

# Menu Trends in Corrections

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**S**erving up menu solutions within Correctional Food Service has become increasingly challenging. An operator's ability to provide healthy, affordable, nutritionally balanced meals continues to be challenged by budget cuts, higher food prices, an aging inmate population and an increasing demand for religious and/or special diets.

Food costs have been on the rise for several years due to a variety of factors, including: increasing energy and fuel costs, stronger global demand for food, weather related production problems, increased U.S. agricultural exports and the overall economic climate. According to USDA forecasts, increases in major food price indexes will continue to rise in 2013:

Several Correctional Food Service trends appear to be emerging in answer to these challenges. Menus are being streamlined or standardized to aid in compliance, reduce grievances, improve controls and maximize cost benefits.

Health guidelines are being considered. Following heart healthy guidelines such as reducing overall caloric content, introducing low or reduced sodium products, (protein, soup bases, etc.), increasing whole grain products and fiber, limiting sugar (sugar free desserts or drinks, eliminate sugar packets, etc.), limiting fats (less saturated fat, no trans fat) and including fortified foods for increased nutrients.

CHANGES IN FOOD PRICE INDEXES	
Category	% Increase Forecasted for 2013
Beef and Veal	4.0 to 5.0
Pork	2.5 to 3.5
Poultry	3.0 to 4.0
Fish and seafood	2.5 to 3.5
Eggs	3.0 to 4.0
Dairy products	3.5 to 4.5
Fats and oils	2.0 to 3.0
Fruits and vegetables	2.0 to 3.0
Sugar and sweets	2.0 to 3.0
Cereals and bakery products	3.0 to 4.0

1 - [http://www.ers.usda.gov/datafiles/Food\\_Price\\_Outlook/Food\\_Price\\_Outlook/CPIforecast.xls](http://www.ers.usda.gov/datafiles/Food_Price_Outlook/Food_Price_Outlook/CPIforecast.xls)  
Food Price Outlook: Changes in Food Price Indexes, 2010-2013

2 - A low sodium food has 140mg sodium per serving. A reduced sodium food has 25% less sodium than the original food.

3 - The Institute of Medicine recommends consuming 14g of fiber for every 1,000 calories consumed  
(a food with 2-3g of fiber per serving is considered a good source of fiber)

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An overall trend throughout food service includes serving trans fat free products or foods prepared with healthy fats, such as canola oil, olive oil, and plant sterols rather than using artery-clogging trans or saturated fats.

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Introducing fortified functional foods into menus is one of the most cost effective methods to improve health and prevent nutritional deficiencies by providing an increase in Vitamins and Minerals.

Another opportunity to standardize menu options being served is to incorporate meatless/no flesh foods for Kosher and Halal meal plans serving vegan meals (no meat, dairy, eggs, fish or poultry) in lieu of providing specific Kosher or Halal meals. Other facilities have been able to reduce the number of daily and/or hot meals offered in an effort to streamline food service.

Increasingly, dietitians and food service staff are utilizing social networking and industry contacts to educate and share best practices. Using recipe networks, nutrition message boards and other outlets to share and network makes a valuable and specialized knowledge base more accessible.

As Corrections menus get healthier we are faced with the challenge of rising food costs. In an effort to prevent a nutrient gap in our meals, options such as Vitamin and Mineral fortified foods are vital. Not only will they help manage our costs, but inevitably will have a positive impact on the health of our inmates resulting in reduced healthcare costs.