

Providing adequate nutrition and controlling costs are two key goals of the foodservice department in our controlled environments. This is often achieved via purchasing power, bids, and—in some cases—growing/raising needed foods. Some jails and prison systems operate on-site gardens and farms to produce vegetables, fruits, meat, eggs, and milk.

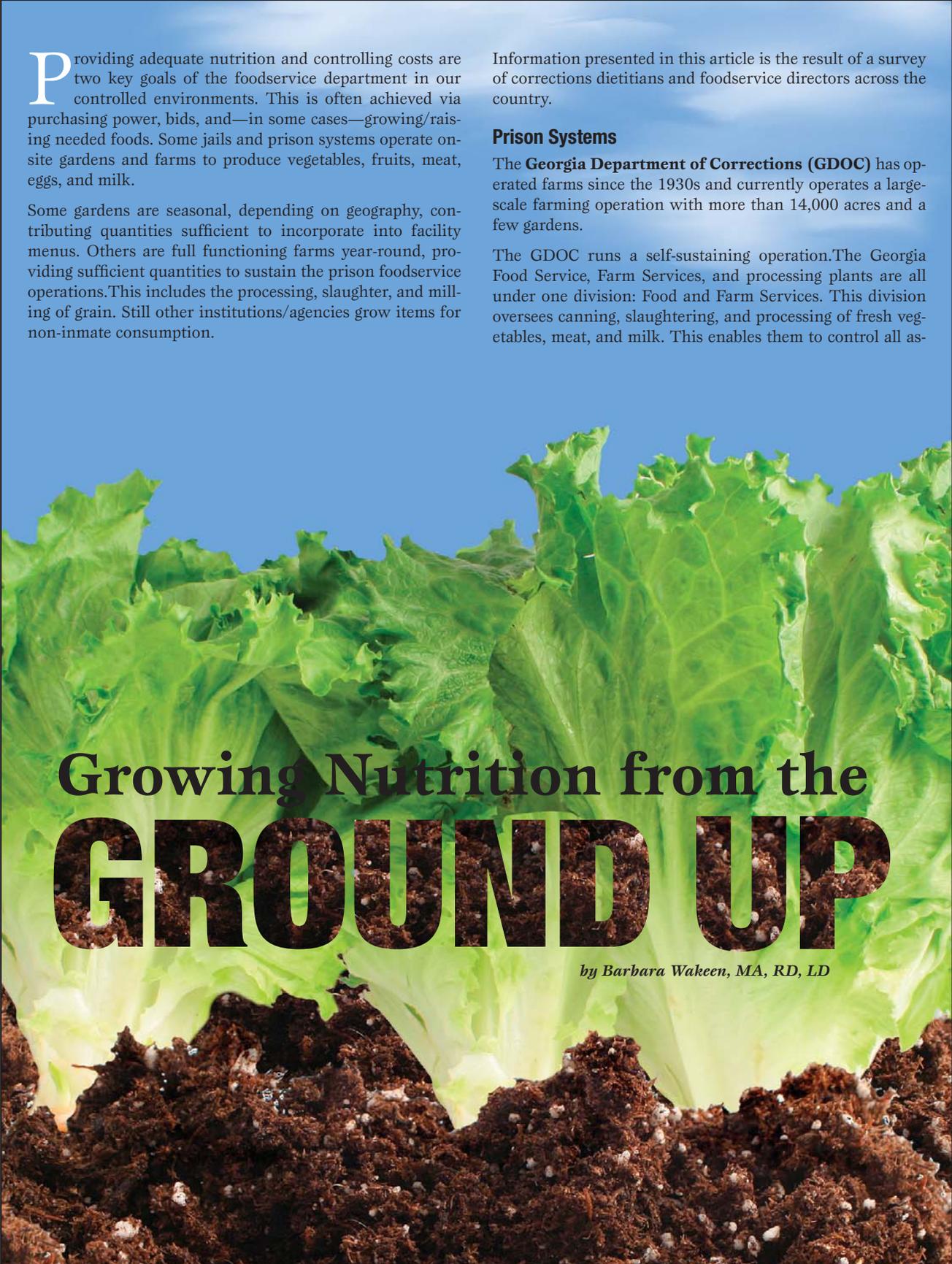
Some gardens are seasonal, depending on geography, contributing quantities sufficient to incorporate into facility menus. Others are full functioning farms year-round, providing sufficient quantities to sustain the prison foodservice operations. This includes the processing, slaughter, and milling of grain. Still other institutions/agencies grow items for non-inmate consumption.

Information presented in this article is the result of a survey of corrections dietitians and foodservice directors across the country.

### Prison Systems

The **Georgia Department of Corrections (GDOC)** has operated farms since the 1930s and currently operates a large-scale farming operation with more than 14,000 acres and a few gardens.

The GDOC runs a self-sustaining operation. The Georgia Food Service, Farm Services, and processing plants are all under one division: Food and Farm Services. This division oversees canning, slaughtering, and processing of fresh vegetables, meat, and milk. This enables them to control all as-



# Growing Nutrition from the **GROUND UP**

*by Barbara Wakeen, MA, RD, LD*

pects of the menu planning, and in turn, produce the farm items based on menu requirements. It even operates a grist mill that produces 100 percent of grits and cornmeal needs.

According to Norman Wilson, Director of Food and Farm Services, the Food and Farm Services produce:

- 100 percent of the beef, pork, eggs, and milk
- 100 percent of DOC needs for canned vegetables: beets, Irish potatoes, carrots, kale, collards, turnips, squash, field peas, and sweet potatoes
- Fresh vegetables: broccoli, cabbage, squash, corn, cucumbers, greens, cauliflower, tomatoes, peppers, okra, and onions
- Strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries for seasonal use

Forty five percent of the food that is consumed by the inmate population in Georgia is grown on the farms.

In **California**, the **Prison Industry Authority (PIA)** is a self-supporting state agency created in 1982, to operate California prison industries much like private industry. The PIA works in conjunction with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to provide work opportunities for approximately 5,500 adult inmates. This inmate work program includes agriculture, services, and manufacturing.

PIA is in charge of the following agricultural industries:

- Growing almonds and packing 1 oz packages for CDCR sack lunches
- Raising chickens for shell and frozen eggs only
- Raising cows for milk production for the state's feeding programs

According to Sue Summersett, MPH, RD, Departmental Food Administrator for CDCR, PIA also has other non-agriculture food industries that involve value-added services and manufacturing to maximize resources and nutrition goals while controlling costs:

- Beef processing plant for state consumption. Beef is purchased and made into products for CDCR—hamburger, franks, sausages, stew meat, Salisbury steak
- Coffee roasting, grinding, and packaging for state consumption
- Making sliced loaf bread for approximately 10 institutions
- Packaging individual portions of peanut butter and jelly, bread slices, cookies
- Making and packaging 100 percent fruit juices in 4 oz cartons

The **New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC)** does not operate a large-scale farm or garden; however, it does operate a vegetable and fruit processing center in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture Department for Jersey Fresh. The DOC meets with local growers for forecasted items and plans seasonal menus accordingly. Says Christine Vaughan, MS, RD, Consultant Dietitian—Field Services Office, “The Department purchases fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers in New Jersey when an over production of an item occurs or when retail specifications are not met. We also check to see items are not nutritionally compromised before serving.”

Salads, carrot sticks, celery, and vegetables for the menu and cook-chill are processed by the “AgriIndustries” part of Office Field Services. These foods are for inmate consumption.

The **Minnesota Department of Corrections (MDOC)** incorporates seasonal garden produce into menus at two boot camps—Moose Lake/Willow River, which are actually two separate locations.

At Moose Lake/Willow River, the Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP) has farmed a small (state approved) garden in the past until this year during expansion. While in operation the garden yielded the following seasonal produce:

- Potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Radishes
- Green beans
- Chives

Five offenders are assigned to garden detail: they till, sow, plant, weed, water, and pick the vegetables and till again in the fall. These offenders work in the garden for the six months of their incarceration until they leave.

According to Robert Utech, Food Service Director CIP Moose Lake/Willow River, “We support the offenders to eat vegetables; and in the past, we have put out tomato trays for lunch with other vegetables on an every-other-day basis. This year we will not grow a garden due to expanding, but hope to have a garden back the following year.”

In contrast to the aforementioned, some agencies have gardens, but not for inmate consumption.

In **Missouri**, there are no longer farms in the DOC, but few institutions have gardens. All produce grown is given back to the community through the Restorative Justice Program (and not for offender use).

The **Virginia Department of Corrections (VDOC)** operates an active “Agribusiness” program. Several facilities have greenhouses and/or gardens. Large farms also produce seasonal vegetables and fruits that are distributed statewide. According to Linda Shear, MS, RD, the DOC has recently changed to a quarterly menu cycle, in part to more readily incorporate fresh produce.

The **North Carolina Department of Prisons (NCDOP)** has vegetable gardens in the small field units. They grow items such as cabbage, collards, carrots, and tomatoes. These vegetables are used in supplementing the menu and have contributed to food cost reductions in individual facilities.

North Carolina Correction Enterprises operates a meat processing plant and a cannery that provide frozen and canned foods to user agencies. The meat processing plant handles items such as meat, seafood, and cheese—including nearly 10 million eggs each year.

**Florida** and **Kentucky** operate gardens to varying degrees also.

## Jails and Detention Facilities

In northern states such as **Michigan**, **Huron County Jail** and **St. Joseph's County Jail** operate gardens seasonally, as

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weather permits. Food service, security, and inmates have active roles in garden operations.

At **Huron County**, Dorothy Cole, Canteen Services Food Service Manager, assists in planning what is grown in the 1½ acre garden. She oversees what is brought into the kitchen. The work crew leader oversees this project, planting seeds and plants, as well as picking the produce. Garden items include:

- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Green beans
- Tomatoes
- Squash (winter)
- Green onions
- White onions
- Cucumbers
- Beets
- Corn
- Broccoli
- Potatoes
- Green pepper
- Zucchini

These items fulfill the menu requirements as planned and/or replace like menu items, such as soups and seasonal salads. Produce grown that is in excess of use is frozen for later use.

**St. Joseph's County** in Michigan has operated a three-acre vegetable and fruit garden for more than 15 years. The food-service manager determines what will be grown and assists with oversight of the garden. Designated trustees work in the garden; however, sometimes the manager and some kitchen trustees will pick items that are ready. St. Joseph's grows:

- Cucumbers
- Tomatoes
- Cabbage
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Green peppers
- Zucchini
- Green beans
- Watermelon
- Cantaloupe

The fresh produce is used in place of fresh, frozen, or canned items typically purchased. Extra produce, such as tomatoes and onions, are frozen for use in colder months.

Within the **New York City DOC**, seasonal gardens have been planted for many years. They are on-site vegetable gardens that produce items which supplement staff menus.

Due to the large number of incarcerated individuals, gardens are not big enough to feed inmate populations. Inmates do, however, work in the gardens. Vegetables are distributed to various production sites.

As far as involvement in the garden, the Director of Nutritional Services is advised of the vegetables being grown. Vegetables commonly grown are cabbage, broccoli, zucchini, eggplant, tomatoes, lettuce, and cucumbers.

In **California**, county facilities operate farms and gardens, ranging from large farms where fruits and vegetables are grown and processed for multiple sites, to those that have a small garden for the staff dining room only.

One dietitian indicated she meets with the farm supervisor and requests foods to be grown that reflect facility menus. The foodservice department has some input as to what is grown; however, the final decision is that of the farm supervisor.

The fresh produce items are incorporated into menus, and/or appropriate substitutions are made to whatever fruit/vegetable is on the menu. Produce orders from outside vendors are adjusted accordingly based on farm production availability.

### Summing it Up

As outlined above, gardens and farms in corrections operate at different levels for different outcomes, but achieve positive benefits for all. Gardens and farms are multidisciplinary, involving administration, security, food service, and inmates.

Many inmates in these agencies literally 'reap what they sow' and vice-versa. Gardens and farms become part of work assignments and sentencing to some degree, and are even a perk for a trustee to have the opportunity to work outside the facility. Their involvement maximizes resources, increases activity and morale, and offers a sense of pride for the inmates.

Looking at nutrition...fresh is better than frozen; which is better than canned. Of course, it is not always feasible to serve from the fresh state when feeding large populations, and is contingent upon availability of these perishable items.

Gardens and farms, even if only seasonal, offer correctional facilities many advantages when it comes to nutrition, costs, and resources.

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*Barbara Wakeen, MA, RD, LD is ACFSA's Dietitians in Corrections Committee Chair. She is a consultant dietitian and owner of Correctional Nutrition Consultants, North Canton, OH.*

## Dietitian's Corner

### Meetings and Announcements

#### American Dietetic Association (ADA) Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE)

September 29 – October 2, 2007

Philadelphia, PA

Corrections Sub-Unit will hold a networking meeting on Monday, October 1, 2007, 5-6 pm.

[www.cdchcf.org](http://www.cdchcf.org)

[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

#### National Commission on Correctional Health Care

#### (NCCHC) National Conference on Correctional Health Care

October 13-17, 2007

Nashville, TN

[www.ncchc.org](http://www.ncchc.org)

Past Dietitian's Corner articles are available on the ACFSA website—[www.acfsa.org](http://www.acfsa.org).

### Networking Information

If you would like to be added to the Dietitians in Corrections networking EML (electronic mailing list), please email me directly at [bwakeen@neo.rr.com](mailto:bwakeen@neo.rr.com). You *do not* have to be a dietitian. This is an informal discussion group and your name/email address will be listed in each email sent to the group.