Farm to Corrections

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES IN INTEGRATING CALIFORNIA-GROWN PRODUCE INTO THE STATE PRISON SYSTEM

May 2023

ChangeLab Solutions

NUTRITION POLICY INSTITUTE NPI

IMPACT JUSTICE
A National Innovation and Research Center

Executive Summary

California produces more fruits and vegetables than any other state in the United States,[1] yet too little of this produce makes its way to the plates of people who are incarcerated in California. The University of California Nutrition Policy Institute, Impact Justice, and ChangeLab Solutions have initiated a collaborative effort to increase the amount of California-grown produce in the California corrections system. In this report, we identify opportunities to improve the health and well-being of people who are incarcerated as well as the greater California community by increasing the purchase of California-grown specialty crops by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), and we also identify the challenges involved in that endeavor. In the pages that follow, we present findings from interviews, policy analyses, and procurement scans that describe the current state of procurement of specialty crops in California state prisons and discuss opportunities for growers, policymakers, corrections staff, and other stakeholders to facilitate state prison procurement of local produce. We argue that increased local procurement of specialty crops by California state prisons would improve the health and well-being of people who are incarcerated in California while providing California growers with increased economic opportunity and reducing the land miles traveled by foods procured by state institutions.

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I. Introduction

California is an abundant agricultural state and is charged with feeding and maintaining the well-being of the second-largest state prison population every day.[2] But even with an abundant supply and a steady demand, there remain untapped opportunities to increase the amount of California-grown specialty crops[i] available to residents in California state prisons.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is the largest state purchaser of food in California, spending over $163 million annually on meals[3] for almost 100,000 incarcerated residents.[4] However, CDCR currently purchases a limited variety of agricultural products, the geographic origin of which is not tracked or reported, despite a state law requiring institutional purchasers to prioritize California-grown produce.[5] As such, it is unclear how much of this product is produced within the state. Increasing the volume of California-grown agricultural products inside California state prisons would benefit growers, people who are incarcerated, and surrounding agricultural communities.

California producers would benefit economically from tapping into the large and consistent market CDCR provides for agricultural products. Producers are often located mere miles from correctional facilities, so transportation costs and time from harvest to sale are minimal. Purchasing locally would benefit communities by maintaining and creating jobs and increasing local economic activity, especially in rural communities where prisons often make up a significant part of the local economy.[6]

People who are incarcerated would benefit from increased access to a wider variety of high-quality, local fresh fruit, vegetables, and other agricultural products. Current access to fresh produce inside state prisons is limited, compromising the short- and long-term physical and mental health of people who are incarcerated.[7] Poor nutrition increases incarcerated people's risk of adverse physical health outcomes, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, as well as negative psychological health outcomes, such as depression and antisocial behavior.[8] These conditions have long-term health care costs for individuals, facilities, and surrounding communities. Investing in the day-to-day health of the incarcerated population can lead to significant savings in the long run.[9]

Corrections staff could also benefit from CDCR's increased procurement of agricultural products, as healthier residents can create safer environments for all. A well-nourished person is less prone to aggressive or hostile behavior toward corrections staff or other people who are incarcerated.[10]

Lastly, increasing access to agricultural products like fresh produce in CDCR facilities can benefit the communities that people return to after incarceration. People who return from prison healthy in mind and body, with the tools to nourish themselves, are better able to contribute meaningfully to their communities and reduce the likelihood that they will return to prison.[11]

[i] *Specialty crops* is a term used by the federal government to distinguish a specific group of plants grown for food, medicinal, or aesthetics in order to direct funding and resources to their production. For more information about the use of this term in this document, see the "Key Terms & Language" section.

II. Key Terms & Language

Before we go too far, we want to define a few terms that we use repeatedly in this report.

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR): the state department responsible for managing the state's prison system.[12]

California Department of General Services (DGS): the state department that serves as the business manager for all California state departments and agencies, managing procurement and other services.[13]

California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA): the state department that provides work assignments for people who are incarcerated in CDCR facilities, including assignments related to manufacturing, service, and consumable products (like food).[14]

Canteen: a store where residents of a correctional facility can shop for basic hygiene items, food, and stationery.[15]

Food hub: an organization that manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of food products primarily from local and regional producers.[16]

Food supply chain: relationships and transactions that move food from producers to consumers and on to disposal.[17]

Local: In this report, *local* refers to anything grown within the state of California.

Policy: a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of government or other institutions.[18]

Procurement: the process (including how and from whom) of specifying and buying food by an organization or institution. A similar term, ***sourcing,*** is also used throughout this report.[19]

Quarterly packages: packages purchased by or for CDCR residents that consist primarily of clothing, tennis shoes, food, and health and beauty items. Depending on their privilege group classification, a resident may receive packages either quarterly or annually.[20]

Raw and minimally processed: Raw agricultural products are foods in their natural state, including "all fruits that are washed, colored, or otherwise treated in their unpeeled natural form"[21] and vegetables in their natural state, "whether or not they have been stripped of their outer leaves [and] waxed."[22] Minimally processed products have been "slightly altered for the main purpose of preservation but [the processing] does not substantially change the nutritional content of the food. Examples include cleaning and removing inedible or unwanted parts, grinding, refrigeration, pasteurization, fermentation, freezing, and vacuum-packaging."[23]

Residents: people who are currently incarcerated and residing in a correctional facility.

Scratch cooking: food that is prepared from raw or unprocessed ingredients, typically at the location where it is served.[24]

602: a CDCR grievance form that is submitted by a resident to begin the appeal process for any violation of the California Code of Regulations under Title 15, Division 3: Adult Institutions, Programs and Parole.[25]

Specialty crops: Specialty crops are defined in federal law as "fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)." This definition includes both raw and processed products (e.g., canned or frozen), which must consist of 50% or greater of the specialty crop by weight, not including added water.[26]

Throughout this report, we refer to food that CDCR purchases that meets the definition of *specialty crops* as ***agricultural products,*** which is also the term used in California's regulations related to institutional purchasing.

System-impacted: System-impacted individuals have been affected by the criminal legal system in some way – legally, economically, or otherwise. They may have experienced incarceration or may have a family member who has experienced incarceration.

III. Methods

We conducted a variety of activities to explore opportunities to increase CDCR's purchase of local agricultural products, including (1) assessing the existing state of CDCR's purchasing and procurement practices by conducting a scan of the department's procurement records; (2) analyzing the policy environment surrounding CDCR's food purchasing by conducting scans of California state law and CDCR policies governing procurement of in-state agricultural products; and (3) interviewing stakeholders involved in the procurement system, to help us understand the current state of the system and identify opportunities for change. We interviewed 29 people, including corrections staff, public sector staff, policymakers, grower representatives, prison reform advocates, academics, and individuals who were previously incarcerated from across the state of California.

We synthesized findings from all of our data collection activities to identify strategies to increase procurement of California-grown agricultural products like fresh fruits and vegetables in CDCR facilities. In Section VI of this report, we list recommended action items by sector, so that practitioners from various fields can easily identify ways to support CDCR and other key stakeholders in purchasing, preparing, and serving local agricultural products and in improving residents' access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

In addition to the work we conducted in California to increase local procurement in prison settings, we also conducted interviews and policy scans with stakeholders across the country to help us understand the national landscape of farm-to-corrections initiatives. While we do not discuss that work in this report, you can learn more about promising practices and strategies in our supplementary resource Farm to Corrections: Promising Practices from Across the United States.

IV. The Food Supply Chain of California Prisons

The food landscape of a state agency like CDCR consists of three principal stages: purchasing, preparation, and service. Our findings on the use of specialty crops in CDCR are presented in these three stages, followed by a summary of existing challenges and opportunities to create change.

Purchasing

CDCR spends approximately $163 million per year on meals for its residents.[27] When CDCR purchases food for these meals, that process (commonly referred to as *procurement* in institutional settings like corrections) is governed by a variety of factors, including state law and policy, purchasing practices, sourcing and supply options, budget, and other considerations, such as menu requirements and security concerns.

State law & policy

As a state department, CDCR is required to follow state laws that regulate all state procurement and contracting. California's Public Contract Code (PCC), Penal Code (PC), and Government Code (GOV) inform purchasing decisions for nearly all state agencies, including CDCR. These regulations seek to ensure that California receives the best value when making purchases and that all potential vendors that wish to do business with the state are provided equal opportunity.[28] This approach, referred to as *least cost procurement*, generally rewards the suppliers that provide products at the lowest price, with some codified exceptions. Least cost procurement can make it challenging to prioritize criteria other than cost – such as locality and quality. Exceptions to least cost procurement are codified in state law; examples include preferences given to small businesses and businesses owned by disabled veterans.[29]

State law dictates that CDCR prioritize certain processes in purchasing food. If a product is available through a vendor that has a statewide contract with the California DGS or through CALPIA,[30] CDCR must purchase the product from that vendor or CALPIA. Because no statewide contracts currently include agricultural products and few agricultural products are procured by CALPIA, individual CDCR facilities have a waiver to make purchases from outside vendors specifically for agricultural products.[31] This practice is referred to as *delegated purchasing authority*.

Purchases made with delegated purchasing authority must still follow state procurement regulations and the DGS State Contracting Manual, which dictates procurement methods depending on the characteristics (e.g., dollar amount, special vendor status such as small business) of each purchase.[32] Monthly purchases of agricultural products by CDCR facilities often qualify for informal solicitation methods (e.g., obtaining phone or written quotes from potential vendors) due to their low dollar value and/or because the vendor is certified as a small business.[33] The combination of the delegated purchasing option and informal solicitation methods provides a flexible structure through which to integrate California-grown agricultural products into institutional meals. But as is made clear by public records of food purchases by CDCR facilities (as described in the "Purchasing practices" section), this flexibility has not yet been leveraged. Procurement and contracting policies,

including those described here, can be complicated and difficult to navigate, meaning that food purchasers like CDCR food managers may not be aware of or able to leverage available flexibilities and options for purchasing California-grown agricultural products.

Additionally, the California State Legislature has introduced policies to support state purchasing of California-grown agricultural products. AB 822, passed in 2017, requires state agencies like CDCR to give a price preference to California-grown agricultural products over out-of-state products. This objective is achieved by requiring CDCR to buy California-grown agricultural products if the quoted price from a California vendor is no more than 5 percent higher than a similar product from an out-of-state vendor.[34] For more information on AB 822, please see our fact sheet AB 822: California's Preference Policy for Agricultural Products Grown Within the State. In 2022, the state passed AB 778, which expanded the provisions of AB 822 by also requiring any California state agency that purchases agricultural food products to implement practices to support a goal of ensuring that at least 60% of the agricultural food products purchased annually are produced in California.[35] Unfortunately, neither of these laws includes elements such as reporting and enforcement mechanisms and explicit funding streams to enable monitoring and ensure compliance with the policy. In a scan of CDCR food purchases conducted by the project team, there were no reported uses of this preference by CDCR since the policy was implemented that were available in the public record. Interviews with CDCR food service managers indicate uneven awareness of these requirements as well as challenges in navigating competing contracting preferences (like those for small businesses and disabled veteran-owned businesses).

Purchasing practices

We scanned all CDCR food purchases made March–June 2021[ii] to understand and analyze CDCR purchasing patterns. In that time period:

- CDCR made 228 purchases of raw and minimally processed agricultural products and pre-mixed produce from 24 individual vendors. The total dollar amount of these purchases was $3,986,293.86. Products included raw and minimally processed fruits, vegetables, and nuts.
- The majority of CDCR's produce purchases were made in one of three ways: from CALPIA, via informal solicitations with outside vendors, or with vendors that qualified as small businesses.
- No information on the geographic origin of the products was included in the public record.

These data show that CDCR purchases an impactful amount of agricultural products, through procurement methods that could be accessible to California producers and produce distributors. But the findings also indicate a lack of processes or tools within CDCR and DGS to track the geographic origin of food purchases. This absence of tracking makes it unclear whether CDCR and other state departments are already purchasing locally grown agricultural products and makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of targeted policy or programmatic changes.

[ii] The data represented here on CDCR food purchases were gathered from purchasing data publicly available: SCPRS, CSCR, historical contracts data. State Contracting and Procurement Registration System (SCPRS), California Department of General Services website: dgs.ca.gov/PD/Resources/Page-Content/Procurement-Division-Resources-List-Folder/SCPRS-CSCR-Historical-Contracts-Data. 2021.

Sourcing & supply options

California-grown agricultural products can be sourced from produce distributors or individual producers. Working with distributors who aggregate produce from a variety of vendors and producers (as CDCR facilities currently do) makes it challenging to identify the geographic source of individual products. Given that California is the largest producer of specialty crops in the nation by volume,[36] it is likely that some portion of the agricultural products purchased by CDCR are grown in California, but the systems and tools to track this information have yet to be implemented by DGS or CDCR, and distributors themselves may not have access to or be able to track geographic origin.

Sourcing directly from producers or other aggregators like food hubs is also an option, but as noted by CDCR representatives we interviewed, meeting the volume requirements of a CDCR facility can be challenging for individual producers and may require additional effort, coordination, and capacity building to be successful. As a CDCR representative noted,

> *"I've talked to some farmers myself and some produce guys, and they said, 'We'd love to do business with you, but we don't do that volume.'"*

Supply networks and relationships are critical factors in what and how agricultural products are purchased by CDCR facilities.

Budget

Budget is another critical factor in CDCR's food purchases. Food budgets for correctional facilities are typically very low. In fiscal year 2019–2020, CDCR spent $3.78 per person per day on meal costs, totaling $163 million, which was more than budgeted and resulted in a $26 million budget shortfall.[37] In response to the suggestion to integrate more California-grown agricultural products, a CDCR representative noted,

> *"I'm all for it if we can make it work. But of course, I cannot escape the reality of the budget."*

Food budgets do not have funds specifically earmarked for produce; therefore, if the cost of other food items increases, the funding available to spend on produce decreases. Fresh produce and other agricultural products can be more expensive than other products, including canned or frozen foods, which could limit the flexibility of CDCR to prioritize California-grown agricultural products unless this goal is aided through creative partnerships, policies, programs, and budget supports such as those that have been implemented in school food settings in the state.[38]

Standardized menus

All CDCR facilities comply with a statewide monthly rotational menu that is developed by the CDCR food administrator and approved by a CDCR dietician. In recent years, CDCR has modified menus to include more fruits and vegetables, creating an opportunity to purchase more California-grown agricultural products.[39] The menu dictates what individual facilities purchase on a monthly basis and could be leveraged to encourage the purchase of more agricultural products by individual facilities.

Security concerns

While all CDCR institutions subscribe to the same general menu, some facilities ban certain foods, such as citrus fruit. These bans largely aim to prevent the manufacturing of alcohol among residents.[40] Perceived security concerns such as this one are therefore a factor in what food is purchased for meals served in correctional facilities.

Preparation

With hundreds and sometimes thousands of residents in each facility to feed three times a day, CDCR facility kitchens are designed to prepare large quantities of meals quickly. Kitchen staff training, physical infrastructure, and cultural attitudes influence how produce is prepared at each facility.

Staff knowledge, skills & training

CDCR kitchens are run by food service managers with some additional support staff to assist them, but the majority of kitchen workers are people who are incarcerated in the facility, who have varying levels of food procurement and cooking experience. In stakeholder interviews, residents who worked in CDCR kitchens during their incarceration shared that workers are not always provided with proper training on the job and that many lack basic knowledge of sanitation and safe food handling practices, and culinary skills to prepare safe and palatable meals, especially at industrial scale.

Residents also described vastly different experiences with access to produce, depending on who was in charge of the kitchen and how well versed those managers were in safely, effectively, and thoughtfully operating food service. The food service manager at one prison, for example, frequently ordered insufficient amounts of produce to serve the entire facility, leading him to decide not to serve the produce to anyone. One interviewee recalled that the meals were instead bulked up with additional bread while purchased produce rotted in the kitchen and was eventually thrown out. The interviewee did not report that to CDCR superiors for fear of losing his job in the kitchen. At the other end of the spectrum, one resident reminisced about a food service manager who went above and beyond to provide a variety of fresh produce:

> *"I hadn't seen that in my entire time until I got down to [facility name]. . . . It was awesome. Like, even grapes – like, for breakfast, sometimes we got grapes, and that was, like, I hadn't seen a grape in six years! Like, oh my God, it's a grape! You know? And so grapes, sometimes even, like, slices of cantaloupe or watermelon – like, that stuff was so good. And it's just like you never knew how much you missed it until, you know, it was gone."*

Kitchen equipment & infrastructure

Even in kitchens where the staff have expertise in preparing food, physical infrastructure limits the storage and processing of agricultural products like fresh fruits and vegetables. Most facilities lack the refrigerated storage needed to hold large quantities of fresh produce prior to preparation, which makes it challenging to purchase quantities large enough for the entire facility without having to worry about spoilage. Additionally, kitchen setups differ across CDCR facilities, with some prison kitchens built for scratch cooking while others have only the capacity to provide heat-and-serve meals. Even in kitchens where scratch cooking is a daily practice, preparation methods are still limited to what is possible with available equipment. Many kitchens, for example, have enormous kettles for boiling and industrial ovens for baking but lack large cooktops that would make alternative preparation methods like sautéing or stir-frying possible, which might allow for more varied and better-tasting meals.

Each time food service managers purchase produce, they must consider limitations on processing, such as whether their kitchen has the staff and/or equipment to chop lettuce for salad or potatoes for roasting or whether they need to order pre-processed items like shredded lettuce or frozen potato cubes. CDCR limits kitchen workers' access to knives due to safety concerns, which can create an additional challenge in preparing fresh produce for thousands of residents. While pre-processed produce can be a convenient means of working around these challenges, the items available in CDCR kitchens are often of poor quality and do not inspire creativity or extra effort on the part of kitchen staff. As one food service manager explained,

> *"For instance, let's say if I was doing frozen zucchini, it would just be the box of frozen zucchini, warmed up, seasoned a little bit, and served. Because it comes across that it's already ready to go because it's in a box, you know. But when it's fresh, you automatically think, 'Okay, well, let me add some onions,' you know, 'let me add some, some peppers,' and so you just kind of get a little more creative in that sense because you're starting from a fresh state that kind of puts you in the mind of cooking. . . . So from a psychological standpoint, I think you get a little more creative in a healthy way when it starts fresh."*

There are limitations, however, to how creative food service directors can be when preparing meals. They are required to follow the statewide menu and aren't permitted to make substitutions that affect the nutritional content of the meals (e.g., adding a seasoning high in sodium to cooked vegetables). However, food service directors do have some leeway when it comes to produce: often, the menu will say "side of fruit," and food service directors can choose whether to serve apples, pears, or another type of fresh or canned fruit for that meal.

Culture & attitudes

The attitudes of staff members also contribute to how produce is prepared in each kitchen. Although CDCR facilities are legally required to provide residents with nourishing and healthy food,[41] residents in CDCR facilities still spoke about the general sense of disdain for their well-being on the part of CDCR staff and leadership. Particularly prevalent was the feeling that staff did not believe people who are incarcerated are worthy of good, nourishing food. As one person explained,

> *"The people that are put in place to actually oversee the preparation of it, they have deep hostility towards prisoners. . . . They don't think that we deserve anything. So even though there's a lot of fruits and vegetables coming into the prison, they intentionally let that sit there and spoil."*

Service

A key element in integrating more California-grown agricultural products into CDCR facilities is how the food is served.

Quantity & quality

CDCR is responsible for providing approximately 100,000 residents with three meals daily throughout their incarceration. While menus are developed by dieticians and designed to satisfy the minimum daily nutritional requirements for healthy adults, in practice, formerly incarcerated interviewees perceived that portions, especially of fruits and vegetables, were very small and likely did not meet minimum requirements. Former residents shared that vegetable servings were generally very small compared with the starchy items served. They also reported that agricultural products like fruit and vegetables often were not edible. Interviewees shared experiences of being served underripe, overripe, and sometimes moldy fresh fruit and vegetable items, while prepared vegetables were either too stalky and fibrous to chew or were mushy and overcooked. Given the meager portions and poor quality of fruits and vegetables served to incarcerated residents, a thriving illicit market exists for fresh produce items smuggled out of the facility kitchen. An interviewee recalled,

> *"I would make deals with some of the guys that were unloading the trucks and stuff like that and acquire stuff that came right off the truck – just to be able to eat something that was good."*

Food service policies & practices

Although not consistently enforced, regulations create additional barriers for residents to consume their state food rations. California Regulation Code Title 15, section 3055, Use of Food, states, "Inmates shall not remove any food from the dining room, kitchen, or food storage areas except as specifically authorized by facility staff." People who were previously incarcerated reported that they were restricted from bringing fruit items out of the dining hall during meals, which gave them no choice but to either consume or throw away all of the fruit served before leaving the dining hall. Thus, if unripe, spoiled, or inedible fruit is served to a resident, they must forfeit that portion. While some facility staff members allow residents to bring food back to their living quarters, other staff who perform cell searches

may force residents to dispose of these items despite their having permission to remove them from the dining hall. One interviewee shared,

> *"We couldn't eat the pears at dinner, and we weren't being allowed to take them out of the chow hall. So I 602'ed it on the premise that we're being denied a serving of our fruits and vegetables; therefore, we're not getting the minimum nutrients that's required. And I won. I won, but the winning of it was we just stopped getting pears."*

Alternative sources of food

Outside of meal service, residents are given opportunities to pay for supplemental food via canteens, food packages, and vended foods available during visits from people from outside of the correctional facility. These alternative options include few opportunities to purchase agricultural products.

The canteen – a facility store where residents can shop for basic hygiene items, food, and stationery – is limited in its food offerings. Due to lack of space and limited refrigeration, dry and shelf-stable foods are prominent items. Instant beans and dehydrated vegetable packets are available for both men and women; however, dried fruit and individual salads are available to women only at some facilities. Gender disparities in food access are common in CDCR prisons, as men are prohibited from purchasing packaged fruit due to concerns about alcohol production. Despite resident advocacy and petitioning to add whole fresh fruits and vegetables to canteen offerings, petitions have been repeatedly denied without explanation. In the few cases when fresh or dried produce is available at the canteen, prices are often too high to be affordable for many residents.

In addition to the canteen, residents can purchase quarterly packages from approved vendors that carry similar processed fruit and vegetable products. Although the quarterly packages provide a greater variety of products, restrictions limit these options to certain privileged groups. Like canteen restrictions, "women only" exclusions are prominent among listings for dried fruit and other sugary foods.

Lastly, residents who receive visits may also have the option to purchase fresh fruits or vegetables (if available) that are offered through vending machines or through approved vendors for day or overnight family visits. However, only a small percentage of the incarcerated population actually participates in family visits, and each facility has different rules about allowable food purchases for these visits. For example, a facility may restrict the amount of money that can be brought in during a visit, which may limit access to available produce options. Some interviewees recalled ordering food directly from a facility's kitchen, through approved vendors (the same vendors used for quarterly packages), or from a local grocery store. While food options available during visits provide an opportunity to serve California-grown produce to residents, the lack of universal access to these visits among residents and the variation in allowable food purchases for these visits creates inequities among residents.

Interviewees shared that these paid options are priced with extremely high markups, and given that prison jobs pay pennies on the dollar in comparison with market wages, residents must rely on family and friends on the outside to support them, or they must find ways to attain food through unconventional means.

V. Summary of Key Factors & Considerations

As highlighted in earlier sections, a wide variety of regulatory, infrastructural, practical, and cultural issues across the correctional food supply chain make it difficult to get California-grown agricultural products into facilities and to make them palatable, desirable, and accessible to residents. Before sharing recommendations and opportunities for change, we provide a brief summary of the key factors and challenges identified within the existing purchasing system:

- **Policies.** Policy requirements at the state level (e.g., bills like AB 778) and institutional level (e.g., menu requirements) direct what and how food is purchased and served. State policy requirements can sometimes impede CDCR's ability to integrate California-grown agricultural products.
- **Practices.** Institutional practices that affect food purchasing might not be codified in law or policy but are implemented by an institution within CDCR; for example, individual institutions might limit purchases of certain fruits due to security concerns, or they might restrict residents from taking fruit from the dining room.
- **Systems and infrastructure.** Existing systems and infrastructure such as food distribution and sourcing pathways, kitchen equipment and setup, and food suppliers' practices can present challenges in purchasing ease, knowledge of products' origin, preparation capacity, and accessibility and palatability of agricultural products for residents.
- **Budget and resources**. Tight budgets and a lack of food storage and preparation resources may make the purchase and preparation of available produce inaccessible to facilities.
- **Training, skills, and knowledge.** Even when produce is made available, limited skills and knowledge of kitchen staff may pose a barrier to preparing it in a safe and palatable way.
- **Culture, beliefs, and attitudes.** Prison staff's culture, beliefs, and attitudes related to incarceration, correctional facilities, and people who are incarcerated can also reduce staff's willingness or ability to spend time, effort, and resources on purchasing, preparing, and serving appropriate quantities and qualities of food types like produce.

VI. Opportunities for Change

Our work has demonstrated that there are multiple opportunities to support procurement of California-grown specialty crops in CDCR facilities, thus increasing access to fresh, nutritious food for people who are incarcerated. Here, we summarize the strategies and actions that CDCR, its partners and supporters, and other California stakeholders can take to increase procurement of locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Policymakers
Reallocate CDCR budget to increase funding available for food.
Provide CDCR facilities with funds for staff training and equipment purchases to facilitate processing and storage of fresh produce.
Require all bids to the state that include raw or minimally processed agricultural products to identify California-grown items.
Add identification of California-grown products to state registration requirements for processed food.
Farm-to-corrections advocates
Promote awareness among California producers of CDCR as an institutional purchaser.
Develop resources for California producers that describe the benefits of doing business with institutional purchasers. Provide guidance for navigating the state procurement system, and explain the needs and requirements of a large institution like CDCR.
Develop resources for CDCR food managers to help them navigate state procurement policies, source local food products, and incorporate local produce in meals. These resources can highlight the health and economic benefits of serving California-grown specialty crops to people who are incarcerated.
Conduct menu and meal audits to assess the amount and quality of produce served and consumed in CDCR facilities.
CDCR
Further commit to increasing the portion of CA-grown and highly palatable produce served in meals.
Inform decision makers about budgetary and other constraints that make serving palatable California-grown produce challenging.
Establish direct purchasing relationships with small and medium-sized California growers located near CDCR facilities.
Review procurement processes to better support small and medium-sized producers.
Gather input from people who are incarcerated about produce they would like to see served in CDCR facilities.
Connect with corrections food service departments in other states to share promising practices and resources for increasing local procurement and serving fresh produce to people who are incarcerated.
Adapt policies to allow incarcerated residents to bring produce back from dining halls to their living quarters.
Adapt policies to allow fresh produce to be sent in quarterly packages.
Increase canteen capacity to store and offer fresh produce.
Growers and Distributors
Partner with other California producers and distributors that already do business with CDCR to sell produce to CDCR.
Connect with a local food hub and collectively sell produce to CDCR.
Register with the state as a certified small business to gain priority in CDCR procurement.
Funders
Provide financial incentives and support to state agencies for the purchase of California-grown specialty crops.
Researchers
Study and report on lessons learned from model farm-to-corrections efforts.
Study interventions to improve food in correctional facilities.
Study the food-related needs and desires of people who are incarcerated.
Assess the costs of long-term diet-related harms caused by incarceration to correctional facilities, correctional agencies, individuals, families, communities, and society.
System-impacted people
Contact local or state policymakers to raise awareness of issues related to food and incarceration.
Share personal experiences related to food and incarceration with the community to increase awareness of this topic.
Submit a public comment on proposed legislation related to food in correctional facilities.
If relevant, join a family council (scheduled meetings for family members to engage with staff) at a CDCR facility, and advocate on behalf of residents for increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

VII. Conclusion

How foods, and specialty crops in particular, are purchased, prepared, and served has great impact on the correctional food environment, the California food supply chain, and the health and well-being of people who are and were previously incarcerated, as well as the communities they return to. Findings from our work show a complex and multifaceted context that CDCR and other key stakeholders must navigate to build a stronger connection to the California agricultural economy.

Stakeholders have many opportunities to improve the food in California's prisons and various ways to support farm-to-corrections efforts in California. Our hope is that the information that we've presented can serve as a roadmap for California and other states looking to serve more locally grown specialty crop items to people in carceral settings. Opportunities to connect correctional systems to local agriculture are plentiful, but it will take action on the part of many stakeholders to change the current landscape. We hope that this report can be a step on the path toward improved economic opportunities for local growers, better opportunities for health and well-being for people who are incarcerated, and increased knowledge and job satisfaction for staff at prison facilities.

Acknowledgments

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

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

Impact Justice advances safety, justice, and opportunity through boundary-breaking work that honors and empowers people and is changing expectations about what we can accomplish together.

This report was written by Nessia Berner Wong, Carolyn Chelius, Heile Gantan, Leslie Soble, Ron Strochlic, Vince Young, and Wendi Gosliner. Editorial and design support was provided by Rachael Bennett, Patrick Glass, Carolyn Uno, and Kim Arroyo Williamson of ChangeLab Solutions.

This project was made possible by funding from the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service through grant AM200100XXXXG032. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the USDA.

The Farm to Corrections California team would like to thank the individuals who shared with us their insights and experiences of access to fruits and vegetables while in CDCR custody. We also appreciate the CDCR staff and officials who helped us understand the workings and challenges of food procurement within the department. Additionally, we would like to thank the advocates and experts on our advisory committee, who helped guide our research.

Design: Sandra Koenig, Branding Harmony.

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