change compared to the commercial foodservice sector's profits, this money is ripe for

[76] Smith, 210-211.
[77] Harris, Kaufman, Martinez, & Price, 35.

corporate embezzlement within a prison food system with little oversight and minimal protest due to prisoners' lack of access to legal protection. In 1845 Elam Lynds, warden of Sing Sing prison, was forced to resign after reports that he intentionally underfed prisoners in order to sell the state-supplied food.[78] The profit-driven practices of foodservice companies are nothing new, however the structure in which they occur has changed. Where once individual actors appropriated state funds for personal gain, politicians now align with private foodservice to extort state money through prison foodservice contracts.

The laundry list of Aramark's violations is long, but foremost among them are allegations of the company mistreating and withholding wages from workers, providing poor quality food, and committing fraud. As of 2007, more than half of the jobs on Forbes' list of lowest-paid jobs in the country were with Aramark.[79] Yet despite these violations, Aramark continues to serve public institutions across the nation. There is a growing body of evidence that Aramark is underfeeding prisoners in order to embezzle money from the state. In 2001, the Florida Department of Corrections outsourced all foodservice to Aramark, supposedly to *save* money, and ended a long history of prison farming in the state. Six years later, operational irregularities and the climbing price of the contract (up to $71 million annually from the initial $55 million) brought Aramark's performance under scrutiny. Paul C. Decker, (Florida's DOC Inspector General) discovered that Aramark was making "windfall profits" at the expense of Florida taxpayers by charging the state for phantom meals, regularly underfeeding inmates, and serving poor quality food. Decker's report showed that by terminating the contract and reverting foodservice to state control, Florida could save

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[78] Head, Tom, & David B. Wolcott. *Crime and Punishment in America*. York: Maple Press, 2010: pp. 50.
[79] Maher, Mark. "Scandal Surrounds Aramark." *The Hawk*. 1 April, 2008. 29, Jan., 2012. <http://www.sjuhawknews.com/2.7303/scandal-surrounds-aramark-1.1014471#.TybRP-OXTbg.>

approximately $7 million annually.[80] Despite these findings, the state signed another contract with Aramark in August that allowed the company to retain 75% of the state's prison foodservice.

Shortly after the contract renewal, Aramark once again broke from state-mandated menu requirements announcing plans to cut inmates' diets from 3000 to 2100 calories with "no detriment to inmates' nutrition and health."[81] Simultaneously, House Speaker Marco Rubio wrote a letter to Aramark commending the corporation as "a company of the highest integrity."[82] Outraged at the company's planned second breach of contract and government's complicity with this breach, Secretary of the FDOC Jim McDonough resigned. McDonough's resignation sparked fresh debates over the contract renewal and ultimately public pressure led Aramark to withdraw, citing "high food costs" as the cause, and the prison food system reverted to state control by 2009. To date Aramark has been fined about $260,000 for these contract violations,[83] but this is a mere slap on the wrist for a corporation that made over $30 million in profits the same year it ceded foodservice back to the FDOC.[84]

## CORPORATE POWER

As one correctional officer within the Florida prison system noted, "When they closed the state prison farm system they destroyed the system's ability to feed itself."[85] This sea change illustrates that the prison food system is no longer about prisoners' health and

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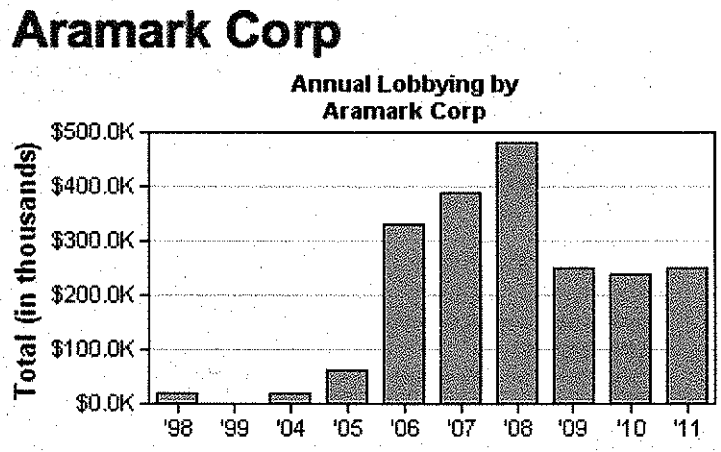
[80] Decker, Paul C., & Donald L. Miller. Cost-Value Analysis: Aramark Foodservice Contract C1927. Office of the Inspector General. Florida Department of Corrections. 10 Jan., 2007.
[81] Perry, Mitch E. "Ex-Corrections Chief Blasted Prison Foodservice." WMNF. 22 Feb., 2008. Radio.
[82] Rubio, Marco. Letter to Tim Campbell. 31 Jan., 2008. From the Tampa Bay Times. Online. < http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/the-buzz-florida-politics/content/food-fight-aramark-quits-prison-vendor>.
[83] "Aramark Ops Out of Florida Prisons Contract." *Food Management*. 11 Sept., 2008.
[84] "Fortune 500: 216. Aramark." CNN Money. 28 Feb., 2012. <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2008/snapshots/2309.html>.
[85] Doherty, Bridget. Personal Interview. 25 Oct., 2011.

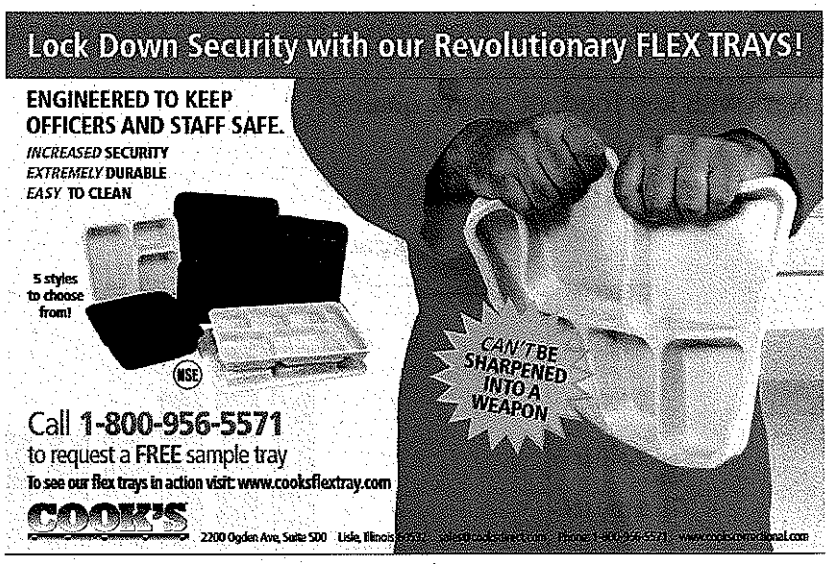
food needs. It is about exerting control over a vulnerable population in order to maximize profits—profits derived from both prisoners' pockets and taxpayers funds. As Florida's example shows, economic efficiency, or prisoners' rights and the preservation of human dignity do not determine policy regarding the prison food system. Rather this system is structured to fulfill the economic self-interests of corporate and political players. How does Aramark advance a privatized prison food system that charges taxpayers more money to provide prisoners with less food, of poorer quality?




The answer is corporate lobbying. Since 2004, Aramark has spent over two million dollars in lobbying. Not surprisingly 2007 and 2008 (the years of Aramark's debated contract renewal with Florida) mark the company's highest annual spending on lobbying by far, though publicly accessible data does not detail what this lobbying money went toward.[86] Though I have singled out Aramark, there are a whole slew of private companies invested in food and food-related goods and services for correctional institutions. Because these companies, like all companies in the prison industry, have a vested economic interest in the continued growth of the American prison system they perpetuate inflated perceptions of

[86] "Aramark Corp." Center for Responsive Politics. OpenSecrets.org. Data originally form Senate Office of Public Records. 6 Feb., 2012. 15 Feb.. 2012. <http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/clientsum.php?id=D000024107&year=2011>.

crime and punitive attitudes toward criminals in order to create new markets (i.e. more prisons) for their products. A glance at the Association of Correctional Foodservice Affiliates reveals articles on improving inmate behavior through fish oil to advertisements that reinforce the popular assumption that prisoners will use any opportunity to lash out violently.[87] Instead of policymakers examining why inmates behave with such aggression




and looking toward reforms, foodservice corporations have capitalized on the punitive atmosphere surrounding American corrections to promise solutions through a more disciplinary, controlled food system. Though foodservice is a seemingly nonpartisan necessity to sustain the prison system, private corporations have transformed prison foodservice into an active agent fueling onward the expansion of the prison system and punitive society, both of which allow them to enlarge their customer base.

## CONCLUSION

The structure of the prison food system—its lack of oversight and disregard for prisoners' rights and well-being in favor of corporate protection and profit—facilitates, in

[87] *INSIDER Magazine*., pp. 1.

fact, encourages the dubious practices described above. The privatization of prison foods as it is currently practiced in companies like Aramark clearly entails threats to human rights and public health. But these violations could be prevented if state governments were to enact harsher regulatory policies to protect the rights and health prisoners. With such regulation in place, private food companies could actually harness their economic and political power to make positive social change.

For example, Fighting Hunger is a public private partnership in Texas that connects food banks, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), and food corporations to prevent hunger. In this partnership, food banks "provide money for seeds, fertilizer, and shipping containers," and prison farms provide the land, labor and agricultural expertise to produce large quantities of food for hunger relief agencies across the state.[88] Corporations fill in the missing link by providing money to transport this food to communities across the state where it was most needed. Since Fighting Hunger's inception in 1996, Phillip Morris, Miller Brewing Co., and Kraft Foods have donated thousands of dollars to fun refrigerated transportation for these agricultural goods.

Besides the program's obvious boons to rural communities and food security, Gary Johnson (director of the TDCJ's Institutional Division) notes that prisoners "benefit from the ethic of wholesome work, and the satisfaction of helping their fellow citizens…these offenders are very positive about doing something good for the public." Based on the success of the program in Texas, it has now expanded to Wisconsin, Geogria, North Carolina and Ohio. [89] Fighting Hunger shows that private corporations can contribute to public good

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[88] "Unprecedented Public/Private Partnership Launches Statewide Fresh Produce Delivery Tour from Texas Prison Farm." *Business Wire*. New York: 2000. pp. 1.

[89] "Unprecedented Public/Private Partnership Launches Statewide Fresh Produce Delivery Tour from Texas Prison Farm." *Business Wire*. New York: 2000. pp. 1.

through their vast economic resources, however it is idealistic to imagine corporations will pursue philanthropic ventures beyond minimal charity to boost public image without economic incentive.

The greatest threat of privatized prison foodservice is the inherent threat of social control. Emerging psychological studies are proving that foodservice companies might be able to control not only what prisoners eat, but also how they feel and behave. In 2002, psychologist Bernard Gesch published a study on the effects of dietary supplements on violent behavior amongst 231 inmates in an England prison. Previous psychological studies had found that violent offenders are deficient in omega six and omega three essential fatty acids, and so the aim of the experiment was to determine whether supplementing the diets of especially violent offenders with these acids (as well as other vitamins and minerals) would reduce "anti-social" behavior as measured by the number of inmate infractions recorded by correctional officers. The results of the study showed that historically violent inmates taking supplements committed an average of 26% fewer offenses than violent inmates taking placebos.[90]

As of yet these findings are merely correlative, and more research would need to be done to determine whether dietary factors have a causal relationship with anti-social behavior. While we don't need studies to show that a healthy diet has positive effects on mood, energy and overall well-being as compared to a poor one, these studies give new meaning to the old adage "you are what you eat" with potentially troublesome implications. These studies bring into question the role of free will in the prison environment. If prisoners were legally required to take supplements it would create a slippery slope between regulating

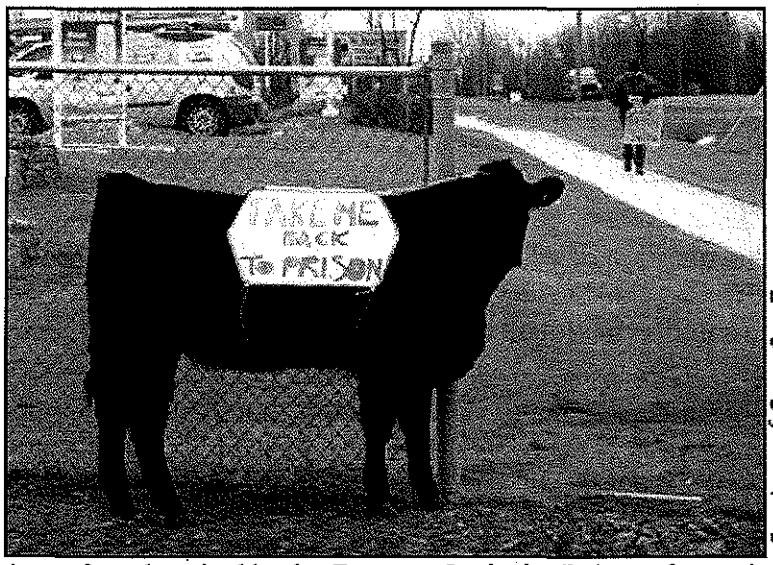
[90] C. Gesch, Bernard, Anita Eves, Sean M. Hammond, Sarah E. Hampson, Martin J. Crowder. "Influence of supplementary vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids on the antisocial behavior of young adult prisoners: randomized placebo controlled trials." *The British Journal of Psychiatry*. 181 (2002): pp. 22-28.

inmate diet and therefore mood, and exerting total control over inmates' behaviors and individual choices. This slope become even more slippery with the potential of psychotropic drug innovations that could target and suppress certain kinds of social behaviors and thereby subdue inmates in a manner that harkens back to Aldous Huxley's "soma" from *Brave New World.*[91]

Beyond the question of whether or not controlling inmates through diet is ethical, the very idea that the solution to violent behavior, crime, and recidivism comes in pill form produces problems of its own. A pill lasts only so long as its molecules are present in the body. A rehabilitative program can change a life. As the carceral system continues in its quest for quick-fix solutions—building more prisons, or supporting a corporate food industry that puts cheap food on the table instead of allowing prisoners the time and effort of growing their own—it creates dependent communities, and undermines the potential for communities (local and prison populations) to empower and sustain themselves.

[91] Fukuyama, Francis. "Neuropharmacology and the Control of Behavior." *Our PostHuman Future.* New York: Picador, 2003: pp. 32-34.

# VI. SAVE OUR PRISON FARMS



A cow from the prized herd at Frontenac Institution Dairy up for auction[92]

The ongoing debate over the viability of prison farms in Canada exemplifies the costs to prisoner rehabilitation, rural economic development, public health, and sustainability that accompany the unchecked growth of the prison industrial complex. Canada, like the United States, has a long history of using prison farms and inmate labor as a means of prisoner rehabilitation and institutional cost reduction. For over 100 years, Canada's six prison farms have offered prisoners invaluable vocational and life skills through a sustainable and empowering agricultural model that bolsters the food security of prisoners and local communities alike. However all of this is changing. On February 24, 2009, a Kingston newspaper leaked the story that the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) would be phasing out the prison farms program over the course of the next two years.[93] In response local farmers, food justice advocates, social activists, former correctional officers, environmental

[92] Thomas, Nicki. "Prison Farms Facing Execution." *Capital News Online*. 5 March, 2010. 28 Feb., 2012. <http://www.capitalnews.ca/index.php/news/prison-farms-facing-execution>.
[93] N.p. *Save Our Prison Farms National Campaign*. 2011. Online. 4 Oct, 2011. <Saveourprisonfarms.ca.>.

advocacy group, and ex-inmates who formerly worked on the prison farm united in the national *Save Our Prison Farms* campaign. The campaign calls for a halt in the dismantling of the prison farms in order to provide non-governmental experts time to analyze the farms' viability and benefits, as well as to examine the political and ideological motives behind their closure.[94] Three years later, the battle for the farms is still raging.

The campaign illustrates that beyond eradicating an exceptional and proven rehabilitation program for prisoners, closing the prison farms will have a dramatic effect on local food systems, economies, and the environment. As these diverse interest groups that constitute the campaign argue, the move to close prison farms is not in the interests of the prisoner, who will lose valuable vocational programs and thus the tools of his own empowerment and rehabilitation, or of the taxpayer who will have to pay more for *decreased* public safety as un-rehabilitated prisoners are released into society, or of the local community who will lose these bastions of the agricultural economy and of food security. Rather, closing the prison farms and outsourcing foodservice to a multinational corporation is part and parcel of a larger neoconservative agenda to transform Canada's prison system in the image of America's privatized model at the expense of taxpayers, community food security and public safety. The prison farm closures reflect past trends of rural deindustrialization and privatization in the United States beginning in the eighties. By drawing from the results of American criminal policies after these processes, and analyzing the current transformation of the Canadian prison food system, I reveal the political and economic motivations that drive a prison culture and disciplinary society wherein we lose the means to sustain ourselves.

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[94] <http://saveourprisonfarms.ca/>.

The current effort to close Canada's prison farms reflects the same neoliberal forces that reduced America's prison food system to a capitalist enterprise decades ago. Yet there is very little information available on the justifications or motives for the closure of America's prison farms. In contrast, Canada's prison farms have incorporated education and empowerment into the prison farm program and as a result, these farms have shown monumental effects in increasing food security (for both rural and prison populations) and reducing recidivism. New paradigms of the American prison farm are emerging, as I will explore in the final chapter, but because these nascent projects have little data available as of yet I use this Canadian case study to exemplify the success of farming as a rehabilitative prison program and the political, economic, and ideological processes that are attempting to undo this success.

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## CANADA'S PRISON FARMS

Canada's prison farms rehabilitate by providing prisoners with meaningful work through which they can grow, learn, and recreate themselves. Prisoners at any of the six facilities with farms (Frontenac, Pittsburgh, Westmorland, Riverbend, Rockwood, and Bowden) are given the opportunity to work on the farm at the end of their sentences. Prisoners work with plants and animals, learning specific vocational skills—such as operation and maintenance of heavy machinery, environmental stewardship, crop management, livestock care and breeding—as well as life skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and responsibility. Furthermore, prisoners can get certified in various agriculture

related fields such heavy machinery operation, food handling, and dairy operation.[96] Thus even if inmates do not go on to a career in agriculture, some of the practical skills and certifications they earned through the farms program apply to future jobs.

There are more intangible benefits to working with living things as well. First of all, the farm transforms the prison into a lively, colorful space where inmates, guards, and local farmers can interact as equals working toward the common goal of self-reliance and sustainability. Merely being in this colorful space, free from the confines of barbed wire can be a rejuvenating and liberating experience for the prisoner who is used to the bleak, hard prison landscape. While many of the inmates are from urban areas and have never seen a cow, let alone farmed, working with plants and animals offers a calming escape from the violent, tense environment of the prison.[98] Working with living things—whether livestock or crops—instills empathy and reduces aggressive behavior amongst inmates through what was historically called the "fresh air treatment."[99] Giving inmates the opportunity to exercise, to breath fresh air, to work outside the cruel confines of cement and barbed wire, keeps inmates healthy and relieves much of the emotional pressure of the harsh prison environment. Correctional officers that have worked within these facilities, officers that risk their careers by standing up in support of the farms, have said that the farms are the single-most effective rehabilitation program in the CSC, and furthermore, that in their time working with the program (for some, as long as thirty years) they did not see a single case of violent re-offending amongst prisoners who participated.[100]

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[96] Ed. Hansard. "House of Commons Prison Farm Debate." *House of Commons Debates*. 40th Parliament, 3rd Session. Dec. 1, 2010.
[98] Doherty, Bridget. Personal Interview. 25 Oct., 2011.
[99] Jiler, 25.
[100] Doherty.

EFFECTS ON RURAL COMMUNITIES

The economic and nutritional benefits of the prison farms extend beyond the prisons' walls as well. The prison farms play a large role in regional agricultural infrastructure, and on a local level, they bolster sustainable food systems that benefit prison and local populations alike. In fact, many community members surrounding the prison farms are integrally tied to and even dependent on the farms as a source of revenue and food security.[101] The farms buy from local businesses, such as agricultural supply stores and machine manufacturers, and hire local farmers to educate prisoners in agricultural skills and farm management. As independent, small-scale agriculture is on the decline due to competition with agribusiness, these second jobs as vocational trainers are crucial for independent farmers to supplement their incomes and thereby sustain their traditional livelihoods.[102] Contrary to what Conservatives would have the public believe, prison farms do not compete with the private farming sector. Because the produce that the prison farms yield is only sold to other correctional institutions, cheap inmate labor and government funding of prison farms does not threaten independent farmers. The prison farms' surplus produce (which is typically a substantial amount) is donated to local food banks or soup kitchens.[103] Thus the prison farms promote a strong local food system and farm infrastructure through their direct economic investment in and donation to the community.

In rural communities surrounding the prison farms, the strong local food system fosters a direct connection between farmers and consumers so that farmers get a greater share

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[101] Doherty.
[102] Doherty.
[103] Doherty.

of each dollar spent on food (since independent farmers can avoid the processing, packaging, transportation and marketing costs that constitute up to 80 percent of mass marketed food's cost), and therefore reinvest more money in their communities.[104] Such reinvestment benefits everyone engaged in the food system, including local consumers, and preserves rural towns' traditional industries and autarkic cultures from the pervasive threat of corporatization (which, as described in chapter three, has effectively rendered parts of rural America a cultural vacuum). Furthermore, community food security reduces the environmental impact of agriculture by reducing packaging, refrigeration and transportation costs, and the carbon footprint of the distance food must travel.


By reinforcing the agricultural infrastructure of rural communities, prison farms sustain local farmers and therefore local availability of nutritious food for the entire community, incarcerated or free. In this way, the Canadian prison farms are linchpins of *community food security* (as *SOPF* protestors advertise in their campaign posters).[105] Community food security implies a system wherein community members obtain a healthy diet through "a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice."[106] The prison farms do both by empowering prisoners and local populations through a rehabilitative, self-sustaining agricultural program that promotes the universal right of access to healthy food. In this way,

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[104] Ikerd.
[105] Thomas.
[106] Burton, Hannah, Hugh Joseph, Andy Fisher, and Kami Pothukuchi. *What's Cooking in Your Food system? A Guide to Community Food Assesment.* Venice: Community Food Security Coalition, 2002: pp. 5.

local food systems can synthesize a diverse array of goals including "community economic development, anti-hunger, social justice, local and sustainable agriculture, public health, nutrition, environmentalism," and in the unique case of the prison farms: rehabilitation.[107]

## EFFECTS ON PRISON POPULATIONS

Sense of community is crucial to the inmate's rehabilitation. Giving the prisoner the chance to contribute to society through farming counters the social alienation he feels through his criminalization and imprisonment. Working with local farmers allows prisoners to develop a real relationship with the outside community; to get to know the community they will be released into, and be a part of it for the duration of their incarceration.[108] The knowledge that the produce the farms yield will serve fellow prisoners and the local community instills prison farm workers with a sense of pride that helps with this socialization. Furthermore, the education and vocational skills prisoners learn on the inside become the instruments of their own empowerment upon release as prisoners use these tools to engage with and contribute to the local community.

In providing these tools for prisoners to successfully reintegrate and in bolstering a food system that fosters networks of support (both economic and social) for prison populations and rural communities alike, the prison farms build safer, healthier communities. By cutting one of the most successful educational and vocational programs in the Canadian penal system, the conservative government claims it is "modernizing" rehabilitation programs in order to better help ex-prisoners in the difficult process of social reintegration. However, the closure of such a program will only undo the structures of rehabilitation,

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[107] Burton, 5.
[108] Doherty.

community food security, sustainable economic development, and prison-community solidarity that the prison farms have put in place. Thus the closure of Canada's prison farms is a signal of larger political and ideological movements taking place.

## JUSTIFICATION FOR CLOSURE

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's majority conservative government has supplied various justifications for the prison farms' closures, all of which are tenuous at best. The primary reason the Harper government cites for closing the farms is cost. The Conservative party argues that the prison farms lose $4.1 million dollars annually. How they have come to this figure, however, is a mystery since the Correctional Service of Canada keeps no statistics on the cost of the program. When asked for evidence to support this claim in Parliament, the "Conservatives refused throughout the debate in committee to provide what exactly was the cost of the prison farms program and how much money we would specifically save [by closing them]."[109] In fact, at the founding *Save Our Prison Farms* meeting in Kingston, local conservative politicians (before they could be coached in the government's policy agenda) attested that **the prison farms were anything but uneconomical**. If anything, the farms were cost-saving.[110] Even assuming the Conservatives' figure was correct, cutting the farms would entail new costs in buying or potentially importing, transporting, and storing food that would equal if not, exceed the $4.1 million they claim to be losing.

Take, for example, the closure of the farm at Frontenac Correctional Facility in Kingston. Frontenac's dairy formerly supplied milk to prisons throughout Ontario and Quebec, donated thousands of eggs to local food banks, and invested approximately

[109] Hansard.
[110] Doherty.

$900,000 annually in the Kingston region.[111] The farm was in the top 20 percent in productivity for the Ontario region,[112] but now that the farm is closed government tenders estimate it will cost nearly one million dollars annually to contract a private dairy firm.[113] While this figure is not too far from Frontenac dairy's former annual expenditures, there are other costs to consider that accompany privatization. First, the contract only covers the Ontario region. A separate contract, and another one million would be required to serve Quebec. Second, the contract will not cover the mass food donations the dairy once contributed and as a result, community food security will wane as local emergency foodservices lose their steady contributors. Finally, this new contract (under NAFTA) would mean the prisons' milk could come from anywhere within North America.[114] Not only does this take money out of the community (possibly to another country altogether), thereby undermining rural community reinvestment and economic development, but such outsourcing negatively impacts the environment as well by increasing the carbon footprint that the prison food system will generate.

Beyond considering new food costs, the government will have to take into account the costs of increased recidivism that will undoubtedly result from the closure of the farms programs. Even if cutting the farms saves money in the short term, the closure of any proven rehabilitative programs will produce long-term costs that include higher recidivism rates and a burgeoning prison population.[115] Without the bulwark of the prison farms, local farming economies and infrastructures will deteriorate, potentially producing further long-term costs

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[111] Weaver, Tammy. "Replacing Prison Farm Milk to Cost Almost $1 Million." *National Farmers Union.* Online. 29, April 2010. 15 Oct, 2011. <http://www.nfu.ca/press.html#apr>.
[112] Hansard.
[113] Weaver.
[114] Weaver.
[115] Doherty.

such as increased dependence on welfare and increased crime rates as the hundreds of civilians associated with the prison farms lose their jobs. Thus the prison farm closures are not economically motivated. Shutting down the backbone of a sustainable food system will cost, not save, money. Rather the closures are ideologically driven. Canada's neoconservative government has made unsubstantiated claims that these farms lose money in an effort to shift Canada's carceral system to a privatized, outsourced model serving private corporate interests in emulation of America's prisons

The second reason for closing the prison farms is that agriculture is a (supposedly) "dead industry."[116] Closing the prison farms, Minister of Public Safety Vic Toews claims, is necessary to the "modernization of CSC's skills development programming" since agricultural skills do not reflect the "realities of the employment world" today. According to the minister, "Of prisoners who actually work on these prison farms, less than one percent of them actually find work in an agricultural setting."[117] Yet Toews entirely neglects the intangible benefits the farms provide, as well as the inmates' personal needs and realities beyond job skills. In a penal system where a significant portion of the prison population suffer from mental and physical illness or have histories of substance abuse, therapy and rehabilitation are too often ignored in prison programs. The farms program is unique in that is seamlessly combines practical job skills applicable to any work, therapy, education, and community building in order to address a broad range of inmates' emotional, psychological, and practical needs.

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[116] Hansard.

[117] Toews, Vic, Minister of Public Safety. *First Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security: Prison Farm Closures and Food Provisionment.* Canada. Parliament of Canada. 40th Parliament, 3rd Session (March 3, 2010-March 26, 2011).

While standard vocational programs view the prisoner as a potential worker, the prison farms program approaches the prisoner as an individual, with specific needs, issues, and ambitions. The government's primary strategy in reducing recidivism is giving prisoners "employable" (typically blue collar or service industry) job skills with the hope that employment post-release will successfully reintegrate ex-prisoners into society. Yet employment alone will not deter an ex-prisoner from committing crimes. The farms program encompasses education, exercise, and personal development in addition to job skills in order to aid prisoners in overcoming a vast array of issues. The purpose of this program is not to directly land inmates jobs post-release, but rather, to empower them through knowledge and cultivate in them life skills that will be applicable to any future career they might pursue. Violent offenders learn empathy working with animals, offenders who have never held steady jobs learn responsibility and promptness, and by working together, all inmate participants learn teamwork and forge a sense of community through their shared labor alongside local farmers. On the farms, inmates "get to know the dignity of a job well done and understand the structure of work."[118]

The prison farms work as rehabilitative programs because they take a well-rounded approach that responds to prisoners' personal and practical needs, as well as to the agricultural economy already in place within these prison towns. Replacing the farms with "lower cost" programs to teach "modern" job skills would be to follow in the footsteps of Aramark's "In2Work" program and abandon the economic development of rural farming towns. While In2Work does provide inmates with a food handler's license, it accustoms prisoners to a position of low-skill service without any opportunities for advancement or

[118] Hansard.

personal growth. The notion of replacing the farms program with a narrow skill-based vocational program reveals just how out of touch the Canadian government is with the viability of small-scale agriculture, the increasing popularity of local food, and prisoners' lived experiences with correctional programs and furthermore, it reveals government's underlying motives for this closure.

## THE DEVOLUTION IN CANADIAN CORRECTIONAL POLICY

Citing the supposed high cost of maintenance and the undesirability of agricultural skills, the Harper government claims that ridding the CSC of the burdensome farms program will open up funds for increasing "public safety." This rhetoric of "safety" and emphasis on the "public" (as opposed to "prisoners," the population correctional institutions are meant to serve) illuminates a startling sea-change in the purpose of Canadian correctional policy. Canada is transitioning to America's "tough on crime" model—specifically, cracking down on drugs and juvenile offenses—by building a punitive penal system that breeds, rather than reforms criminals. This shift is especially clear in Canada's changing offender profile; between 2001 and 2007 the incarcerated population of Aboriginals and females has noticeably increased.[119] Canadian criminal policy is funding the expansion of the prison system through cuts to rehabilitative programs at the expense of prisoners' rights and the "public safety" that such policies profess to protect. This process is creating a self-perpetuating cycle, wherein lack of prison programs increases recidivism, which in turn increases prison populations and thereby necessitates the further expansion of the carceral system. This shift is the result of many overlapping influences and global trends, but first and

[119] Babooram, Avani. "The Changing Offender Profile of Adults in Custody 2006/2007." Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue. 28.10 (Dec. 2008): pp. 9-10.

foremost among them is the proliferation of a global prison industrial complex built through alliances between government and multinational corporations to pursue private economic interests.

The seminal document responsible for restructuring Canada's prison system is the 2007 review of the Correctional Services of Canada, entitled *A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety*. In this document, the Review Panel—a conservative-leaning group of policy makers and advisers—outlines a model for reforming the penal system with the supposed aim of increasing "public safety." Spearheaded by Ontario's former Minister of Correctional Services and "privatization guru" Robert Sampson, [120] the Panel consisted of individuals experienced in public policy and intimately connected to police or correctional institutions. None of the Panel members "had academic training related to criminology, offender treatment or correctional law."[121] As such, these "objective" panel members had direct incentive (economic or political) to press policies that would bolster criminal enforcement and carceral institutions. In the *Roadmap*, the Panel used select crime statistics to paint a distorted picture of Canadian crime rates (especially in regards to violent crime) and of the prison population in order to justify "strengthening public safety" agenda.[122] Yet the Roadmap's skewed portrait of the Canadian criminal system was taken at face value and their recommendations supported as a policy agenda without question. The Panel has changed the public's perceptions of criminality and their opinions of what the conditions of imprisonment should be in order to limit prisoners' human rights.

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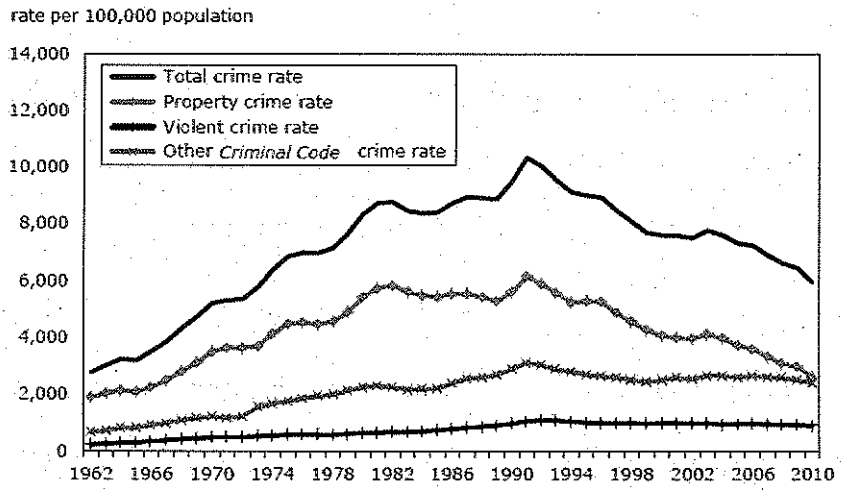
[120] Doherty.

[121] Jackson & Stewart, 6.

[122] Jackson & Stewart, x.

The *Roadmap's* major departure from human rights conventions regards the Panel's proposed usage of differential rights and privileges within the prison setting to discipline prisoners. The Panel proposes depriving prisoners of all rights but the most basic—food, clothing, shelter, nominal health care—as a means to promote offender accountability for crimes committed, and forcing prisoners to earn back these "privileges" by displaying a commitment to rehabilitation. These "privileges" include the possibility of transferring facilities, access to training, sports, or vocational programs, the right to visitors and paid work, earned parole, and canteen privileges.[123] The Panel justifies this restructuring of prison conditions by portraying the prison population as more difficult and more dangerous, claiming that violent crime is on the rise despite its general decline over the past decade (see chart below).[124]




While some may argue that creating a merit system of privileges and privation within the prison system would motivate prisoners' active self-rehabilitation, the truth is that for

[123] Jackson and Stewart, xiv.

[124] Brennan, Shanon and Mia Dauvergne. "Police Reported Crime Statistics in Canada, 2010." *Statistics Canada*. 27 July, 2010. Website. 6 Nov., 2011.

many prisoners who are used to sparse living conditions, such a system will undermine successful reintegration. The "they-get-less" method of motivation is:

> not likely to lead to reintegration of offenders, but rather to a harder, tougher cohort of individuals who, in large measure, are already quite used to privation. ...if offenders 'participate' or attend programs for the sole purpose of avoiding a negative consequence, or to meet expectations of a decision-making authority, they are less likely to internalize the benefits and therefore, ultimately, defeats the purpose of the correctional plan in the end.[125]

These provisional programs—accessible to inmates based solely upon a review board's judgment of those inmates' behavior and commitment—exemplify the type of programs the government hopes to put in place of the prison farms. In such a prison setting, job-training programs mold the most obedient prisoners into complacent workers, while non-compliant prisoners are excluded from rehabilitation due to their lack of "commitment."

The primary issue with this perspective is the assumption that "the rights and privileges of those who obey the laws...are fundamentally different from the rights of those who do not."[126] Prisoners retain their human rights upon incarceration since these rights are inherent, not "earned" or deserved. Incarceration, the limitation of the prisoners' right to mobility, is punishment enough. Any further withdrawal of rights is merely the exercise of naked state power. This meritocratic system of rights creates a slippery slope that jeopardizes the rights of prisoners, the population most vulnerable to exploitation by state power because of their isolation from society at large, based solely on the discretion of correctional officials with ties to a conservative, pro-imprisonment government and the prison industrial complex. Of course, discipline and control within the prison setting is necessary. However discipline is only effective if it is used to promote positive change in the individual. Incentivizing the

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[125] Jackson and Stewart, xviii.
[126] Jackson & Stewart, xiii.

prison population to rehabilitate themselves through deprivation of rights and human dignity de-humanizes the prisoner and renders him less capable of overcoming the immense social, cultural and economic pressures that constrain at-risk populations to lives of crime.

## CANADA'S PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Less than a year after the *Roadmap* was published, the Canadian government officially responded to the Panel's suggestions by "investing $478.8 million over five years to initiate the implementation of a new vision" for corrections.[127] It is this new vision that served as the foundation for the Harper government's newest Canadian Crime Bill being pushed through Parliament titled the "Safe Streets and Communities Act." Per the Panel's demands for increased enforcement and security measures, the Bill illustrates this shift to America's "tough-on-crime" model through legislation that "is more based on punishment than prevention."[128] Amongst other changes, the Bill will introduce mandatory minimums for drug offenses, end early parole for murderers, and eliminate pardons for certain "serious crimes" or for offenders with "three strikes."[129] These laws will further criminalize nonviolent crimes, such as drug offenses, and keep offenders in prison longer. To accommodate the enlarged prison populations these legislations would usher in, the government is currently double-bunking to open up 2700 spaces across existing institutions,

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[127] Jackson and Stewart, 3.

[128] Carlson, Kathryn Blaze. "Crime and punishment: Inside the Tories' plan to overhaul the justice system." The National Post. Nationalpost.com. May 20, 2011. Nov. 4, 2011. <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/05/21/crime-and-punishment-inside-the-tories-plan-to-overhaul-the-justice-system/>.

[129] Bill C-10. "An Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and to amend the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other Acts." House of Commons of Canada. First Reading, Sept. 20, 2011. First Session, Forty-first Parliament.

despite Canada's obligation to international conventions against the practice.[130] In an environment where tensions and aggression already runs high, double-bunking only generates "higher rates of stress-induced mental disorders, higher rates of aggression, and higher rates of violence."[131] Furthermore, without the prison farms or similar programs to give inmates the opportunity for stress-release, exercise and fresh air, aggression and anxieties erupt within the concrete walls and barbed wire requiring greater expenditures on policing.

More disturbing still, the Harper government is looking into spending another $9 to $10 billion on the construction of American style "super jails."[132] At a House of Commons debate over the prison farms, liberal Parliament member Mark Holland noted, "the government is embarking on chasing after California…locking people up for longer and longer following a Republican model that leads to less safe communities and turns prisons into crime factories."[133] These prisons engender, rather than reduce crime because rehabilitative programs such as the farms program are reduced, cut entirely, or limited to those inmates who have earned the "privilege" of personal betterment. When so much of the prison population suffers from mental health problems, diseases, illiteracy and other job-excluding factors, the prison environment's psychological suffocation only compounds these issues to release inmates worse off than they were upon their imprisonment.

The government is cutting successful rehabilitative programs in order to supposedly open up funds for "better" vocational programs, yet simultaneously, expanding the prison system, increasing the prison population, and thereby forcing the closure of more rehab

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[130] Hansard.
[131] Schlosser, 73.
[132] Hansard.
[133] Hansard.

programs, or at the very least, limiting the population that can participate. Having seen the effects of such "tough-on-crime" policies in the United States, Canadian liberals argue that further criminalization will not deter crime when the rate of police reported crime is the lowest it has been since the 1970s (refer to chart above).[134] As the forerunners of prison privatization, California and Texas are the most cited cautionary tales in Parliament. Liberals fear that the unchecked expansion of the prison system will leech money out of other public services such as health care and education, as it has in California, thereby weakening the infrastructure of public welfare and increasing crime rates and recidivism.

## CONCLUSION

Canada's prison farms offer a valuable model for a successful agricultural program that rehabilitates the prisoner by engaging him in a localized food system that empowers prisoner and community alike. However the farms' closures will eradicate the rehabilitative progress, social and economic stability, economic development and self-reliance of prison populations and prison town. In Canada, the closure of these prison farms is depriving inmates of already limited rehabilitative and vocational opportunities, and affecting communities' abilities to feed themselves. Moreover, eradicating these cornerstones of the local community, economy, and food system leaves a vacuum—a "food desert"—to be filled by corporate chains which destroy the subsistence way of life that has characterized these small farming communities for decades.

The prison farm closures are merely the symptoms of a more insidious trend. When the government eagerly ushers in more prisoners while actively reducing the means for

[134] Brennan & Dauvergne.

prisoners to rehabilitate themselves; when the government has the money and will to spend billions of dollars on prison construction, yet cannot afford an effective and proven rehabilitation program that would help negate the need for more prisons, there is clearly an underlying incentive beyond the publicized justifications of "public safety" and "modernization." The case of the prison farm closures in Canada reveals a deep political paradigm shift in the Canadian carceral system and correctional policy, a shift from empowering prisoners to controlling and punishing them. In this system, the prisoner has become capital—a cost to be minimized or a source of profit to be manipulated.

Because the prisoner is capital, private correctional industries (such as correctional corporations, health care, foodservice, etc.) and associated economic and political stakeholders have incentive to expand the carceral system and the incarcerated population to extremes in order to increase their profit margins or further their political agendas. Though Canada does not yet have private prisons, the current state of the Canadian carceral system reflects the transformation of America's penal system from rehabilitation to punishment that occurred in the 1980s alongside the privatization of America's prison services. In other words, the prison industrial complex is spreading north and the only bastions against such imprisonment for profit, programs like the prison farms that are driven by public good rather than capital, are fading.

# VII. THE FUTURE OF PRISON FOOD

Perhaps the age of a national prison system entirely sustained by small-scale prison farms is over. Perhaps in the globalized age, privatization is inevitable. Yet contemporary progress in sustainability and environmentalism are revolutionizing how we think about food and its production. Prisons inevitably change the economic, social, and political landscape of any region where they are constructed. Yet these changes can be positive, building on the assets that both rural and prison populations have to offer. Prisons can be a locus of environmental and social advocacy, of food justice, of change. In this chapter, I will explore two examples of such innovative prison farm and garden programs. While neither supply enough food to feed the entire prison populations of their respective institutions, both offer insights into how these micro-movements within the prisons can overhaul the current exploitative prison food system in order to rehabilitate prisoners, revitalize rural communities, and bolster local food systems.

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GREENHOUSE

In the 19th century Rikers Island served as a farm to produce food for all of New York City's jail populations. As the jail population expanded the island was gradually subdivided into separate jail complexes, but Rikers retained tracts of land for agricultural purposes. Though Rikers still maintains a working farm that yields approximately 40,000 pounds of

produce annually,[139] inmates do not enjoy the fruits (or vegetables) of their labor since this yield is a pittance compared to what is required to feed the approximately 20,000 inmates housed at Rikers—one of the largest penal colonies in the world—on any given day.[140]

Most of the produce the farm yields—such as watermelon, pumpkins, squash—go to the guards in gift baskets as rewards for their service, or compose the fare at functions for correctional staff. But it is not so much the produce that matters as the experience itself. One former Rikers inmate noted, the farm "gives guards and prisoners both something to do."[141] While the farm can offer inmates vocational skills related to farming, it is lacking in the rehabilitative and educational methods that make a prison program truly transformative. As a short term jail Rikers can be a dislocative space for many of the inmates who typically spend less than six months on the island.[142] In such a transient, alienating environment a small patch of permanence, of tranquility, can have a profound effect on the inmate. This pocket of stasis—this space for self-reflection and growth—is exactly what GreenHouse provides.

The GreenHouse project is a horticultural therapy program for inmates at Rikers Island Jail in New York City. GreenHouse began in 1996 as a project of the Horticultural Society of New York with the aim to rehabilitate prisoners through horticultural therapy and thereby, reduce recidivism rates. GreenHouse works toward this goal by providing prisoners with "job and life skills, some scientific knowledge, and on-going therapy working with plants and animals in the hope they can redirect their lives through meaningful work" and

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[139] Jiler, 20-24.
[140] Jiler, 13.
[141] Anonymous. Personal Interview. 11/4/11
[142] Jiler, 13.

break the vicious cycle of recidivism that grips so many offenders in a system with very few educational and vocational opportunities.[143]

As in Canada, the recidivism reduction effort is focused primarily on giving inmates useful job skills so that they might find employment post-release and escape economic pressures that may cause a relapse into criminality. GreenHouse specifically trains inmates in landscaping and horticulture, and through GreenTeam (the HSNY work program for inmates post-release connects ex-inmates to jobs in New York city's nurseries, landscape design firms, and public parks. While job skills do notably reduce the likelihood of recidivating, a truly successful rehabilitative program focuses on the inmate as a person, not merely as a source of capital. Though primarily focused on horticulture rather than food production, GreenHouse provides valuable insight into the characteristics of a successful educational and rehabilitative program rooted in cultivation, environmental stewardship, and empowerment.

Unlike traditional prison labor programs designed to exploit the prisoner to yield cheaper products, GreenHouse's aim is to use horticulture as a therapeutic tool while simultaneously teaching prisoners vocational skills. At Rikers, the GreenHouse accomplishes this rehabilitation by creating a safe environment, separate and distinct from the jail, where inmates can express themselves and gain the self-esteem and confidence necessary to overcoming sometimes traumatic pasts, and to surviving the harsh emotional, physical, and psychological conditions of imprisonment. On the two-acre plot of land where the greenhouse and gardens are located, "inmates learn about plant science, ecology, horticulture skills, garden construction and design" and ultimately design and build their own gardens.[144]

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[143] Jiler, 16-17.
[144] Jiler, 13.

Through this program, "Gardening becomes an avenue of self-expression, and through the accumulation of knowledge—empowerment."[145]

It is this empowerment through knowledge and meaningful work that truly rehabilitates the prisoner, not some certification program like Aramark's In2Work that address inmates as a worker, not an individual. The ex-inmates I interviewed that participated in GreenHouse during their time at Rikers described the greenhouse as a meditative, personal space where they could concentrate on their work, unlike other educational or vocational programs at Rikers where institutional conditions and relationships cause too many distractions.[146] In a prison environment where personal time, space, or belongings are rare, the greenhouse offers a unique respite.

Furthermore, the opportunity for meaningful work within the prison gave inmates' incarceration greater meaning than mere isolation from society and punishment. GreenHouse work allowed the prisoners to gain something from his incarceration and made the time go by "twice as fast." As one of these former inmates said, the "prisoner has nothing to do but time, and he wants to work" because work offsets the depression of confinement.[147] For many inmates, the GreenHouse provides work they can be proud of for the first time and empowers inmates by teaching them self-reliance. Though GreenHouse does not have statistics detailing the program's effects on recidivism, studies show that inmates who have participated in similar horticultural therapy programs are only 25% as likely to recidivate as

[145] Jiler, 49.
[146] Anonymous. Personal Interview. 11/4/11.
[147] Anonymous. Personal Interview. 11/4/11.

nonparticipating inmates.[148] Additionally, less than 10% of inmates that work with GreenTeam post-release recidivate.[149]

The practical knowledge inmates acquire at Rikers is key to the success of GreenHouse because it provides inmates with a skill base that they can apply to their daily lives, and to their own communities post-release. One ex-inmate described how his GreenHouse education helped him understand nutrition and diet's effect on the body so that, upon release, he was motivated to provide a healthier diet for his son.[150] Yet even while inmates are still incarcerated, this connection between the prisoner and the broader community is vital to the prisoner's rehabilitation. As with Canada's prison farms, connecting the inmate to community gives him a sense of purpose within the community that he will soon be released into and allows the prisoner to serve more than just time. GreenHouse forges this sense of community through projects that use inmate skill and labor to beautify inner city neighborhoods (often the very neighborhoods Rikers inmates hail from) and promote food security; much of the greenhouses' "annual yield of several thousands pounds of vegetable, bedding, and perennial seedlings…[is] distributed to elementary schools, libraries and community gardens in the city."[151] In this way, the GreenHouse extends rehabilitation and food security beyond the prisons walls to affect positive change in New York's neighborhood food systems.

## THE SUSTAINABLE PRISON PROJECT

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[148] Jiler, 36.
[149] Jiler, 152.
[150] Anonymous. Personal Interview. 11/4/11.
[151] Jiler, 44.

While the threat of major agribusiness and foodservice corporations controlling America's food looms large, and prison farm and gardening programs continue to close down, alternative movements in opposition to the corporatization of food are growing and the prison is proving ideal for the germination of such efforts. The Sustainable Prison Project (SPP) is a partnership between the Washington State Department of Corrections and Evergreen College that aims to "reduce the environmental, economic and human costs of prisons by implementing sustainable practices, green collar education programs, and ecological research projects."[152]

For the past decade, scientists and students have been working with the Washington DOC to promote sustainable practices in the prison. But it was not until 2008 that the project was officially launched at four prisons throughout Washington State. These prisons represent a broad range of population size, gender, security level, and infrastructure. Projects at the prisons include horticulture, bee-keeping, organic gardening, propagation of endangered species, water treatment, motorless lawn mowing (as a voluntary exercise opportunity for inmates), the K-9 Rescue program, and more. The program is already showing phenomenal success in improving sustainability of prisons. Between 2005 and 2010, members of the SPP in conjunction with the DOC reduced waste to landfills by 35%, increased recycling by 89%, increased composting by 90%, reduced potable water consumption by 100 million gallons, and between 2009-2010, reduced carbon emissions by 40%. The economic and environmental costs reduced through these endeavors were substantial, [153]

As with Canada's prison farms, the SPP synthesizes a diversity of experts and interests. Evergreen students and professors see opportunity for ecological research and

[152] "Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2009." Sustainable Prisons Project. Online. <http://blogs.evergreen.edu/sustainableprisons/resources/>.
[153] Sustainable Prison Project Practices. Dec. 2011. Pamphlet.

promoting sustainability with prisoners providing fresh insights; prison officials see educational opportunities for inmates, as well as a means of reducing tensions and tedium by intellectually engaging prisoners; conservationists see the chance to cultivate endangered species in a cost-effective but non-exploitative way by connecting their mission with a nature-starved population; and prisoners view this project as a means to reconnect with society by solving pressing environmental problems, and by preparing themselves for re-entry to society through "green collar" job training.[154]

Enforced institutional settings, such as prisons, provide ripe grounds for raising awareness about and enacting sustainability because they provide a largely sedentary or inactive population eager for physical and intellectual stimulus. Furthermore, these institutions are ideal for researching the effects of sustainable practices because they have relatively stable populations with measurable input and output levels of materials and energy.[155] But rather than exploit inmates' desperation for stimulation, the SPP encourages inmates to take ownership of these projects. As Project Manager Kelli Bush notes, the power of the SPP lies in that inmates are "treated as partners in our work;"[156] as "active and valued participants in an ongoing exploration of how to solve a critical environmental problem."[157] Giving inmates such equal voice and weight is, in itself, hugely empowering within a disciplinary institution. The demand for such engaged physical and intellectual opportunity is evidenced by the fact that the SPP has 3,585 inmate volunteers.[158]

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[154] Sustainable Prison Project Overview. Dec. 2011. Pamphlet.
[155] Nadkarni, Nalini & Craig Ulrich. "Sustainability research and practices in enforced residential institutions: collaborations of ecologists and prisoners." *Environment, Development, and Sustainability*. 11.4 (2009): 816.
[156] Bush, Kelli. Personal Interview. 8 Feb., 2012.
[157] Nadkarni & Ulrich, 831.
[158] Sustainable Prison Project Practices. Dec. 2011. Pamphlet

Like GreenHouse, the SPP approaches recidivism reduction through empowerment by education and job training, specifically "green-collar" job training in sustainable professions. Between 2004 and 2011 the SPP hosted over 100 lectures in five prisons with over 2400 inmates in attendance, and conducted 30 workshops on topics ranging from gardening to butterfly biology.[159] While "green-collar" professions seem like a small market currently, the SPP projects that people with expertise in sustainability—including vocational and trade level expertise—will be in high demand in the near future as the world faces challenges to our current production methods and systems. As agribusiness continues to destroy our environment, this prediction seems more and more probable. Regardless of demand for green-collar jobs, inmates gain general job skills applicable to any kind of work and find empowerment through education.

In terms of food and farming, eight prisons throughout Washington State operate farms, all of which use compost produced on site as fertilizer. The smaller of these prisons serve the produce to the prison population, and all donate surplus food to local food banks.[160] Many of Washington State's prisons have gardens or greenhouses, and according to Kelli Bush, the Washington DOC has launched aquaculture programs at various facilities. All the food produced at these sites contributes to feeding the inmate or local populations, but the farms alone are not enough. Currently, the WDOC is trying to establish a program that would buy produce directly from local farmers in order to support local agriculture and reduce transportation distance so that *all* facilities utilize sustainably grown food. [161]

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[159] Sustainable Prison Project Practices. Dec. 2011. Pamphlet

[160] Vanneste, Julie. "Washington Department of Corrections 2009 Sustainability Progress Report." Department of Corrections, Washington State. Online. <http://www.doc.wa.gov/sustainability/links.asp#factsheet>.

[161] Bush.

While the environmental impacts of the SPP are huge, the human impacts remain to be seen. Because this project is still in its nascent stage, project managers do not have data regarding the project's effects on recidivism or inmate health. However, the WDOC's Sustainability Progress Reports note there is "substantial qualitative evidence that involvement in sustainability efforts and programs at the facilities is beneficial." Such qualitative evidence includes improved inmate mood, positive behavior, and increased communication between inmates and their families, as well as interaction "with the community both inside and outside of the prison walls."[162] Though definitive results remain to be seen, the SPP and the Washington State DOC are making huge strides toward transforming the prison to serve larger social and environmental purposes, and thereby undo the human and environmental destruction both the food-industrial and prison-industrial complexes has wrought.

## CONCLUSION

Both GreenHouse and the Sustainable Prison Project are successful because they give prisoners agency in work that has greater social benefit. In both, educators empower inmates through knowledge so that inmates can take ownership of their projects, be it designing a garden or operating an apiary, and take pride in putting this work toward the betterment of their local communities. All of the alternative prison farming and gardening programs I have discussed encompass much more than food production; all build on the assets of local populations (both prison and rural) to synthesize diverse interests in the pursuit of social and environmental justice through sustainability and food security; all foster community self-

[162] Vanneste.

reliance in an increasingly corporate controlled food system. But unlike the Canada farms program, GreenHouse and the SPP are small in scale. And it is because of their size that these programs offer immense hope for the future of the prison food system.

A wholesale transformation of the prison food system is nigh impossible within America's entrenched prison-industrial. Yet these micro-movements—with their local specificity, relatively low operational costs (as compared to national programs), and tangible benefits to local communities—can have broad reaching positive effects on recidivism, rural economies, public health, and sustainable agriculture. Critics may argue that the benefits are not worth the minimal costs of implementing these programs, or that prisoners' "three hot meals a day" are good enough for them. However, these critics fail to realize that the prison affects far more that just the prisoner.

As anthropologist Allen Feldman writes, "arrest is the political art of individualizing disorder."[163] America's massive prison system exists today because we have individualized crime as a personal problem and the solution (incarceration) as an individual responsibility. While this perspective clearly neglects the rehabilitation of the prisoner through community, it also neglects the injurious repercussions of imprisonment for society; from incarceration's effects on prisoners' families and communities, to the effect on rural American culture, economies, and society as I have exhibited in this paper. In this way, individualizing crime has not only spurred recidivism, but also quelled community and social opposition to prison expansion in order to sustain a hugely profitable prison-industrial complex at great economic, social, and environmental costs.

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[163] Braz, Rose & Craig Gilmore. "Joining Forces: Prisons and Environmental Justice in Recent California organizing." *Radical History Review*. 96 (2006): pp. 107.

While I focus on the manifold costs of privatized prison foodservice for rural and prison populations, it is important to note that the conflation of these two immensely powerful industries within the prison food system entails great costs to all of American society, and with the globalization of these trends, to the world. As policy deprives prisoners of the only means to rehabilitation—education and meaningful work—prisoners become trapped in a revolving door of criminality and incarceration that produces ever rising recidivism rates (in New York State recidivism is now around 65%, two percent lower than the national rate).[164] Higher recidivism encourages prison expansion, and thus, further cuts to prison programs in a self-perpetuating cycle that dis-empowers prisoners and the rural communities that come to house these new prisons at the taxpayer's expense. In 2007, state spending on corrections reached $49 billion, with the average annual cost per inmate ranging from $13,000 to $65,000 depending on the state.[165]

But prison policy is not rooted in prisoners' rights, social benefit, cost-effectiveness, or autarky. Given the immense cost of feeding prisoners through private foodservice, the cost-effectiveness of community supported agriculture, and the profoundly transformative effects of prison farms on prisoners (and therefore recidivism reduction), economic arguments do not justify prison farms' closure. Rather, powerful corporations like Aramark frame carceral policy to meet their profit agendas and thereby engender rural communities and prison populations dependent on an exploitative prison system. The prison industrial complex is pervasive and monolithic, however, as the negative effects of the American prison industry come to light we are beginning to realize the diversity of individuals harmed by this behemoth. To borrow from the California Prison Moratorium Project: "if prisons

[164] Jiler, 17.

[165] "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008." The PEW Center on the States. Public Safety Performance Project. Online. <www.pewcenteronthestates.org>.

benefit almost no one, then almost anyone is a potential ally in the fight against more prisons."[166] In this paper I have portrayed the wide range of people affected by the privatization of America's prison food system, as well as those who are fighting to change it: dietitians, correctional workers, (ex)prisoners, prisoners' families, farmers, rural communities, public officials, environmental activists, students, conservationists, academics. As allies behind the common causes of food justice and prisoners' rights, these individuals introduce varied perspectives on punishment and prisons, and thereby open the American understanding and practice of punishment to reconcepualization.

Sustainability and community self-reliance, empowerment, provides a banner to which countless groups can rally. In the prison setting sustainability is more than a social responsibility; it has become a means to dismantle the repressive control foodservice corporations wield over vulnerable populations (both within and beyond the prison walls), and thus a tactic to eradicate one facet of the prison-industrial complex. It has becomes a mode of empowering inmates to be leaders in the global movement toward universal food security and self-reliance. Sustainability in the prison has become a tool of social justice that reaches beyond the prisons walls. Prison farms and gardens synthesize the interests and assets of diverse populations and thereby reimagine the role of the prison and the prisoner in America society. Through such reimagination, sustainable prison agriculture program can move American carceral policy toward a restorative and rehabilitative justice system that would undo the economic, social, cultural, and environmental harm of the exploitative private prison food system.

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[166] Braz & Gilmore, 100-101.

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