

One might not rate food as a priority reform target. However, food is one of the top issues in daily life in prison that can cause difficulties. That and mail or phone.

Food may seem the least of a prisoner's worries. After all it is usually guaranteed two or three times a day. More pressing burdens may be separation from loved ones, separation from society, loss of numerous life rights as well as careers and opportunities for quality education and self-improvement.

All of this is true. The Supreme Court has determined that no punishment/injury may be done to the convicted, beyond the separation required by sentencing. We understand the malignancy and pain of that separation more than most.

And the Supreme Court has not ordered that prison foods be "tasty" as long as they are nourishing. The balance between taste and nourishment in prison kitchens is a long running battle, with financial consequences, and population unrest.

And hiring top-flight cook-stewards on low pay with the requisite experience of mass-cooking is problematic. In addition to managing three meals a day for 31,000 Nc prisoners, these stewards must supervise a inmate kitchen staff with

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limited experience, if any.

Most kitchen workers drafted in prisons are not "Sunday School teachers", and a number of them supplement their incomes (such as it is -70¢-\$1.00) by stealing and selling choice items in the blocks. Here that would be tomatoes, chicken, cheese, and onions. As a cashless society the price is calculated in stamps, drugs, contraband or service.

This kind of theft has likely been going on as long as there have been prisons (6000 B.C.?) except the consequences for stealing prison food owned by the Roman state, for example, were probably far more severe than now.

Some guards have a "look the other way policy" towards stolen food. I've seen dozens of onions and pounds of stolen bacon spread through my block. Some guards feel sorry for us - and perhaps you would too, if you saw some of the preparations that "nourish" us. I feel sorry for us, too. And correctional officers spend 12 hours a day locked up with us. By the time they get home after their shift, shower, eat dinner and sleep, it is time to get up and return to be temporarily incarcerated with us. Sometimes - but rarely - they eat the same food as we do.

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Prison food dynamics have evolved. My first prison job, my first year in prison, I was volunteered for the kitchen of a major processing prison for NC convicted (#1). I think I made 40¢ a day?

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The difference between the crew I worked with then and the crews who talk to me at this camp can be boiled down to this one word: "Supervision."

My first prison "chowhall" steward was a marine (?) retiree. And he set up a culture of do it his way or hit the highway. (You can set a "disciplinary" for quitting.)

He taste-tested the food. Ugly, deplorable presentations of poorly cooked food were not allowed in his serving line. There was very little "down time." We cooked, served, and cleaned constantly. There was no excuse for dirty gloves or wash towels. Every tray was spotless. The food was thoroughly - but not over - cooked. There was no waste.

Portions were adequate because there was minimum theft. This manne watched everything, inspected everything, including the furthest inch of those big ovens. You didn't leave at the end of the day until everything was spotless. This steward inspired pride in quality, food presentation and a job well done.

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If you worked in that kitchen you kept yourself physically clean. You knew that the next morning the steward would inspect your fingernails and clothing for signs of uncleanness.

And the kitchen workers ate well. Stealing was not an option like at other camps I've been to. As long as we ate all the food we workers put on our trays then the steward was pleased.

When inmates get greedy and steal masses of food, the resulting quality and quantity of the meals for general population suffers. That, apparently, has happened here at NC prison # 4.

Unfortunately, a large number of "menu" items in prisons were dropped from 2005 to 2015. (I kept a list.) The replacements involved a number of (I think) disgusting "meat" "patties" — processed patties. A surgeon in Union County told me to "avoid the processed meats", as studies showed that these could be very unhealthy. However, when the base of the meals has become processed meat products, one has little choice but

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but to eat it, or starve. A prisoner, under doctor's orders, may sign up for a "diet tray," with real meat but no cakes or the like. This is considered to be the "healthy" alternative to the tray the general population receives. So is that the "unhealthy tray?" Couldn't we all receive real, non-processed chicken or turkey? Why is the special "diet meat" healthier than the "regular" meal?

Chicken and turkey are served so often (before the Pandemic) that they are found in over 27 food items in every five week rotation period. We see processed meat so often that I worry about cross-contamination of my DNA. (Just kidding.) You have to laugh, a little, like when my table partner found a large grasshopper head in his serving of turnip greens. And he ate it! Or when I found the end of a turkey butt-anus in my turkey bits and rice! True.

Napoleon said that an army travels on its stomach. So does a prison. Food and mail call are the most sacred of unalienable rights in prison. Disturbance of those two most looked forward to items can cause even the most passive prisoner to be unsettled and non-cooperative. Call them privileges if you must, but consider that the wholesomeness of the food contributes to the rehabilitative state of mind.

To be fair, if you receive funds from friends or family, you can buy snacks from a "Canteen": sodas, soups, chips, cakes, bags of fish, etc., as well as hygiene items.

If you have no money in your Trustee account you may receive some indigent items, like stamps and toothpaste.

Also, recently, the NC prison provides a seasonal box of diverse food items for up to \$100.00. Or "bonus bags" for \$50.00. In prison, money is so rare that prisoners think of ten dollars as if it were twenty. We assume profits are made on Canteen items. Stamps are the coin of the realm. The economics of the black market bazaars on the yard are such that presently a .55 cent US postage stamp goes for .40 cent value in goods or services or gambling chips. I note that gambling, bartering and trading are disciplinary acts - forbidden. A stolen onion is from five to ten stamps. Contraband tobacco is about ten stamps a smoke - for two, and is also forbidden.

Fines for disciplinary acts are \$10.00 (processing?), \*Hole time, and/or loss of some privileges like phone, visitation, limited canteen draws, etc

\*"Hole": "Restrictive Housing"

Food items that were

7 Eliminated, (in my experience at NC Prisons 1, 2, 3 and 4.) (Samples) 2005 - mid 2019:

1. Chicken nuggets
2. CATFISH NUGGETS
3. pizza slice square
4. Peanut Butter + Jelly
5. Walnuts / Raisins
6. fried boned fish
7. veal patty
8. Sundae cup ice cream
9. 2% milk
10. Liver
11. Roast Beef slice
12. Reduced Tomatoes
13. "Pot pies" with crust
14. Onion slices
15. Cornflakes
16. sugar for cereal
17. corn on cob
18. sweet potato pie
19. Watermelon
20. Cantaloupe
21. Apple butter
22. 1 cup breakfast "coffee"
23. Soy Strogonoff
24. Squash
25. Tacos
26. "hamburgers" with Tomato, pickle, lettuce.

NEXT: Replacements for above →



8 II. Replacements for eliminated foods on previous page (Samples):

1. "Pot pies" NO CRUST. little meat. peas/corn. starch fluid.
2. "Tree bark" bran cereal (our terminology.)
3. Watered down breakfast "juice."
4. "meatloaf" patty (NOT like mother made.)
5. "Salisbury STEAK" patty. MISnamed.
6. Chicken or pork processed "riblet."
7. "CAJUN TURKEY" misnamed.
8. Chicken processed patties - often.
9. "Square" fish
10. Molasses
11. Real chicken on bone, once every 5 weeks
12. Bacon, was once a week.
13. Apples, often.
14. Banana, oranges.
15. 1% MILK.

III The Pandemic loss of staff and changes in kitchen staff made styrofoam tray packs of meals necessary for block delivery.

Reining Hall closed. Blocks house up to 34. Meals-on-wheels delivered three times a day. Food quantities and menu items

vary in quality, freshness, appearance and taste. But we assume the staff is

doing the best they can under the circumstances.

Were food funds cut during Pandemic?

Or in 2019?

## Food Reform

9. To some prisoners, a reform effort regarding food quality, quantity, and true nourishment criteria for men must be implemented,

If staff won't eat it, don't serve it.

If prisoner kitchen staff neglect cleanliness or caring cooking - preparation standards, consequent it.

Clearly eliminate opportunities for food theft that adversely affect quality and quantity of foods for the general population.

Prisoners are not asking for restaurant quality meals of inappropriate expense.

Quality, quantity, and nourishment does matter, to all of us.

At one time some prison systems developed and attempted to serve a substance termed "NUTRALOAF." It may have had minerals and vitamins that are necessary to sustain human life, but were awful. That kind of institutional problem solving demeans prisoners, blurring the distinction between humanity and animal.

Yes, food reform is a critical issue, though understated.

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