



Office of the
CORRECTIONS OMBUDS

**Summary Report on the January 2019
Washington State Penitentiary Prisoner
Food Preferences Survey**

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Executive Summary

This report presents quantitative results and qualitative insight from the Washington State Penitentiary food survey carried out in January 2019 by the Office of Corrections Ombuds. The purpose of this survey project was to facilitate improvement of both Washington Correctional Industries food offerings and stakeholder relationships in the wake of the Washington prison food strikes in 2018 and 2019, and in response to prison food complaints submitted to the Office of Corrections Ombuds.

Survey results highlight specific priorities concerning food issues. The three areas of greatest importance to prisoners at Washington State Penitentiary are as follows:

- (1) That meal portion sizes are increased, made consistent, and not watered down. The vast majority of survey respondents report regularly feeling hungry after some meals, most especially after lunch. Lunch portion sizes are reported to have been reduced since hot breakfasts were reinstated in 2018.
- (2) That Correctional Industries make adjustments to its food reheating protocols, which are reported to render many meal items hard, dry, and inedible.
- (3) That Correctional Industries provide more protein in meals, and that this protein come from unprocessed meat, egg, and dairy sources. Many survey respondents would like their meals to have a healthier carbohydrate-protein balance, with proteins primarily derived from animal sources unadulterated with soy-based textured vegetable protein.

Secondary areas of concern for respondents are as follows:

- (1) Quality of food ingredients, to include freshness
- (2) Provision of healthier, less processed foods
- (3) Variety in meals and meal components
- (4) Improved recipes and flavor
- (5) More effective monitoring of prisoner kitchen staff to ensure not only that proper food safety and sanitation protocols are followed, but also to prevent the meals of the protective custody and broader West Complex population from being intentionally contaminated with foreign objects

Introduction

The Washington Department of Corrections (DOC) provides three meals per day for prisoners through its self-funded revenue branch Correctional Industries (CI). Local prison CI Food Services programs are administered by each facility's CI Food Services Manager. In recent years CI has phased out hot breakfasts for prisoners at many DOC facilities, introducing cold bagged breakfasts—informally known as “breakfast boats”—that are handed out to prisoners with their evening meal to eat the next day. Breakfast boats are eaten by prisoners in their cells and do not require a dining hall movement. The change to breakfast boats has proved unpopular with many

prisoners and was cited as a reason for both the April 2018 Washington State Penitentiary (WSP) and February 2019 Coyote Ridge Corrections Center (CRCC) prisoner food strikes. In response to these strikes, hot breakfasts were reintroduced at WSP from late spring to summer of 2018, and an interim partial breakfast reform has been introduced at CRCC. While WSP prisoners have appreciated the new hot breakfasts, the CI food reheating protocols at WSP have raised additional concerns about food quality.

The inspiration for the WSP prisoner food survey project was to facilitate improvement of both CI food offerings and stakeholder relationships in the wake of these food strikes, and in response to subsequent WSP prisoner complaints filed with the Office of Corrections Ombuds (OCO) pertaining to CI food. During OCO Director Joanna Carns' meetings with WSP inmate tier rep groups, a participant asked whether a survey could be conducted of the entire population. This suggestion resulted in the survey.

Survey respondents by and large eat DOC mainline meals (DOC 240.100 Food Services Program, Attachment 1 Guidelines for Mainline Meals), with a small percentage of respondents eating Mainline Alternative medical (DOC 610.240 Therapeutic Diets, Attachment 1 Therapeutic Diet Manual) or religious diets (DOC 560.200 Religious Programs). Religious diets currently offered by the Washington Department of Corrections are Vegetarian, Halal, Kosher, and—as of February 1, 2019—Milk Mainline Alternative.

Methods

Survey Creation, Distribution, and Collection

The WSP food survey questions were developed by the OCO Ombuds with input from CI and a Statewide Family Council representative who has previously worked with CI and the Washington Department of Health (DOH) on a pilot CI healthy prison commissary food project. The first two questions were prompted by CI with an interest in getting detailed information regarding meal choices; questions #3 - #5 were prompted by OCO and developed in collaboration with CI. In anticipation of collaborative work between CI and DOH that will be funded by Center for Disease Control State Physical Activity and Nutrition Grant No. 1807—under which DOH will provide technical support to CI in developing a nutritional principles training toolkit for local facility CI food managers—a survey question was added to collect information from WSP prisoners on nutrition and food policy education topics of interest. Prisoners were asked to provide their living unit name on the survey but were not asked to provide their own names, DOC numbers, or cell numbers. Survey questions were as follows:

1. *What are your three favorite items on the menu?*
2. *What are your three least favorite items on the menu?*
3. *What is your #1 concern about DOC food?*
4. *If you had one menu improvement suggestions, what would it be?*
5. *What would you like to see more of on the men?*
6. *Which nutrition related topics would you like to learn more about (check all that apply):*

- Gov. Order 13-06¹*
- Carbohydrates*
- Protein*
- Caloric Needs*
- Fruit & Veg Needs*
- Other:_____*

Two weeks prior to distribution of the survey, prisoners at WSP received living unit kiosk messages informing them of the upcoming OCO food survey. The survey was distributed by OCO staff on January 22, 2019 to prisoners in the following WSP living units:

- WSP West Complex
 - Delta, Echo, Fox, Golf – close custody
 - Intensive Management Unit (IMU) North – administrative segregation
 - IMU South – administrative segregation
- WSP South Complex:
 - Baker, Adams, Rainier (BAR) – protective custody and mental health
 - Victor & William – medium custody
- WSP East Complex
 - Units 6, 8, 10 – minimum custody (“camp”)
- WSP Hospital

In close custody and IMU units, OCO staff introduced their office and the purpose of the survey using either intercoms or cell door introductions. Staff from the OCO hand delivered surveys and blank envelopes for anonymity to each living unit cell that was occupied. If occupants were not in their cell, an appropriate quantity of surveys and blank envelopes were left for them. All possible measures were taken to ensure that respondents understood that this survey was from the OCO and not from DOC; that anonymity would be protected; and that local facility staff would not interfere with the survey process.² Surveys were delivered from 2 to 6PM, and were collected starting at 8PM. Nearly all surveys were collected that same day, with the exception of 28 surveys that were returned to the OCO in the weeks that followed. In total 1,627 surveys were returned to OCO staff.

¹ Washington State Governor Jay Inslee’s [Executive Order 13-06 Improving the Health and Productivity of State Employees and Access to Healthy Foods in State Facilities](#), October 30, 2013

² Note that both OCO staff and WSP prisoners report a positive and supportive attitude toward the survey and efforts to improve CI food offerings from WSP custody staff, who seem to recognize the important role food morale plays in maintaining prison security.

Survey Processing and Analysis

Tracking numbers assigned to surveys by unit were as follows³:

- Delta – Survey Nos. 480–621, 1630
- Echo – Survey Nos. 622–746, 1626–1629
- Fox – Survey Nos. 747–854, 1631–1633
- Golf – Survey Nos. 855–980
- IMU North – Survey Nos. 993–1047, 1634
- IMU South – Survey Nos. 1048–1176, 1177, 1635
- Baker – Survey Nos. 432–479, 1638
- Adams – Survey Nos. 388–431, 1622, 1623
- Rainier – Survey Nos. 1178–1248
- Victor – Survey Nos. 1249–1427, 1636
- William – Survey Nos. 1428–1615
- Unit 6 – Survey Nos. 1–143
- Unit 8 – Survey Nos. 144–188, 199–262, 1616–1621
- Unit 10 – Survey Nos. 263–387, 1637
- Hospital – Survey Nos. 981–992

Sixteen of these surveys were returned blank, and three surveys were filled out with answers irrelevant to the CI menu or actual food items. Data for the remaining 1,618 were coded and entered into an Excel spreadsheet organized living unit and menu type (mainline or mainline alternative).

It cannot be guaranteed that individual respondents did not fill out more than one survey, or that prisoners did not fill out surveys together. Indeed, many responses from individual living units appear to be near-duplicates, sometimes in similar handwriting. Many respondents listed fewer than the instructed quantity of responses or no responses at all for a given question, while other respondents listed more than the instructed quantity of responses. Extra responses were entered as distinct responses. Thus, individual surveys do not exert equal weight on final results.

In some cases, meanings of responses were unclear, and were typed exactly as they were written. Respondents often differed in the names they used for a given menu item (e.g. “country fried steak” and “chicken fried steak”), or sometimes only provided a vague name for an item (e.g. “enchilada” instead of “chicken enchilada” or “beef enchilada”). Results therefore present the most accurate balance possible between specificity and generalization. It was sometimes unclear if respondents were listing a current CI menu item, a past item, or an item they hoped could become a menu item. It is therefore possible that some items reported are not current CI menu items, or that names respondents used for items are not identical to official CI names for these items.

Non-food-item responses were coded based on shared themes. In this way, slightly different responses, such as “Reduce Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP) fake meat” and “More real meat,” were coded under a single response, such as “Use 100% Pure Meat No TVP.”

³ Due to a numbering error, no surveys were numbered with tracking Nos. 189–198

Responses to a given survey question were sometimes more appropriate as an answer to a different survey question. These answers were shifted to the appropriate category as needed. It was often difficult to distinguish between the “#1 concern” and “menu improvement suggestion” categories, so these response categories were merged into one category. Moreover, some responses resulted in certain sentiments being duplicated. For example, a respondent could answer that his top concern was “insufficient protein,” that his recommendation for improving the menu was “to increase protein content,” and that he would like to see “more protein.”

Results and Discussion

Perceptions of the OCO Survey

Despite OCO efforts to communicate the source and purpose of the survey, not all respondents appear to have realized that the survey was being delivered and analyzed by the OCO, as evidenced in the way their responses sometimes address DOC or CI in the second person.

Nearly every respondent appears to have taken the survey seriously. Only a handful of responses indicate skepticism over the possible effectiveness of the survey (e.g. Survey No. 891), and one respondent writes that he “was hoping this survey would have more to it” (Survey No. 465). Many respondents express gratitude for the survey effort with comments such as:

- “I appreciate DOC taking the time to address offender food concerns” (Survey No. 486)
- “This is highly appreciated...Thank you and God bless” (Survey No. 572)
- “Thank you for supporting us” (Survey No. 599)
- “Thank you for doing this. I hope it helps. Blessings” (Survey No. 625)
- “Thank you for looking into this, it’s overdue” (Survey No. 1048)

The survey question about nutrition education topics aroused a negative response in some respondents. For example:

- “We don’t need to be educated, we need fed” (Survey No. 772)
- “C.I. seems to think inmates need to be educated concerning nutrition, when all the education in the world will avail them of nothing if C.I. continues to make it impossible to eat healthy” (Survey No. 1583)
- “I’ve heard enough bullshit propaganda about nutrition from would be administrators at the turd factory. You do not properly respect beliefs, or science facts. I’ve never seen so much corrupt data in my life” (Survey No. 363)
- “How can you call the garbage that is served by CI nutrition?” (Survey No. 513)
- “What does the Governor⁴ care about food?” (Survey No. 590)

It is not clear whether all respondents understood some of the survey questions. For example, it sometimes appeared respondents were answering the question about current favorite CI items with names of foods they wish existed on the menu, and some respondents appear to have

⁴ Refers to the Executive Order 13-06 topic.

mistaken the nutritional educational topics question for one asking about items they would like added to the menu or concerns they have about CI food.⁵ Some respondents appeared to struggle with literacy or to be English language learners. However, the overall sense is that the majority of respondents understood the survey and took it seriously.

Changes Since April 2018 Food Strike

Before delving into the survey responses, the current WSP food services context must be presented. Many respondents report appreciating the new hot breakfasts that were introduced in late spring and summer of 2018 as a resolution of the April 2018 food strike, despite concerns about new food reheating protocols. One respondent reports feeling a health improvement after the change: “I’m going on 3 mos. normal brkfst [sic], as opposed to boats every day and feel a noticeable difference in quality of health” (Survey No. 1371). However, when hot breakfasts were reinstated for the mainline menu, those eating some mainline alternative meals continued to receive cold breakfasts (Survey No. 516).

After the April 2018 food strike CI temporarily served oatmeal from large pans in WSP dining areas, but upon the purchase of new reheating ovens switched to heating oatmeal in shallow compartments in trays (Survey No. 849). This is reported to have had a detrimental effect on the edibility of oatmeal and other meal items (e.g. Survey Nos. 420, 428, 535, 537, 629, 753, 769, 1623). One respondent states that “[s]ince the food strike some changes have been made both good and bad...For example the oatmeal is a favorite thing among us but has changed from good quality to bad. Shortly after the strike it was served from a large pan, everyone brought their bowls to the window to get a serving and the whole process worked out great. Now the oatmeal comes already in the trays and by the time we get it it’s dry and crusty. Everyone would like it to go back to being served from the pans. The CUS tried to get the process changed back to improve the quality but the kitchen refuses” (Survey No. 849). Thus, one respondent requests that CI “[b]ring oatmeal in the pans back” (Survey No. 2019). This sentiment is a common one expressed throughout the surveys.

There is a general sense that lunch and dinner meals declined in quality or portion size once hot breakfasts were reinstated (e.g. Survey No. 1338) and that overall prisoners are being fed less than they were before the food strike (Survey No. 866). Many side items, especially on lunches, have been eliminated (Survey No. 879), leaving “empty slots on tray” (Survey No. 887). Those lunch portions that are served have been reduced in size or quantity (Survey Nos. 105, 178, 203, 223, 234, 274, 281, 299, 1003).

Respondents had the following additional statements about current lunch and dinner offerings:

- “Real hamburger patty—needs something with it, tray is barren” (Survey No. 678)
- “Don’t give me a hamburger pattie [sic], 2 scoops of corn and call it a meal” (Survey No. 1415)

⁵ This is based on the observation that many respondents wrote a menu item name or a concern about CI food on the blank line next to the “Other” category for this question instead of writing a nutrition education topic of interest.

- “With our Sunday lunch’s [sic] give us more than a burger or chicken patty or chicken nuggets with corn. We are grown men and that don’t [sic] fill us up” (Survey No. 498)
- “We need more food on days you guys just give us a sandwich for lunch” (Survey No. 512)
- “Not one good lunch” (Survey No. 672).
- “One tuna sandwich thats [sic] all we get, hamburger patty and corn dont [sic] fill me up” (Survey No. 644)

Moreover, some respondents report the elimination of previous menu items that people liked after the food strike, such as a different type of breakfast burrito, taco salad, and fajitas (Survey No. 849). Chicken tenders were evidently replaced with chicken nuggets (Survey No. 1428), with most respondents preferring the chicken tenders.

Favorite Foods

Some respondents listed specific utilitarian reasons for listing certain foods or meals as their favorites. For example, Survey No. 49 lists tuna fish, fish patties, and hamburgers as favorite items for their protein content. Survey No. 55 lists hard-boiled eggs as a favorite because this item is one that can be visually identified as a real, whole food, giving the person eating it a sense of confidence about its origin and nutritional content. Lunch boats were listed by one respondent because they have a larger quantity of food than other meals (Survey No. 961). One respondent indicated that his responses—such as pizza, waffles, and breakfast sandwiches—were listed as favorites because they are the only foods that do not make him feel sick after eating (Survey No. 468).

Many respondents indicated that a given item or meal listed was a favorite, but with the caveat that the item or the portion size is too small. The following are examples:

- Pancakes and waffles (e.g. Survey Nos. 39, 43, 71)
- Real beef hamburger patties (described as “smaller than a Happy Meal” in Survey No. 544)
- Chicken patties (Survey No. 378)
- Fish nuggets (Survey No. 567)
- Tuna sandwich (Survey No. 567)
- Pizza wraps (e.g. Survey Nos. 408, 605)
- Cheese pizza (Survey Nos. 714, 1330)
- Polish dogs (Survey No. 631)
- Milk cartons (Survey No. 421)
- Turkey-ham sandwiches (Survey No. 549) and quantity of meat slices on sandwiches (Survey No. 757)
- Sloppy Joe/burrito fillings (e.g. Survey No. 951)
- Chicken nuggets (e.g. Survey Nos. 131, 139, 318)

When asked to report three favorite items on the menu, some prisoners reported meal combinations they like rather than individual meal items:

- Spaghetti, salad, and garlic roll (e.g. Survey No. 35)
- Pancakes or waffles with sausage and peanut butter (e.g. Survey No. 266) or with eggs and potatoes (e.g. Survey Nos. 280, 535)
- Oatmeal with eggs or fruit (e.g. Survey No. 310)
- Chicken fried steak or chicken patty with potatoes (e.g. Survey No. 35)
- Hard boiled egg, sweet potato, oatmeal breakfast (e.g. Survey No. 36)
- Fish patty or nuggets with coleslaw (e.g. Survey No. 36)
- Chicken Teriyaki with Brown Rice (e.g. Survey No. 48)

Respondents also indicated subtle differences that made them prefer or dislike different variations of a CI meal. For example, many respondents specified that they like the breakfast sandwich—which is currently served twice per week, once with and once without meat—when it contains meat but not when it is served without meat (e.g. Survey No. 776). And while many prisoners enjoy the Breakfast for Dinner pancakes or waffles meal, some dislike having breakfast foods for lunch or dinner (e.g. Survey No. 121).

Table 1 presents the most commonly listed favorite CI meal items.

Table 1*Favorite CI Meal Items*

Favorite Items	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Pancakes Waffle Meals	430	A favorite item, but size and quantity of pancakes/waffles too low. Also, many would prefer to have it as breakfast instead of Breakfast For Dinner
Hamburger	350	Favorite item, but patty is too small and needs more sides to be a full meal. Would also like to have garnishes added. Cheese, pickle, tomato, onion, lettuce, etc.
Chicken Nuggets/Tenders	333	
Taco	276	
Biscuit N Gravy	249	Some would like to see gravy recipe improved.
Chicken Teriyaki & Brown Rice	162	
Eggs	136	
Hard Boiled Eggs	119	
Chicken Patty	118	Needs more sides to be a full meal when served as sandwich.
Enchilada	110	
Pizza	109	
Breakfast Sandwich	95	Most prefer the meat version of this sandwich and dislike the version without meat
Mac N Cheese	88	
Fish Mac N Cheese Meal	85	
Spaghetti	81	
Polish Dog	73	Is currently often overheated. Too hard too chew.
Oatmeal	69	Is currently often overheated. Too hard too chew.
Sausage	60	
Enchilada Beef	59	
Peanut Butter Jelly	59	Many would like more peanut butter packets. Many report that jelly is low quality and just gets thrown away.
Fish	58	
Burrito	56	
Burrito Bean	51	Unclear from many responses whether this indicated the “Bean N Cheese Burrito” meal or the “Build Your Own Taco/Burrito” meal.
Hamburger N Cheese	51	
Milk	51	Unclear from responses if this was liquid or powdered
Enchilada Chicken	49	
Burrito (Beef Or Chicken)	48	
Lasagna	46	
Liquid Milk	46	
Breakfast Burrito Egg	44	

(Table 1 Continued)

Favorite Items	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Tuna	44	
Fish Taco	43	
Pizza Wrap Hawaiian	42	
Potatoes	41	
Beans N Rice	40	
Peach Pie Burrito	39	
Sweet N Sour Chicken	37	
Pizza Cheese	35	
Fish Patty	33	
Fish Nuggets	32	
Pizza Wrap	31	
Chicken Fried Steak	30	
Potato Salad	29	
Chili N Baked Potato	28	Many responses give the impression that the potato is the problem, not the chili, and that “regular” chili is preferred over white bean chili. Follow up conversations with food reps recommended.
Additional Favorite Foods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taco Salad • Peanut Butter • Beef Stroganoff Noodles • Chicken • Nothing • Tuna Sandwich/Tuna Melt • Breakfast • Meatloaf Salisbury Patty • Chicken Alfredo • Macaroni Salad • Fruit • Salad • Sloppy Joes • JoJos • TriTaters • Breakfast Boat • Cookies • Rice • Chicken Casserole • Boats • Meat • Tuna Salad • Vegetables • Tuna 	≤ 27	

Least Favorite Foods

Many respondents annotated their lists of least favorite foods with concerns about a lack of variety, poor palatability, and questions about recipe development in the CI menu. Some of the concerns can be attributed to individual preferences, but many are directly related to how the food is prepared, even with the understanding that preparing mass quantities of food for institutional populations may always leave something to be desired.

Respondents often gave specific reasons for listing certain foods as least favorites. For example, Survey Nos. 49 and 295 list TVP content in CI meat products as the reason for disliking the CI tacos and spaghetti. Oatmeal and noodles were sometimes listed as a least favorite *because* they are served overcooked and hard on top from sitting too long in reheating ovens (e.g. Survey Nos. 538, 597). One respondent listed the beef patty hamburger as a least favorite “because it is not filling” (Survey No. 776). Some respondents listed “Breakfast for Dinner” as a least favorite item because it is “not enough” (Survey No. 759) or because they prefer pancakes and waffles for breakfast instead of dinner (e.g. Survey No. 357).

In other cases, a specific CI recipe is what makes the item a least favorite. For example, one respondent encourages CI “[n]ot to render good items unedible [sic], i.e. beets...until so much clove and cinnamon is put in by kitchen that the clove is the only thing tasted overwhelming and making the beets unedible [sic]” (Survey No. 1040).

Many surveys cited unpalatable sauces, gravies, or dressings as the reason for disliking a given item or meal. For example, one respondent feels there is “[t]oo much grease and salt in toppings and sauces” (Survey No. 610). A solution could be for CI to serve sauces, gravies, dressings, and margarine on the side to make it easier for prisoners to choose whether to eat such items. Providing condiments in dining areas (Survey No. 378) such as siracha sauce, soy sauce, and mustard, could enable vegetables to be served plain (e.g. steamed broccoli instead of mayo-sauce-covered broccoli) and prisoners could modify as needed to make these foods palatable.

Additional reasons respondents gave for disliking specific meal items were as follows:

- Chili used with baked potato is more palatable than white bean chili and should replace the latter (Survey No. 660)
- Hot tuna melt sandwiches were better than the current cold tuna sandwiches (e.g. Survey No. 232)
- Cheese sometimes not mixed into macaroni and cheese (Survey No. 680)
- Chicken Teriyaki and Sweet N Sour Chicken are slimy (e.g. Survey No. 366)
- Pizza wraps have “no actual pizza ingredients” (Survey No. 692)
- Vegetables are overcooked (e.g. Survey Nos. 54, 55) or undercooked (e.g. Survey No. 357)
- Breading on meats is unpalatable (Survey No. 1616), excessively thick (Survey No. 420), and soggy (Survey No. 652). Sogginess is sometimes due to contact with corn on the tray (Survey No. 837).
- Tri-Taters are soggy (Survey No. 769)

- Tortillas on wraps and burritos are soggy and should be served separately from filling (Survey No. 1109)
- Broccoli is served as 90% stems with few florets (e.g. Survey No. 555, 1371)
- Sauces or dressings on coleslaw, broccoli, salads, and other vegetables are unpalatable or use too much mayonnaise or vinegar (e.g. Survey Nos. 57, 85, 162, 169, 202, 223, 289, 294, 310, 680)
- Sauces and gravies on entrée items (e.g. Sweet ‘n’ Sour Chicken) unpalatable (e.g. Survey Nos. 310, 1616)
- Fish patties and nuggets are bland and tasteless (e.g. Survey No. 627)
- Cooked potatoes are dried out (Survey No. 447)
- Beets are served slippery, with a “disgusting stringy fluid” (Survey No. 628). “Beets at WSP are of a low quality and need improvement” (Survey No. 676). “Beets in water should be in vinegar” (Survey No. 937)
- Flavor of white bean chili is not palatable (e.g. Survey No. 186) and could perhaps be improved with better spices and recipes
- Yams would be received better if cooked differently (e.g. Survey Nos. 88, 762)
- Meat sauce on spaghetti is unpalatable (e.g. Survey No. 139) and is just sauce with little to no meat (Survey No. 431)
- Vegetables should be served fresh and without sauces (e.g. Survey Nos. 160, 162)

Many respondents report that items or condiments served together in a meal are incompatible and therefore do not make for an appealing meal experience without indicating whether they actually dislike the individual items comprising the meal. Serving the Mexican carrot and jalapeño side dish with breaded fish items instead of Mexican entrées feels inappropriate for one respondent (Survey No. 353), for example, so he lists it as a least favorite meal item. Many respondents listed the yams with sausages meal as a least favorite item because (1) the pairing is incompatible, (2) the breakfast sausages are unpalatable, and (3) they do not like yams for breakfast (e.g. Survey Nos. 210, 242, 581, 657).

Below are additional statements about incompatible meal combinations:

- “[G]ive us oatmeal with our waffles and pancakes again not cooked carrots” (Survey No. 104).
- “Stop giving us steamed carrots with [biscuits and gravy]” (Survey No. 1108).
- “[Meal items] that don’t go together like hard boiled egg, fish nuggets and a tortilla and plain celery” (e.g. Survey No. 121).
- “They always serve crazy mix like sausages and carrots at breakfast” (e.g. Survey No. 1)

Further insight provided by respondents concerning incompatible meal combinations:

- Yams, beets, cabbage, or carrots served with pancakes or other breakfast items (e.g. Survey Nos. 26, 122, 153, 219)
- Duplicating items in meal combinations, such as serving beans as a side dish for a bean burrito or enchilada (e.g. Survey No. 263)

Moreover, some surveys express that items one would traditionally expect to be a component in a standard meal combination are missing from CI meals, such as no cheese served with tacos (e.g. Survey No. 535).

Some items, such as fish (e.g. Survey Nos. 6, 402), peanut butter (e.g. Survey No. 86), tortillas (e.g. Survey No. 118), burritos (e.g. Survey No. 239), oatmeal (e.g. Survey No. 233), potatoes (e.g. Survey No. 233), and carrots (e.g. Survey Nos. 33, 85) appear to be listed as least favorite items because they are served too often rather than because they are inherently unpalatable. Reducing the frequency at which these items are served and introducing more variety of recipes using these items may improve how these items are received. For example, one respondent recommends serving fish once per week rather than eliminating it entirely (e.g. Survey No. 243). Meanwhile, other items could be served more frequently. Many respondents expressed a desire for salads to be served more than once per week as a dinner item, or for hard boiled eggs to be served more often than twice per week (e.g. Survey No. 457).

Several respondents desire to see more creativity and imagination in CI recipe development to at least give the impression of variety in the menu (Survey Nos. 759, 991). The following statements capture some requests:

- “Better variety of fruits, all we get is [sic] old apples, bananas, oranges” (Survey No. 678)
- “Potatos [sic] every night” (Survey No. 672)
- “More variety of the cold trays. 6 days of carrots and applesauce is to [sic] much” (Survey No. 467)
- “Burritos seem to be 85% of main course [sic] served” (Survey No. 656)
- “At WSP there are 4 basic items we eat, RICE, POTATOS [sic], BEANS, BRAKEPADS [meatloaf/Salisbury steak]” (Survey No. 1055)

Some prisoners point out that menu items with different names are only nominally different, using the exact same processed meat products or components in slightly different recipes (e.g. Survey Nos. 224, 535). For example, “Meatloaf” and “Salisbury Steak” (e.g. Survey Nos. 288, 535), “Sloppy Joes” and “Spaghetti Meat Sauce” (e.g. Survey No. 1469), or “Braised Beef,” “Beef Stroganoff,” and “Beef Stew” (Survey Nos. 881, 1326). What reportedly makes the beef stew different from the braised beef and beef stroganoff is that the former is served over rice and has carrot chunks while the latter is served over noodles and has no carrot chunks—beyond this the recipes are reported to be indistinguishable (Survey No. 881).

Many respondents would like to see fewer tortillas used in meals, since a large quantity of CI meals are made using tortillas. One respondent states that the menu would be improved by “less [sic] wraps or burritos” (Survey No. 773). The following menu items all rely on the same type of tortilla:

- Peach Burrito
- Breakfast Egg Burrito
- Build Your Own Tacos/Burritos Meal
- Bean N Cheese Burrito

- Enchilada
- Fish Tacos
- Pizza Wrap
- Fish Mac N Cheese Meal

Even among some of these tortilla items, there is little variety. One respondent indicates how similar certain tortilla items are by listing “enchiladas A.K.A. burrito, rice, beans” (Survey No. 793).

Many surveys request a reduction in beans as well (e.g. Survey No. 270). Moreover, beans are reported to sometimes be improperly cooked (Survey No. 708) and to cause conflict on living units by causing flatulence. The following statements capture these concerns:

- “Bean burrito with bean [sic] on the side” (Survey No. 657)
- “Bean, plain bean, beans with a side order of beans” (Survey No. 774)
- “I’ve been beaned to death” (Survey No. 688)
- “Too many beans. Bad news when in confined space” (e.g. Survey No. 33)
- “Beans are served to [sic] often causing inmates to endure each others [sic] gases, causing conflict issues” (e.g. Survey No. 201)

However, legumes like beans are cost-efficient and healthy sources of unprocessed vegetable protein. If CI uses dry beans, adding baking soda to the soak water of dried beans before cooking (about 1/16 teaspoon per quart) significantly decreases the content of the raffinose family of sugars, which cause flatulence.⁶ CI may also wish to explore more variety in legumes by adding black eyed peas, chickpeas, lentils, and other types of legumes to reduce the repetitiveness of a single legume type in meals for prisoners.

Respondents would also like to see more variety in types of breakfast foods served (Survey No. 393), and would like to have seasonal variety in fruit (e.g. Survey No. 486). Many surveys expressed a desire to see CI improve the palatability, variety, and nutritional balance of specific meals by adding garnishes or sides to the meal (e.g. Survey Nos. 91, 93). Respondents suggest adding cheese and lettuce back to the taco meal (e.g. Survey No. 93); providing vegetable garnishes (onion, tomato, pickle, etc.) for hamburgers, sandwiches, and salads (e.g. Survey Nos. 168, 546, 689, 1351, 1637); or adding cheese to burritos to make them more palatable (e.g. Survey No. 186).

Allowing some degree of choice⁷ in menu items could also give a better sense of variety, such as by allowing a choice between vegetable items (e.g. Survey No. 253), a choice of a cold bagged

⁶ See Jood, S., Mehta, U., Singh, R., & Bhat, C. M. (1985). Effect of processing on flatus-producing factors in legumes. *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, 33(2), 268–271.

⁷ Allowing some form of agency and choice during incarceration is one way to help prepare prisoners for adjustment and resuming personal responsibility during reentry. See Haney, C. (2003). [The psychological impact of incarceration: Implications for post-prison adjustment](#). *Prisoners once removed: The impact of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and communities*, 33, 66.

meal if one does not like the hot meal being served that day (Survey No. 1194), or the choice to have oatmeal and fruit with breakfast and other meals (e.g. Survey No. 294). One respondent recommends creating a lunch menu that allows prisoners “to specify a ‘food order’ other than a take it, or leave it menu” (Survey No. 760). Some respondents express a desire for more agency and direct involvement in menu creation and food preparation. One respondent recommends a regular menu survey through which prisoners could “choose from what we may like on our menu’s [sic] and give everyone a chance to switch a meal every 3 to 6 months” (Survey No. 1080). One respondent suggests “[a]llowing us as inmates to establish the menu as well as it’s [sic] application” (Survey No. 738), while another would “[h]ave us be more self-sufficient and not rely on C.I.’s idea of what food should be” (Survey No. 780). Still another recommends that DOC “bring back inmate made food from scratch” (Survey No. 715).

Respondents suggest that CI keep its finger on the pulse of most unpopular foods by monitoring outgoing food garbage and regularly interviewing prisoner kitchen workers about which foods are being sent back and thrown away the most frequently (Survey Nos. 1046, 1638). CI staff and the OCO may need to gain more insight from follow-up discussion with prisoners about the specific reasons *why* certain meals or items are disliked, especially for those items that fulfill requirements mandated by Executive Order 13-06, such as certain red and orange vegetables. A list of suggested follow-up discussion questions is included as Appendix F. Table 2 presents the most common meal items listed by respondents as least favorites.

Table 2

Least Favorite CI Meal Items

Least Favorite Items	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Yams Sweet Potatoes Sausage Meal	299	CI should find out in which of the current recipes and meals prisoners like yams. The majority of respondents state that they don’t like yams for breakfast or in the breakfast sausage combo, but it is not clear if they like yams served using a different recipe.
Spaghetti	278	Sauce and meat type were often described as especially unpalatable
Braised Beef	262	
Meatloaf Salisbury Patty	224	
Sweet N Sour Chicken	205	
Beef Stroganoff Noodles	190	
Fish Patty	160	
Fish	155	
Sloppy Joes	154	
White Bean Chili	135	
Beets	123	Some respondents state that beets are rarely fresh, which may be affecting palatability.
Beef Stew	122	

(Table 2 Continued)

Least Favorite Items	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Peanut Butter Jelly	116	
Chili N Baked Potato	108	
Fish Nuggets	102	
Tuna	97	
Chicken Casserole	91	
Carrots	73	Raw carrots are hard for elderly prisoners to chew. Prisoners would like more variety in how these are prepared.
Beans	70	
Burrito Bean	67	
Polish Dog	48	
Chicken Teriyaki Brown Rice	47	
Turkey A La King	47	
Fish Taco	44	
Mashed Potatoes	39	
Coleslaw	37	
Fish Sandwich	37	
Tuna Sandwich/Tuna Melt	37	
Broccoli Salad	36	White dressing was often cited as unpalatable
Burrito	34	
Everything on the CI menu	32	
Chicken Alfredo	31	
TVP Soy Meat	29	
Breakfast Sandwich	28	The version without meat was the one most frequently cited as disliked
Chicken A La King	28	
Oatmeal	28	Typically cited as disliked because of overheating and hardening or because of having raisins or other fruit mixed in.
Breakfast Boat	25	
Boats	24	
Potatoes	24	
Pancakes Waffle Meals	23	
Beet Salad	21	Dressing flavor and texture were cited as the primary reasons this item is disliked
Hamburger	21	
Tuna Salad	21	Some do not like the onions, sogginess, or the amount of mayo
Peach Pie Burrito	20	
Mashed Potato	18	

(Table 2 Continued)

Least Favorite Items	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
<p data-bbox="201 260 509 323">Additional Least Favorite Foods:</p> <ul data-bbox="250 365 561 961" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="250 365 461 396">• Beans N Rice <li data-bbox="250 401 461 432">• Chicken Patty <li data-bbox="250 436 542 468">• Chicken Fried Steak <li data-bbox="250 472 363 504">• Taco <li data-bbox="250 508 509 539">• Biscuits N Gravy <li data-bbox="250 543 561 575">• Breakfast Burrito Egg <li data-bbox="250 579 532 642">• Fish Mac N Cheese Meal <li data-bbox="250 646 380 678">• Celery <li data-bbox="250 682 444 714">• Pizza Wrap <li data-bbox="250 718 493 749">• Biscuit N Gravy <li data-bbox="250 753 493 816">• Burrito Beef Or Chicken <li data-bbox="250 821 493 852">• Carrots Cooked <li data-bbox="250 856 396 888">• Lasagna <li data-bbox="250 892 363 924">• Pizza <li data-bbox="250 928 347 959">• Peas <p data-bbox="201 995 542 1100">Least favorite foods with ten or fewer responses are listed in Appendix C.</p>	<p data-bbox="688 260 753 291">≤ 17</p>	

What Respondents Would Like to See Added or Increased

Several respondents made a distinction between wanting to see certain items on the menu more frequently and wanting to see serving sizes of specific items increase. CI and OCO may wish to discuss the most frequently requested items with facility food reps to determine whether prisoners desire larger portions or greater frequencies of these items, especially because lack of variety or serving an item too often were reasons frequently cited for disliking some menu items.

Some respondents express a desire to have sides added that would make meals feel more appropriate for the time of day at which they are served, while also addressing the issue of meager portion sizes at some meals. Respondents frequently recommend adding soups or a second burger or meat sandwich to current lunches (e.g. Survey Nos. 201, 207, 235, 752). However, if CI adds soups standard ingredient ratios should be established and strictly enforced to avoid watering these items down if they are to be counted toward daily caloric needs.

A list of most common items respondents desire to have increased or added is presented in Table 3.

Table 3***What Respondents Would Like to See Increased or Added***

Would Like More or Want Added	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Meat	210	
Chicken	139	
Real Meat	108	
Hamburger	105	
Pancakes Waffle Meals	90	
Desserts	72	
Beef	62	
Pizza	60	Many respondents requested more variety in pizza type
Sides With Lunch	60	Many respondents said this would help meals feel more complete
Cheese	58	
Chicken On The Bone	56	
Eggs	52	
Cookies	49	
Milk	45	
Fruit	42	
Pork	38	
Fish	34	
Fresh Vegetables	32	
Chips	31	
Mac N Cheese	31	
Animal Protein Meat And Eggs	30	
Garnishes With Burger Taco Salad Oatmeal	30	Prisoners would like to see cheese, tomato, onion, lettuce, pickle, etc. available for burgers, salads, and tacos. Would like fruit garnish served on the side for oatmeal. (Many do not like fruit cooked in the oatmeal)
Peanut Butter	28	
Fries	27	
Cake	26	
Food	25	
Rice	25	
Soup As Lunch Side	25	
Vegetables	24	
Real Food	23	

(Table 3 Continued)

Would Like More or Want Added	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Salad	23	Request for more varieties of salad, beyond just romaine lettuce. Some suggest spinach and darker greens.
Non TVP protein	23	
Chicken Nuggets/Tenders	22	
Ice Cream	22	
Dairy	19	
Scrambled Eggs	19	
Hardboiled Eggs	18	
Taco	18	
Burrito	17	
Potato Salad	17	
Protein	17	
Whole Foods/Non Processed Foods	17	
Brownies	16	
French Toast	16	
Additional Desired Foods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hamburger N Cheese • Chicken Patty • Lettuce • Milk Not Powdered • Fresh Fruit • Hotdogs • Macaroni Salad • Pastries • Steak • Taco Salad • Beans N Rice • Chicken Breast • Sausage • Tomatoes • Breakfast Boat • Chicken Teriyaki Brown Rice • Oatmeal • Potatoes • Condiments • Fried Chicken • Lasagna Desired foods with ten or fewer responses are listed in Appendix C.	≤ 15	

Prisoner Concerns and Suggested Improvements

Perceptions of CI and Relationships With Prisoner Food Reps

An exploration of prisoners' top concerns and suggested improvements is perhaps best presented in the context of respondent perceptions of CI's role in the Washington State prison food system and the tone of the surveys.

The importance of food to prisoner morale and willingness to exhibit pro-social behavior—especially for those in IMU who rely solely on mainline or mainline alternative meals⁸—cannot be overstated. The following responses give some indication of food's importance to prisoner morale:

- “Food can be a powerful tool in rehabilitation/reintegration” (e.g. Survey No. 38)
- “Good food make [sic] people happy” (Survey No. 659)
- “[C]onsider the fact that we are still humans regardless of our mistakes” (Survey No. 373)
- “The food here is bad, expect more food strikes possible riots it's that bad” (Survey No. 1078)

Building trust and a better working relationship among CI, prisoner food reps, and the broader prisoner population is crucial to improving stakeholder interactions and systemic problems associated with the current food services model. The relationship between CI and WSP food reps or other prisoner reps is reported to be somewhat strained. One food rep writes: “As a food rep, I was able to meet with C.I. employees and the last meeting before I quit I heard ‘cost prohibitive’ to all reasonable suggestions to improve the menu. After the food strike we were trying to improve the menu. In order to ‘give one thing’ they had to ‘take another.’ That's C.I.” (Survey No. 1366). Introducing a neutral third-party mediator to facilitate these meetings could prove helpful to resolving chronic areas of distrust between stakeholders.

Even more critical, there may be perceptions that raising concerns about food will result in retaliation (Survey No. 849), or that food is being used as a disciplinary measure. One respondent currently housed in IMU states that “the kitchen refuses to answer any questions about their food. We ask them to stop killing the veggies and we get infractions for disrespect, we ask for calorie breakdown for health conscious people and we are told, quite literally [sic] to go to hell” (Survey No. 1055). Another respondent writes that “[t]he meals are worse in close custody because of the punishment mental thing. Don't want to cater to trouble [sic] makers. So if they want something to eat that is good go to medium or camps or other places except the last stop to hell” (Survey No. 753). Some prisoners seem to feel they do not even have the right to expect quality food, making statements such as “[w]e are overly privileged [sic] prisoners” and “other countries' [prisoners are] not so lucky” (Survey No. 572).

A handful of respondents wrote messages on the outside of their survey envelopes that provide an impression of their perceptions of CI Food Services:

⁸ See “Hunger Games” by Jeremiah Bourgeois at *Minutes Before Six* for an in-depth explanation of the psychological dynamics over mainline meals between IMU prisoners and prison staff: <http://minutesbeforesix.blogspot.com/2016/09/hunger-games.html>

- “SOS Help thanx [sic]”
- “‘Menu Reform’ You hear me? Think eatable, you hear me?”
- “Please help us! Thanx [sic]”
- “Get Rid of CI”
- “You know the foods [sic] not good when the taste of the glue seal makes you hungry.”

The surveys themselves were filled with informative qualitative commentary. Some surveys express positive perceptions of CI’s role in the food system. One respondent states that apart from the three least favorite items he has listed, “otherwise food menu isn’t too bad! Please keep up the good work” (e.g. Survey No. 71). Other respondents wrote “[t]hanks for the food!!!” (Survey No. 588), “[h]onestly, I am grateful for everything we get” (Survey No. 621), and “theres [sic] nothing really wrong with menu [sic]” (e.g. Survey No. 572). Another had mixed criticism and praise for changes in the prison food system since CI’s takeover (e.g. Survey No. 140). Surveys from the BAR Units protective custody and mental health populations reflect the best perception of CI’s efforts among all the surveys received, despite also being the most likely to express concerns about prisoner kitchen workers tampering with food.

The majority of survey respondents express either neutral or negative perceptions of CI’s role in the food system. Several respondents feel that CI’s food model is too broken to salvage, with statements such as “[s]crap the whole thing and start over” (Survey No. 507). Additional sentiments toward CI Food Services are captured by the following responses:

- “Cook, and prepare the food, one time only, in the kitchens provide on *site*! We don’t need any *pre prepared* [sic] food by CI” (Survey No. 685)
- “The food has not improved. Correctional Industries has made a mockery of our dietary system. DOC must return to making food from scratch and not penny pinching thru CI” (e.g. Survey No. 17)
- “Do away with CI pre-packaged food” (e.g. Survey No. 48)
- “Get rid of CI. The problems start there” (e.g. Survey No. 205)

One survey (No. 487) even features a vulgar drawing on the back with the words “Eat That.”

Many surveys reflect concern that the quality and generosity of CI’s menu has declined over time (Survey Nos. 701, 959, 1022, 1327), with respondents expressing skepticism about CI’s commitment to improving food for prisoners (Survey Nos. 373, 453). This sentiment is reflected in statements such as the following:

- “Pancakes keep getting smaller and smaller...Soon they will be the size of an Oreo cookie and we only get two” (Survey No. 849)
- “What happened to 3 sausages, now we get none [with pancakes]” (Survey No. 977)
- “Whole chicken during Thanksgiving or Christmas was good now discontinued” (Survey No. 753)
- “C.I. lowered quality, quantity, and variety on all meals...no quality control. Before C.I. took over food services even staff used to eat our meals. Now even custody will not eat the C.I. meal plan (Survey No. 854)

- “[T]he staff and DOC officers won’t eat our food, so what does that tell you” (Survey No. 671)

One respondent’s number one concern is “that we will get fed actual poop next” (Survey No. 1537).

Many prisoners have served long sentences and have a clear memory of previous DOC and CI food models. Those who have not been incarcerated as long have heard from other prisoners how the food system in Washington prisons used to be. Thus, many surveys express a desire for a return to specific temporal benchmarks or to practices of previous food managers at specific DOC facilities:

- “Bring back the food menu from 2010” (Survey No. 214).
- “Return to portion sizes of 2012 menu” (Survey No. 1620)
- “20 years ago WSP had the best food of all prisons” (Survey No. 759)
- “Serve breakfast like Joe Williamson at Stafford Creek Correction Center” (Survey No. 308)
- “We need real food like we used to have 20 years ago. All the CI food is over processed garbage. Go back to the old menu’s [sic]. DOWN WITH CI!!” (Survey No. 378)
- “Go back to what was being served in the 1990’s” (Survey No. 431)
- “[Add] liver, chicken, beef, fish like it was in 2001/2001” (Survey No. 485)
- “2011 menu would be a good reference point” (Survey No. 634)
- “It really sucks—and cost [sic] more then [sic] it use [sic] to cost when the food managers planned the menus” (Survey No. 663)
- “Go back to the old days when it was something to look forward too [sic]” (Survey No. 371)
- “Before CI took over we got bigger pieces of meat” (e.g. Survey No. 140)

Many respondents report an impression of carelessness, apathy, lack of attentive supervision, and improper training on the part of both CI Food Services staff and the prisoners CI employs in reheating and serving food (e.g. Survey Nos. 276, 295), and one respondent cites kitchen staff as rude and apathetic about food quality (Survey No. 133). The desire to see more care and integrity in CI ingredients, recipes, and food preparation was a common theme. (e.g. Survey No. 1596), with respondents wanting to see “our food treated with more *respect!*” (Survey No. 1161). Some respondents specifically request improved kitchen staff training that goes beyond mere reheating tasks (e.g. Survey No. 295) and would like for CI to make meal items and recipes simple enough that “even the kitchen staff can’t screw up” (Survey No. 600).

The following statements echo such concerns:

- “I’d like to see staff take more pride in what they serve” (Survey No. 371).
- “It’s not made with pride by CI, the quality of all the prepackaged dinners are [sic] horrible” (Survey No. 845)
- “I feel we are served the bottom of the barrel that give [sic] me diareha [sic] daily [sic]” (e.g. Survey No. 230)

- “The cheap food and low-self worth in making this food...” (e.g. Survey No. 276)
- “The quality control that are [sic] supervising the inmate cook is lacking” (Survey No. 845)
- “I feel like the kitchen staff throw some menu items together and do not consider inmates have to eat what we get or go hungry and sometimes going hungry is better” (e.g. Survey No. 32)
- “Serve us decent food, something you would eat yourselves” (Survey No. 335)
- “[F]ood should be prepared [sic] by someone who gives a shit” (Survey No. 693)
- “The way the food is slopped onto the trays in the Hub...” (Survey No. 488)
- “It seems we are getting the bare minimal food stamp foods” (Survey No. 780)
- “Simply the quality is just nasty—I’ve owned a restaurant and food prep is critical to the quality of the food” (Survey No. 589)
- “The whole menu, it sucks!” (Survey No. 655)
- “Its [sic] outrageous [sic] the food. Still human beings, not 3d [sic] world country” (Survey No. 760)

Certain menu items or recipes seem to epitomize the concern about apathy towards prisoners’ experience of CI food. For example, there appears to be a statewide trend of serving prisoners broccoli stems (e.g. Survey No. 555, 1371) rather than the florets. Preparation of these broccoli stems seems to be haphazard at best, according to one respondent, who asserts that “[p]utting a bunch of mayo on broccoli [sic] doesnt [sic] make it a salad” (e.g. Survey No. 182).

Many respondents also comment on what is communicated by low quality, imitation ingredients in CI meals, with statements such as “[t]he jelly is corn syrup [instead of real fruit]” (Survey No. 609b) and “[g]et some juice without aspartame” (e.g. Survey No. 174).

How food appeals to the senses matters to perceptions of the amount of pride and care CI takes in its menu offerings (Survey No. 550). One respondent asserts that “[t]he food here the way it is prepared is the worse mess I’ve ever tasted, smelled, and seen. The hogs wouldn’t eat it” (Survey No. 1544). Respondents sometimes presented their concerns in terms of specific senses:

- Visual: “It looks like dog food out the [sic] can” (e.g. Survey No. 156) or “looks like cat puke” (Survey No. 878), and “the food is presented poorly (Survey No. 765). Two additional surveys (Nos. 487, 556) complain that CI food resembles dog food.
- Smell: “Why does DOC’s food stink so bad?” (Survey No. 526). “[Hard boiled eggs] always smell strongly of ammonia” (Survey No. 132). “Sweet & Sour (vomit) chicken over rice. Putrid smell...” (Survey No. 1040).
- Touch: “No more slimey [sic] beets” (Survey No. 678). “Texture [of CI food], its [sic] all like eating baby food” (Survey No. 1140). “Texture—we want breaded food to be crispy—same with potatoes” (Survey No. 609; see also Survey No. 652), and the breakfast burrito⁹ is “slimey/gross [sic]” (Survey No. 627).

⁹ It is unclear if this refers to the peach or the egg breakfast burrito

- Taste: “Why doesn’t a civilian taste the food before it’s given to us? There is no taste” (Survey No. 709).

The very names prisoners use for some food items in their survey responses indicate perceptions of the CI menu: “McFelon” for the CI breakfast sandwich, “brakepads” for the CI meatloaf or Salisbury steak (e.g. Survey Nos. 38, 50, 136, 640), “kibbles and bits” for the CI beef stew (e.g. Survey No. 38), “plastic” for the Polish sausage (e.g. Survey No. 296), “mystery meat sauce” for spaghetti and Sloppy Joes (e.g. Survey No. 273), “noodles with little chunks of meat” for beef stroganoff (Survey No. 420), “white junk” for the mayonnaise-based dressing used on CI broccoli, “roadkill” for CI processed meats (Survey No. 684), and “hockey pucks and goop” or “SOS” for the CI biscuits or processed meat patties with gravy (e.g. Survey Nos. 38, 797).

To illustrate an example of deep mistrust of food ingredients, multiple respondents express concern about food boxes arriving in kitchens marked “unfit for human consumption,” though it is unclear in most cases whether prisoners have seen this with their own eyes or heard it secondhand from prisoner kitchen workers (e.g. Survey Nos. 107, 217, 296). Some surveys (e.g. Survey No. 227, 296) identify this as a concern specific to meat products: “The meat products [sic] state on packaging [sic] not fit for humen [sic] consenshion [sic]” (Survey No. 217).

A sentiment expressed in several surveys is the perception that CI cares more about profit margins than about providing quality or healthy food to prisoners. One respondent feels that CI wastes “time, energy, resources, and money, trying to save and make a buck...what the State and DOC are trying to accomplish is more than an embarrassment to the State and all the tax payers [sic]” (Survey No. 685). Additional perceptions of CI’s financial model as it relates to prison food operations are captured by the following statements:

- “I don’t think that they really care what we eat, as long as it don’t [sic] cost them much. They will give us hog slop just to save a nickel” (Survey No. 756)
- “More concern [sic] in saving DOC money than quality and quantity of food prepared” (Survey No. 345)
- “C.I. food is so concerned about saving that they give us unorthodox type mixed meals [incompatible meal item combinations]” (Survey No. 1050)
- “[T]he less the quantity and quality the food [sic], the more their profits” (Survey No. 1396)
- “We are being charged \$5.00 for boats we make for 1 dollar” (Survey No. 609b)

Several respondents express concerns that the cost of incarceration fees deducted from their trust accounts are not being used to help fund the prison food system (e.g. Survey Nos. 1176, 1554). One respondent notes that “inmate’s [sic] are paying to be housed here so why are we being feed [sic] so minutely? No other state charges for cost of incarceration, but where I’m paying for meals I’m still hungry after 5pm” (Survey No. 623). Another states that “[e]verything [about the menu] should be improved. Your [sic] taking all our money out of prison/penal account an [sic] treating us like cattle” (Survey No. 981). Respondents express a desire to know more about CI food production finances (e.g. Survey No. 522), to include costs per meal, per item, and per prisoner.

Some respondents are even suspicious that CI reduces mainline portion sizes to boost its own commissary sales to prisoners. For example, one respondent would like DOC to “[r]emove all C.I. meals, because they give us small portions, which forces us to buy C.I. commissary so it’s a monopoly [sic]” (Survey No. 669).

Moreover, many respondents feel left in the dark about the ingredients in CI food, with statements such as: “What are we eating? Why do dogs¹⁰ turn their noses at our ‘supposed’ meat?” (e.g. Survey No. 179). One respondent’s primary concern about DOC food is that he does not know “where it comes from” (Survey No. 688), while another “would like the nutritional information of all the food served to us posted in the [living] units” (Survey No. 38). Several prisoners expressed a wish to have access to the nutrition facts, caloric levels, and ingredients labels for foods served by CI (e.g. Survey Nos. 36, 38, 62, 105, 1088, 1434), as well as more information about the nutritional content of each menu item (Survey No. 898), with the primary concern for many respondents being “not knowing exactly what’s [sic] in my food” (Survey No. 712). Increased transparency about food ingredients might go a long way to establish trust between CI and prisoners, since many respondents are concerned about the “lack of nutritional facts available to us regarding food served at the facility” (Survey No. 738). One respondent states that the only CI food for which prisoners are given nutrition and ingredients labels are the peanut butter packets (Survey No. 1550).

Prisoners also wish to know more about the micronutrients, ingredients, and health effects of their fortified juice powder packets (e.g. Survey Nos. 218, 247, 423, 779). One respondent writes: “I don’t know the nutritional value of anything we eat and the kitchen does not respond to my kites about it...I’ve been trying to get the kitchen to give me the info on our ‘fortified juice drink’ for months now” (Survey No. 779). Respondents also wish to know more about chemical preservatives and ingredients in CI’s food, as well as more about CI’s food processing methods (e.g. Survey Nos. 19, 99, 296). Those respondents eating mainline alternative religious diets would like to see more information on vendors from which these items are sourced (e.g. Survey No. 286).

Some surveys also expressed a desire for more communication and transparency with prisoners about how CI menus and recipes are developed (e.g. Survey No. 263) and how CI food is prepared (e.g. Survey No. 127).

Additional areas of distrust pertain to concerns over Airway Heights water contamination at CI’s central food factory¹¹ (Survey Nos. 264, 301) and suspicions over the intentions motivating CI’s choice of food ingredients. As will be explored in a later section, male prisoners are often concerned about the effect that soy phytoestrogens in food have on hormones in adult men (e.g. Survey Nos. 250, 267). Some prisoners even express concerns that about prison staff putting tranquilizers or saltpeter in prisoners’ food as a means of behavioral control (Survey Nos. 264, 301), with one respondent asking: “Am I being drugged in any way?” (Survey No. 1382).

¹⁰ Note that WSP is a prison that has a dog training program, with the Blue Mountain Humane Society. This respondent may not be speaking figuratively.

¹¹ See *The Spokesman Review*, “Citing potential water contamination, Department of Corrections issues recall for food manufactured at Airway Heights Corrections Center,” May 18, 2017. <http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2017/may/18/citing-potential-water-contamination-department-of/>

Summary of Top Concerns and Suggested Improvements

Numerous important themes emerged in the top concerns and suggested improvements presented by respondents. Because respondents frequently did not distinguish between these two questions in the wording and nature of their responses, the coded responses for these two survey questions were merged into one data set. Quantitative assessments of these data are presented in Table 4, with subsequent sections exploring various issues of concern in greater depth.

Table 4

Top Concerns and Suggestions

Top Concerns & Suggestions	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Portions Too Small/Left Hungry/Increase Portion Size	1123	Due to some overlap and duplication in top concerns and suggestions across survey questions, this number somewhat overstates the quantity of individual prisoners reporting this concern. This number should be interpreted as quantity of distinct question responses, rather than quantity of individuals giving this response.
Increase Protein Quality And Quantity	251	
Concerned Food Unhealthy	356	
Concerned about TVP/Soy Content And Quality Of Meat	343	
Food Incorrectly Heated/Under Or Over Cooked	335	
Quality of Food Is Low	277	
Flavor Unpalatable/Bland	209	
Food Preparation Protocols Make Food More Unpalatable Or Inedible	208	
Increase Protein Quality And Quantity	157	
Meals Are Too High In Carbs/ Meals Rely Too Much On Potatoes Bread Pasta As Filler/ Request More Complex Carbs, Fewer Simple Carbs	148	

(Table 4 Continued)

Top Concerns & Suggestions	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Request More Variety in Meals	163	In addition, some meals with different names are only slightly different and are basically the same recipe. For example, “Meatloaf” and “Salisbury Steak”, “Sloppy Joes” and “Spaghetti Meat Sauce”, or “Braised Beef,” “Beef Stroganoff,” and “Beef Stew”. What reportedly makes the beef stew different from the braised beef and beef stroganoff is that the former is served over rice and has carrot chunks and the latter is served over noodles and has no carrot chunks—beyond this the recipes are reported to be indistinguishable
Concerned About Processed/Refined Foods	134	
Portions Inconsistent Between Trays And Between Lunch Dinner	124	Lunch Portions And Side Quantities Are Too Small
Food Not Fresh	120	
Poor Sanitation In Food Prep And Tray Washing	120	
Incompatible Food Items Served As Meal	99	e.g. Yams for breakfast, carrots with pancakes
Give Local Food Manager Control/Cook From Scratch	66	
Old Expired Rotten Moldy Spoiled Sour Reused Food	58	Fruit, Vegetables, Milk, Beans most commonly cited
Request More Variety In Fruit & Vegetables	46	
Concerned Food Is Contaminated By Prisoner Kitchen Staff	37	PC population and broader West Complex especially. Reports of fingernails, rocks, water, and bodily fluids being added to food. Reports that CI staff aren’t monitoring carefully and may be spending too much time on computers
Food Waste	30	Undesirable items thrown away, waste taxpayer dollars, give false impression of sufficient caloric intake
Reduce Beans	29	
Request Healthier Food	21	
Add More Seasonings To Make Less Bland	21	

(Table 4 Continued)

Top Concerns & Suggestions	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Request Liquid Milk At Every Meal/Request Two Milks At Breakfast	19	
Recommend Creating Salad Bar or Buffet With Optional Items To Avoid Waste	13	
<p data-bbox="201 474 656 506">Additional Concerns and Suggestions:</p> <ul data-bbox="253 548 760 730" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="253 548 760 632">• Serve oatmeal from kettle or large pan in dining area to avoid hardening in reheating trays <li data-bbox="253 638 760 695">• Concerned staff are watering down food to make it stretch farther <li data-bbox="253 701 760 730">• Request more variety in breakfast menu 	≤ 12	<p data-bbox="977 474 1403 737">After the April 2018 strike, oatmeal was served from a pan in the dining areas, but once the new reheating ovens were purchased, oatmeal began to be placed in the black rubber reheating trays, and is now allocated between two shallow compartments in the trays.</p>
<ul data-bbox="253 816 760 1871" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="253 816 760 873">• Concerned kitchen staff are apathetic about food quality and prep <li data-bbox="253 879 760 909">• Would like diabetic friendly meals <li data-bbox="253 915 760 972">• Would like pancake/waffle quantity/size to increase <li data-bbox="253 978 760 1008">• Would like entire CI menu to be reformed <li data-bbox="253 1014 760 1071">• Would like CI to reduce beets, carrots, yams, beans & rice, noodle dishes <li data-bbox="253 1077 760 1106">• Concerned about sodium, fat, grease <li data-bbox="253 1113 760 1190">• Rumors from prisoner kitchen staff of food coming in boxes marked “Not Fit For Human Consumption” <li data-bbox="253 1197 760 1274">• Concerned that special diets don’t improve when mainline menu improvements are made <li data-bbox="253 1281 760 1373">• Cold lunches are being served without all boat components, making for incomplete meal <li data-bbox="253 1379 760 1409">• Would like breakfasts to improve <li data-bbox="253 1415 760 1472">• Would like visual appearance of food to improve <li data-bbox="253 1478 760 1535">• Add real fruit juice instead of fortified juice mix & concerns about aspartame <li data-bbox="253 1541 760 1633">• Concerned that excess of beans in diet cause flatulence that creates conflict among prisoners in living units <li data-bbox="253 1640 760 1753">• Salad dressings (romaine, beet, tuna, pasta, potato) are unpalatable, too sour from vinegar, too heavy with mayo, or cause other items in meal to become soggy <li data-bbox="253 1759 760 1789">• Special diets lack variety <li data-bbox="253 1795 760 1852">• Shift religious prisoners to religious diet to allow mainline to eat pork <li data-bbox="253 1858 760 1887">• Use un-breaded fish 		<p data-bbox="977 963 1377 1056">Some respondents state that yams are rarely fresh, which may be affecting palatability.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned about trend of decline in CI food over time • Serve dressings, onions, margarine, and cheese on the side, not mixed in with food • Allow non-vegan menu alternative for those with fish allergies • CI meals cause digestion problems • Concerned cost of incarceration not used to provide quality food or sufficient portion sizes 		
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Portion Size, Consistency, and Content

Quantitative analyses of coded survey responses reveal that respondents’ top concerns are portion size and insufficient caloric content of meals. A full meal that’s edible and satiating is more important to many respondents than are taste or variety in the menu. As one respondent shares, “[t]o be sure, the quality needs improved considerably, but if one must pick only a single concern it is that the diet leaves one ravenous” (Survey No. 1583). Another respondent states that he wants “more filling food instead of tasty” on the menu (Survey No. 1148) and still another would “just like to have a good filling meal that’s all” (Survey No. 1154). Respondents lament that “we never get enough. We are starving” (Survey No. 642), and that they are “[a]ll ways [sic] hungry because there is never enough” (e.g. Survey No. 51).

Further, economic inequities exist between inmates such that some inmates can supplement with commissary and others cannot (Survey No. 851), which can create tension between inmates (Survey No. 1334). Thus, meager portion sizes are not just an issue of prisoner health and well-being, but also risk to prison safety and security.

Mainline alternative meals are reported to have smaller portion sizes than mainline meals (e.g. Survey No. 516). One respondent who eats the kosher menu plan states that “I am always hungry after every meal” (Survey No. 1106). Under all CI menu plans, WSP portion sizes are based on a standard average male caloric level, rather than on an individual prisoner’s stature or weight. Thus, a 120-lbs. man who is 5’4” is served the same amount of food as a man who is 6’5” and over 200 lbs. This point was made in several surveys (e.g. Survey Nos. 112, 1086). Moreover, activity level of individual prisoners—many of whom work out almost daily—is not taken into consideration when determining portion size (Survey No. 375). The one-size-fits-all caloric standard for CI meal plans may therefore be an exacerbating factor in concerns about caloric levels and portion sizes, and is one of many reasons several respondents suggest that CI switch to a buffet or salad bar style self-serve model.

Several respondents express that CI portion sizes at WSP are more suitable for children than for grown men (e.g. Survey Nos. 110, 498), recommending that CI “[a]ctually fill the dishes all the way. The trays are hardly ever enough to satisfy a grown man” (Survey No. 1329). Additional sentiments of this nature are exemplified by the following:

- “We are grown men, we should be fed accordingly” (e.g. Survey No. 49)
- “Portions are too small, and seem to be portions that are even less than children are served in school” (e.g. Survey No. 6)
- “My son eats more for lunch, he’s five” (e.g. Survey No. 79)

Some prisoners report marked weight loss on the current diet (e.g. Survey No. 115), with one respondent reporting that “I lost 6 pounds from October 2018 to Jan 29, 2019” (Survey No. 787). Another states that “I would have to say that they don’t feed us enough food on our trays. I’ve lost alot [sic] of weight do [sic] to the lack of food on our trays” (e.g. Survey No. 46). This affects more than just physical health for prisoners. For those serving long sentences, there is also a negative effect on morale, since feeling full at least makes it more manageable to endure a long sentence (Survey No. 1005).

Time between meals is another important consideration. One respondent points out that “its [sic] a 13 hour stretch from dinner to breakfast” and suggests adding “a snack to pick up at dinner to eat before bed” to stave off hunger (Survey No. 702).

Moreover, several surveys express concerns that CI’s paper menu posted in dining areas or living units, or as presented to inspectors from headquarters or independent government offices, does not always reflect what is actually served on trays, overstating both portion size and nutrient content (e.g. Survey No. 862, Survey No. 1148), especially in terms of animal products and protein, sometimes even listing items that are different from those served:

- “Now days [sic] the food manager budgets the cost of food. Portion controle [sic] so it looks like we are gettin [sic] over the calories are [sic] all there on paper. Not in my belly” (Survey No. 753)
- “Stated nutritional content publish [sic] does not meet actual content. Esp. regarding protein, probably calories also (based on last disclosure I saw)” (Survey No. 680)
- “No meat no chees [sic] is served except on paper it looks like we get portions of beef, chicken, eggs” (Survey No. 753)¹²
- “They don’t give us what the menu says, i.e. hard boiled eggs instead of scrambled eggs, etc.” (Survey No. 1403)
- “I would like to see what you guys think of our menu. Not what it says but what we eat” (Survey No. 958)
- “When outside staff comes in to check on food the serving size we get is tripple [sic] the amount we normally get” (e.g. Survey No. 281)
- “Come eat one week of the food we eat. Don’t eat what they give you come to a unit and grab one of our trays in the West Complex” (Survey No. 958)

There are additional concerns that CI counts condiments or seasoning packets toward meeting caloric requirements (e.g. Survey No. 498), and that prisoners must therefore choose between eating unhealthy condiments or insufficient caloric intake at meals.

¹² This respondent appears to be referring to animal products unadulterated with processed texturized vegetable protein.

Several respondents report that WSP's CI Food Services practices are not consistent with those of other prisons in the state. Two respondents assert that portion sizes are larger in DOC prisons in Western Washington (Survey Nos. 490, 584) and that food quality at WSP is worse than that at other prisons in the state in which the prisoners have been housed (Survey Nos. 805, 862, 1050). One respondent states that WSP allows prisoners to take less fruit with meals than other prisons in Washington allow (Survey No. 934).

A large quantity of respondents also report inconsistent portion sizes and caloric content from meal to meal and day to day (e.g. Survey No. 63), stating that "[o]ne day meals are a full tray, the next day they are small" (Survey No. 59) and that "[c]alories intake [sic] should be [calculated] for each meal. Not each month or each day" (Survey No. 281). Respondents request "stability in our menu" (Survey No. 914) and a "balance of calories throughout the week. No hungry days" (Survey No. 1629). Some respondents report that portion sizes are inconsistent among custody levels. For example, one respondent observes that "portions are small in close custody WSP. The camp gets way more" (Survey No. 1121).

Several respondents observe that there is also inconsistency in the components included with CI meals that are nominally identical on paper menus. For example, "[s]ometimes they serve the same meal twice in one week but with less...sometimes the fish come [sic] with cheese, sometimes it don't [sic]" (Survey No. 553). Another example is the breakfast sandwich, which is served twice a week, once with and once without meat (Survey No. 428).¹³

This issue of inconsistencies in meal components and portion sizes appears to be a bigger problem at some meals than others. Lunch portions are reported to be especially small (e.g. Survey Nos. 105, 178, 203, 223, 234, 274, 281, 299, 1003). One respondent reports that "[t]here are 18 lunches of 28 that don't have enough food on the tray" (Survey No. 900).

Many respondents request "more volume on the lunch and dinner main courses" (Survey No. 610) and suggest that CI serve additional sides "besides just carrots or celery" (Survey No. 697) with meager lunches, with recommendations such as "rice with the fish" or "potato with the hamburger" (Survey No. 592). The tuna sandwich, fish patty, chicken nuggets, and hamburger meals are identified by respondents as being especially deficient in sides (e.g. Survey Nos. 614, 631, 633). When cold meals are served for lunch, a paucity of sides translates to an incomplete meal being served, meaning these cold meals lack some of the standard items typically included in a CI cold "boat" (e.g. Survey Nos. 443, 762). One respondent therefore recommends that CI "[m]ake each meal a full meal. Main dish, side, and fruit" (Survey No. 1367).

There may be additional reasons prisoners report feeling hungry after meals. For example, caloric content of meals may be perceived as lower than it actually is if some items in the meal are unpalatable and left uneaten (e.g. Survey No. 220). If a person does not like the food being served or is allergic to some meal components,¹⁴ and there are no additional sides from which to choose, they must simply go hungry. One respondent reports that "[s]ome lunches are too small. I can't eat tuna, or the fish so I basically don't get to eat lunch" (Survey No. 662).

¹³ Many respondents report liking only the version that includes ham (e.g. Survey Nos. 427, 451, 662).

¹⁴ Several survey respondents report fish allergies, onion allergies, or lactose intolerance that make it impossible for them to eat many meal items.

Another respondent's number one concern is "getting enough food in the unit to serve everyone" (Survey No. 797), and many surveys raise concerns that CI food frequently is watered down, perhaps at the instruction of local facility CI Food Services staff, to make food stretch farther, especially when the bottom of the serving pan is reached (e.g. Survey Nos. 263, 279, 380, 1424). One respondent reports that "[t]he oatmeal, gravy and taco meat is [sic] mostly watered down when you eat last" (Survey No. 279). This cautionary tale includes accounts of watered-down bean dishes and items served as stews, oatmeal, or sauce-covered entrées composed of vegetable and meat chunks over rice or pasta, which may result in CI overstating both caloric and protein content in many meals. Replacing current dilutable entrées with solid, discrete meal items that cannot be watered down, such as whole chicken breasts, could address such issues.

Excessively small portion sizes may also be of additional medical concern for some prisoners. One respondent explains that small portion sizes cause problems for him because he must take several medications with a full stomach of food, presumably to avoid stomach irritation (Survey No. 72).

Several surveys present concerns over food waste due to leftovers being thrown away by kitchen staff instead of being made available for prisoners to eat (Survey No. 488) and due to unpalatable food being thrown away by prisoners themselves (e.g. Survey Nos. 176, 203, 212, 266, 281, 1628) since DOC does not allow prisoners to share or give away food (Survey No. 788). Respondents express concerns that this exacerbates both food waste and prisoner hunger with comments such as "I've been working in the kitchen for 2½ years and we through [sic] to [sic] much away—should feed inmates instead of waste" (e.g. Survey No. 292). Many respondents feel leftover food could be used to add much needed sides to meals with suggestions such as: "Soups should be made [from leftovers] for lunch/dinner" (Survey No. 1370). Many surveys suggest the most common-sense solution for many respondents: eliminate unpopular items and replace them with desirable items to alleviate problems of food waste and hunger (e.g. Survey Nos. 413, 435, 448, 497). One respondent states that CI should substitute palatable items for "the food we don't like because it goes straight to the trash and its [sic] a waist [sic] of money" (Survey No. 1325). Some respondents feel that discarded food represents a superficial impression that CI is meeting serving size and nutritional requirements, since "despite nutritional value, if nobody eats the menu items, nobody is getting the value anyway" (e.g. Survey No. 1628).

Multiple respondents present the case for providing a salad bar, buffet, or cafeteria style self-serve dining arrangement that would allow prisoners to take only those items they intend to eat and determine their own portion sizes and nutrition goals (e.g. Survey Nos. 84, 118, 561). One respondent indicates that this is how food was once served in Washington prisons: "Get rid of C.I. and go back to self serve model (Survey No. 938). Some respondents feel that a self-serve model would make fruit and sides optional so that only those who wish to eat them would end up taking them (e.g. Survey No. 606), reducing food waste (e.g. Survey No. 562) and giving the incarcerated a sense of having some sort of choice¹⁵ over their diet (Survey No. 689). Monitoring

¹⁵ This desire harmonizes well with the spirit of Executive Order 13-06 which aims not to impose any specific foods on those who eat in state facilities, but rather to ensure healthy *choices* are available and accessible to those individuals who desire to eat healthy food. The order addresses the role Washington

which items are left over after running the day's buffet would also give CI a frequently updated understanding of desirable and undesirable foods.

Improperly Heated Food

With the new ovens CI purchased to address the April 2018 food strike have come new concerns about improper heating and dehydration of some food items. Several respondents explain that food for each meal is distributed into black rubber trays that are then kept in the ovens until count or other administrative procedures are complete before being served. Respondents report that food is often served “[t]oo hot to eat in 15 minute time frame” (Survey No. 652) and is “pre-cooked days earlier then super heated in ovens” (Survey No. 753). One respondent is concerned about “the food not being cooked within the hour of mainline being served” (Survey No. 586). Food is reported often to be served late, meaning it cooks too long in the reheating ovens while custody staff carry out what many prisoners feel is an intentionally prolonged count¹⁶ (Survey No. 937).

Many surveys report that the practice of heating all meal items on one tray together does not take into consideration that different types of food need to be heated for different amounts of time, such that some items end up overcooked while others are undercooked, impacting edibility and palatability (Survey No. 804). One respondent reports that “[t]he rice is always rock hard and the food barely warm” (Survey No. 679).

Meal components reported to be frequently undercooked are cold eggs, cold rolls (e.g. Survey Nos. 212, 314), potatoes, and some vegetables (e.g. Survey No. 357). However, the majority of adversely affected items appear to be overcooked. One respondent explains that “[f]ood is super-heated in oven after it's cooked making meal hard/dry, near inedible” (Survey No. 1324). Many respondents report that oatmeal is “*always* overcooked and very dry-hard on top” (Survey No. 604), such that a thick, inedible “scab” forms on top and prisoners are only able to eat about 85% of what remains (e.g. Survey No. 535). Moreover, prisoners report that “we are sometimes given rice and/or noodles that are dry, hard and inedible [sic]” (Survey No. 730). Oatmeal, rice, and noodles are said to sometimes be so dehydrated by heat that they return to being as hard as when uncooked (e.g. Survey Nos. 420, 428, 535, 537, 629, 753, 769, 1623). This has caused dental problems for some respondents, who report that oven-hardened rice has chipped or broken their teeth (Survey Nos. 606, 1460).

Pancakes and waffles also become hard in the ovens (Survey No. 590, 1346) and the “Polish dog” is made so rubbery and tough (e.g. Survey Nos. 257, 1620) as to be “like ‘beef jerky,’ it bounce [sic] off the wall” (Survey No. 760) and to be so hard it “couldn't be bitten through” (Survey No. 210). Hamburgers, too, are reported to sometimes be dried out from reheating (e.g. Survey No. 217). Vegetables are frequently overboiled before reheating and then are reheated to the point of drying out, raising concerns among some respondents about loss of nutrients (e.g. Survey Nos. 215, 534).

State agencies play in making it “more or less difficult for individuals to choose behaviors that promote or diminish health” and aims to promote “access to healthy foods in state facilities.”

¹⁶ The perception is that staff may be retaliating against prisoners for the new inconvenience of having to serve hot meals by dragging out count and allowing food to dehydrate in ovens.

Respondents therefore recommend that CI “[s]erve food from separate [sic] warmers to prevent over cooking vegetables in black rubber [sic] trays” (Survey No. 656) or “serve out of pans instead of our food sitting there overcooking” (Survey No. 770), and that CI “[g]et rid of the black ‘hot tray’” because “[t]hey cram [sic] all the food in it, over cook it, and it is a continual poor product. Horrible” (Survey No. 658). This respondent also states that “[c]lose custody CBCC¹⁷ feeds from the hotel pan to the flat tray, same menu, and the food is edible” (Survey No. 658), indicating that WSP might look to other Washington prisons for best practices.

Food Freshness, Preparation, and Sanitation Concerns

Many respondents request “better or fresher ingredients” (Survey No. 748), with meals cooked locally and served the same day as they are cooked, rather than being frozen and reheated (e.g. Survey Nos. 310, 697, 821). One respondent would like to see “that the food is freshly cooked before we eat instead of it being cooked 3 day [sic] before we eat!!” (Survey No. 591), while another wishes the food could be served “when it is made not put in fridge for days then served to us” (Survey No. 717). Other respondents state that CI food tastes freezer-burned because it is evidently cooked, frozen, reheated, placed in trays, refrigerated, and then reheated¹⁸ (Survey Nos. 649, 1207, 1630). Many respondents would like for CI to “[m]ake the food fresh, not bagged at Airway Heights (main courses)” (Survey No. 283) because “[h]aving packed and then reheated the food later makes it taste like shit” (Survey No. 522).

Spoilage, mold, rotteness, and general food freshness issues appear to affect many types of meal items and are a common complaint for many respondents, who express concerns about how food is stored and served prior to and past expiration dates (e.g. Survey No. 295). These respondents see the lack of freshness in CI food as an indicator of CI’s overall level of concern about prisoner food experiences and health. One respondent explains that “[s]ome times [sic] the [non-boat] bread be [sic] moldy” (Survey No. 557), while another states that the “[w]hite beans w/ potatoe [sic] taste moldy” (Survey No. 678). Additional surveys report that:

- Kosher meals often contain items served past expiration (Survey No. 550)
- Liquid milk is sometimes sour or past expiration date (e.g. Survey Nos. 55, 67, 113, 276), with one respondent estimating that this occurs perhaps 20% of the time (Survey No. 321)
- Vegetables, fruit, and beans are sometimes rotten (e.g. Survey Nos. 178, 180, 260)
- Spaghetti sauce is sometimes spoiled (Survey No. 784)
- Chicken is sometimes spoiled (Survey No. 784)
- Applesauce is sometimes spoiled (Survey No. 1063)
- Coleslaw, macaroni salad, broccoli salad, and other salads sometimes taste spoiled or are served “old and reused” (e.g. Survey Nos. 149, 300, 378)
- Fruit is often badly bruised (e.g. Survey No. 401) or is served thawed after being atypically and repeatedly frozen and thawed¹⁹ (e.g. Survey No. 364)

¹⁷ Clallam Bay Corrections Center

¹⁸ This process should be confirmed. Variations were reported in some surveys.

¹⁹ This appears to refer to inappropriate freezing of whole apples and oranges, not to standard freezing methods of blanched fruit that might occur in regular produce freezing practices

- Potatoes are palatable, but only on the days when they are actually fresh (e.g. Survey No. 1620)
- Beets and yams are not fresh (Survey No. 934), which perhaps contributes to these items being extremely unpopular

Some respondents also express concerns about the sanitation of both CI's Airway Heights food production factory (e.g. Survey No. 1429) and WSP local food reheating facilities (e.g. Survey No. 657). BAR Units prisoners, some of whom are in protective custody and reported to be targeted for harassment by the general prison population (Survey No. 466), express concerns that prisoner kitchen workers are tampering with food served to those in protective custody, contaminating it with fingernail clippings, rocks, poured water, or other foreign substances (e.g. Survey Nos. 411, 436, 437, 441, 460, 468, 590, 1358). One respondent has concerns that kitchen workers or servers are spitting or putting mucus in food (Survey No. 605), while another respondent's top concern is "[c]areless handling/tampering by the inmates who work in the kitchen and prepare the food (rumors of evil and sloppiness are advertised by conscientious [sic] kitchen workers)" (Survey No. 627). BAR Units prisoners are also concerned that general population kitchen workers are diverting less desirable food to BAR Units while giving general population better food (Survey Nos. 1195, 1196, 1220). Similar concerns are reported by some respondents in the West Complex Delta and Echo Units. One respondent recommends a blind feeding dining arrangement to prevent prisoners from interfering with food of other prisoners (Survey No. 614). Another cites a lack of CI supervision as part of the problem: "The inmate cooks that can't cook. Everyone in a rush to get done so they can sit around and bullshit. Make the supervisors do their job. Quit spending 50% of their time on the computers. DOC time for personal pleasure" (Survey No. 488).

Multiple types of sanitation and safety concerns are reported by respondents.²⁰ For example, there can be "[s]omeone getting sick because the food is being handled far to [sic] many times, befor [sic] served" (Survey No. 657). Another respondent feels the food is "not handled right, find debris in food" (Survey No. 989). Multiple respondents raise concerns about poorly washed produce. For example, "peppers are often unclean" (Survey No. 810). One respondent is concerned about "[t]he rice and beans not being washed properly. I almost chipped a tooth" (Survey No. 983). Another respondent also reports finding rocks in beans (Survey No. 1548). Prisoners from both close and minimum custody found metal in their food, with one finding metal in carrots (Survey No. 124) and another finding metal shavings in a meal (Survey No. 628). One respondent has even found dead insects in his food (Survey No. 421). Other respondents are concerned about subpar dishwashing practices (e.g. Survey No. 576), stating that "[t]he black trays, you can smell other food in them" (Survey No. 657).

Soy, Meat, and Protein

Correctional Industries uses many meat products in prisoner meals that contain soy in the form of textured vegetable protein (TVP). Understanding the depth of concerns prisoners have about

²⁰ A 2017 article²⁰ in *The Atlantic* states that "Lapses in food safety have made U.S. prisoners six times more likely to get a foodborne illness than the general population." See <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/12/prison-food-sickness-america/549179/>

TVP content and insufficient animal protein requires going deeper than the obvious medical concerns. There is a cultural perception at play here as well. The prison environment is shaped by hypermasculine cultural expectations and activities. Many male prisoners spend their time exercising and weightlifting and strongly feel that vegetable entrées and vegetable proteins are insufficient for athletic men’s nutritional needs (e.g. Survey Nos. 111). Respondents frequently expressed their concerns about soy in relation to their dignity as men and human beings with statements such as: “Use real meat products, feed us like we are actually human” (Survey No. 1259).

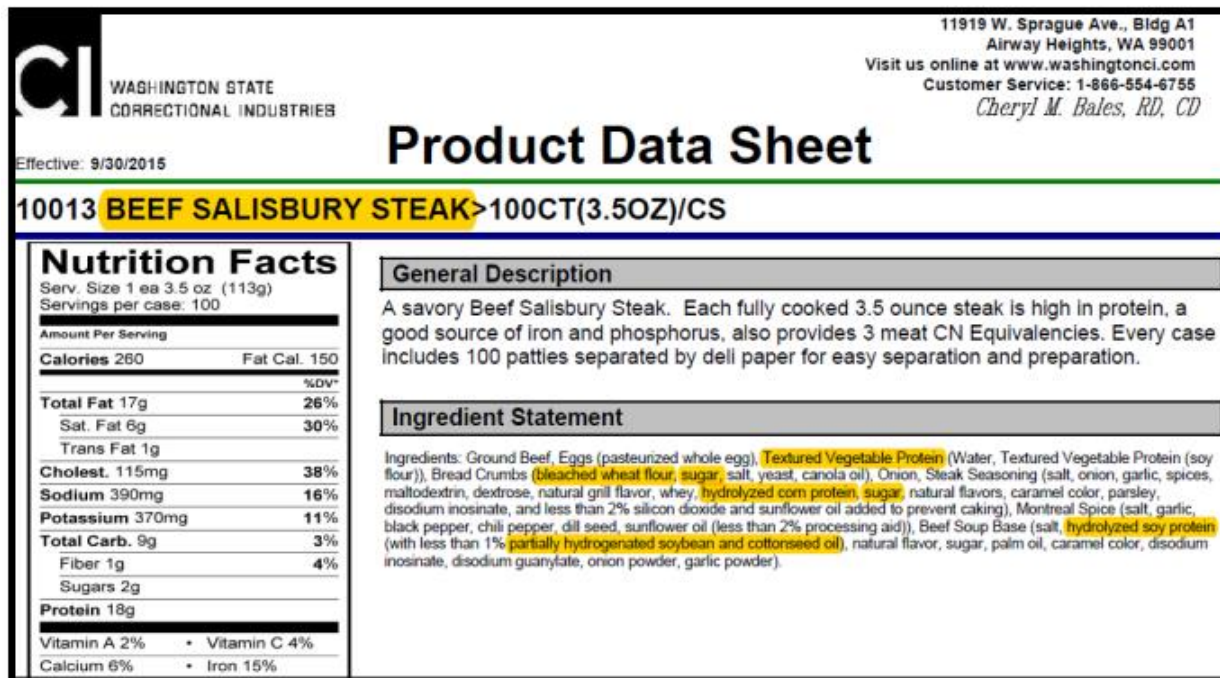


Figure 1. Sample CI meat product ingredient label on file with DOC Public Records Unit.

While many prisoners expressed concerns about TVP content (e.g. Survey Nos. 267, 363, 1014), it is not clear from responses whether all prisoners have the same underlying concern about soy and TVP. Some respondents seem concerned about the processed, non-whole-food nature of TVP, using descriptors such as “fake protein” (e.g. Survey No. 51). Others seem to be specifically concerned about hormonal effects of excessive soy intake through TVP-containing processed meats (e.g. Survey Nos. 267, 784). Many prisoners report feeling sluggish or have digestive difficulties or stomach troubles due to TVP and other processed items in CI meals (e.g. Survey Nos. 161, 185, 373, 468), with statements such as: “[M]y body can’t digest a lot of the soy vegetable protein meat” (Survey No. 640). It is therefore unclear whether prisoners would take the same stance on less processed soy sources, such as tofu or edamame beans, as they do on TVP products.

One respondent would like to see DOC require a specific percentage of animal protein in CI meat products through policy (Survey No. 363) and another would like to receive a list of all CI products containing soy (Survey No. 554).

Whatever the stance on soy, the desire to see more unprocessed meat and animal products on the CI menu was one of the most common responses. The real beef hamburger patties CI has introduced recently are a popular item because they are visually identifiable by prisoners as real beef instead of TVP-based (e.g. Survey No. 118). This also seems to be one reason why prisoners like the hardboiled eggs (e.g. Survey No. 55), and many requested meat or “chicken on the bone” in their surveys (e.g. Survey Nos. 18, 38, 45, 118, 143, 270). Further trust over quality and type of meat ingredients may be established by providing animal proteins prisoners can visually identify as unadulterated with TVP, such as whole pieces of chicken breast (e.g. Survey No. 118). Many prisoners would also like to see pork on the menu and point out that special religious diets are available for those who have religious restrictions against eating pork (e.g. Survey Nos. 210, 378).

Nutrition and Health Concerns

Prisoners, especially those with long sentences or no financial support to supplement their diet through quarterly packages and commissary, are painfully aware that they are at the full mercy of the institutional diet, with little ability to set personal nutritional goals. One respondent’s biggest concern about the prison food is “[t]hat it’s killing me and that I’m going to die from colon cancer” (Survey No. 1608). Several prisoners express the desire to have more opportunities to set their own health goals by designing more personalized diets (e.g. Survey No. 1626).

The following responses capture various prisoner health concerns related to food:

- “DOC is sending people home with clogged arteries and overweight with health concerns” (Survey No. 1055)
- “My #1 concern is one day I’ll get canser [sic], high blood presure [sic], diabetas [sic] ECT. [sic] from eating DOC’s food’s [sic]” (Survey No. 755)
- “This menue [sic] is a perfect recipe for diabetes. I was never diagnosed for diabetes until I came to prison” (Survey No. 756)
- “I’m already a diabetic. I don’t need to be worst [sic] off” (Survey No. 791)
- “They serve too much ‘flour and starch.’ Turning into a diabetic” (Survey No. 754)
- “We just want to eat food that is good for us” (Survey No. 599)
- “I’m not getting the protein and nutrients I need” (Survey No. 670)
- “All I know we [sic] don’t get the right nutrition anyways” (e.g. Survey No. 10)
- “The food here make [sic] my stomach turn and gasy [sic]. Why?” (Survey No. 468)
- “The sugars in [the food] is giving people prediabetes” (e.g. Survey No. 255)
- “I’m a diabetic, and I have blood pressure issues. The food is all processed. I gave up, I refuse treatment because it's a battle I can't win. So I stop taking meds because it's pointless" (Survey No. 589)
- “It’s not healthy for people with heart problems” (e.g. Survey No. 265)
- “Need more protein/calcium. Alot [sic] of us have nutrition issues, bone loss, not every one has help with packages or funds being sent in, added with deductions of 55% to 95% being taken, we can’t properly take care of ourselves, bone and muscle deterioration because of not enough real food” (Survey No. 1392)

- “We are served very few ‘whole’ foods. Most items are highly processed and unrecognizable” (e.g. Survey No. 38)
- “There’s [sic] too much starchy foods as oppose [sic] to green stuff. Everything is processed” (Survey No. 696)
- “Add chicken breast and better salad choice to encourage healthy eating” (e.g. Survey No. 99).

One respondent also reports having developed Irritable Bowel Syndrome on the CI diet, and avoids eating to avoid digestive troubles, which results in weight loss (Survey No. 373).

A common theme from respondents is the desire to see more “healthy choices” on the menu (e.g. Survey No. 1346) and there were many requests for more raw and fresh fruits and vegetables (e.g. Survey Nos. 162, 215). One prisoner suggests “allowing in-cell retention of 1 fruit” (e.g. Survey No. 36). Evidently, prisoners in WSP medium security used to be allowed to take fruit from a box in their day rooms, but custody staff no longer allow this due to concerns about illicit pruno production. Including custody staff in the development of protocols to increase access to healthy fruits is therefore important.

Some respondents lament that CI’s prepackaged food cannot be modified by local facility food managers or prisoners themselves to make it healthier (e.g. Survey No. 291) and would like to see DOC create a mainline alternative diet for health-conscious individuals (e.g. Survey No. 82).²¹

Many prisoners are concerned that CI food is “not meeting nutritional standards” and that CI food has an unhealthy carbohydrate to protein ratio (Survey Nos. 706, 734), relying on bread, noodles, and corn that are packed with simple carbohydrates and insufficient nutritional value to serve as filler in meals (e.g. Survey No. 1618) Carbohydrate heavy meals cause weight gain for some respondents (e.g. Survey No. 467) and others worry that excessive reliance on wheat and other grains creates an imbalance of essential amino acids needed to form complete proteins in legume pairings (e.g. Survey No. 361). Several respondents express concerns that CI relies on unhealthy margarine and condiments to meet caloric requirements for meals (e.g. Survey Nos. 178, 1429) and is not providing healthy alternatives to these items (Survey No. 837). Other respondents express concerns about nutrient loss during CI cooking methods (e.g. Survey No. 310) or request that meats to be lean and baked (e.g. Survey Nos. 185, 295) as opposed to fried or breaded.

Many respondents who frequently exercise request a diet conducive to a physically active lifestyle (e.g. Survey Nos. 185, 218), with statements such as the following:

- “We are hungry. We all stay fit and if you look at us we are mostly skinny [sic], it’s because we are hungry” (Survey No. 776)
- “Serve us healthier/leaner protein that are [sic] beneficial to staying healthy in a sense that we need to live active lifestyles in here” (e.g. Survey No. 185)

²¹ The Statewide Family Council and prisoners across the state have often requested that CI provide a “Health Conscious” special diet option for those prisoners wishing to eat more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables

- “If you exercise for one hour each day and eat every last bite of food of each meal, you lose weight” (Survey No. 1064)

A prisoner in IMU states that “[t]hese meals are barely enough to keep you going for one or two hours. You have to understand that most people here exercise and with these small portions we lose weight...We have to choose between being working [sic] out and always hungry or lazy and still barely getting by” (Survey No. 1046).

Many respondents express concerns about vitamin, mineral, and other nutrient deficiencies in food (e.g. Survey No. 218), including Vitamin D deficiency (e.g. Survey No. 109), which disproportionately affects prisoners in solitary confinement or those with dark skin, due to human reliance on sunlight to carry out Vitamin D conversion in the body. One respondent raises another health equity concern, explaining that African Americans suffer disproportionately from high blood pressure and diabetes and unhealthy aspects of CI diet therefore disproportionately harm African American prisoners (Survey No. 529).

Several surveys also indicate that the CI menu and cooking methods are not suitable for an aging prisoner (e.g. Survey Nos. 925, 1633). For example, some elderly respondents state that raw carrots and beets are difficult to chew, especially for those with dentures (Survey Nos. 692, 1634). One respondent lost a tooth from biting into a raw carrot (Survey No. 1063).

Other respondents are concerned that there are either not enough types of medical diets assigned or inappropriate foods available for certain medical conditions, such as lactose intolerance (e.g. Survey No. 92), diabetes (e.g. Survey Nos. 233, 786, 1055, 1623), high blood pressure (Survey No. 403), or Crohn’s disease (e.g. Survey No. 135). One respondent recommends providing a “diabetic friendly tray” option (Survey No. 1055). Another respondent would like DOC to allow prisoners who do not have celiac disease to request a gluten free diet (e.g. Survey No. 183). However, more may need to be done to improve palatability for such special medical diets, since, as one respondent reports, “The gluten free diet is TORTURE!” (Survey No. 646).

Food allergies are another concern reported in some surveys. One respondent states that DOC only recognizes peanut and tomato allergies and for other allergies simply advises prisoners to skip meals containing allergens (Survey No. 719). Those with fish allergies have no option but to risk an allergic reaction, to “just not eat up to 12 meals per month” (Survey No. 719), or to go on the vegan diet and then receive no meat at all (e.g. Survey Nos. 298, 560). Concerns of cross-contamination in current food preparation protocols are another aspect of this issue (Survey No. 1626).

The scheduling of movements and location of dining is also a health and environmental concern for many respondents. Some feel too rushed while eating and would like to be given more time (e.g. Survey No. 1458). A respondent from the South Complex dislikes having to eat in the living units (Survey No. 1509).

Cultural Considerations

Providing foods desired by certain cultural groups within the prisons, such as grits (Survey No. 29), Asian foods (e.g. Survey No. 645), and a broader cultural variety in general (Survey No. 1138) would be welcomed by many respondents. One respondent recommends that CI provide more foods that (1) represent something familiar across many cultures, (2) that are wholesome, and (3) that work well on a repetitive menu, such as “rice with a different meat and veg [sic] plus fruit, its [sic] cheap and simple to make, no one could complain because we all were raised off it” (Survey No. 693).

One prisoner wanted to see more “American food and less Mexican food” (e.g. Survey No. 31), while another wants to see “more Mexican food” (e.g. Survey No. 72). WSP is anecdotally known for having a larger Latino prisoner population than other WDOC prisons. Balancing cultural preferences in menu items is an important consideration and no doubt a difficult challenge for CI. Focus groups with the OCO, CI, food reps, and the different prisoner ethnic cultural groups across the state could be helpful in developing culturally appropriate food menus.

Mainline Alternative Meals

Several respondents—both those eating mainline and those eating mainline alternative diets—report less variety in vegan and kosher diets than in the mainline meal (e.g. Survey Nos. 546, 547, 1329). “We only [get] about 5 different meals for diet meals” (Survey No. 601) and “I received 62 oranges in my kosher bag in 30 day period” (Survey No. 550). This respondent also received carrots 43 times in a month. Other respondents who eat the kosher menu also report less variety in fruit and vegetables in kosher meals than in mainline meals (Survey No. 1468). The same issues with variety may also be true for some medical diets, which one respondent reports have only three different breakfast meals per month (Survey No. 601). Moreover, respondents report that no changes are made to mainline alternative diets when mainline meals are improved (e.g. Survey No. 646).

Respondents report concerns that mainline alternative menus are nutritionally inferior to the mainline menu (e.g. Survey No. 314) and have more problems with small portions sizes and expired or spoiled food (Surveys No. 516, 550). Unlike the mainline menu, the kosher and vegan menus do not offer hot breakfasts and rely heavily on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches (e.g. Survey No. 56, 516, 547).

Some respondents express concerns that CI makes religious diets especially poor in quality to discourage people from choosing them (e.g. Survey No. 550). Ensuring that mainline alternative menus meet the same quality as mainline menus is therefore important to building trust.

Nutrition Education Topics of Interest

Respondents largely expressed enthusiasm toward the survey’s nutrition education topics and proposed many additional areas of nutrition education, food policy, and food production as topics. Responses for this survey question are presented in Table 5. As DOH and CI develop a training toolkit based on these topics, it will be helpful to both prisoners and CI local facility

staff for DOH to frame the topics as they relate to specific CI menu items and recipe development practices, since many respondents emphasize wanting to have nutrition education that is relevant to the limited array of food options and specific CI products available to them.

Table 5

Nutrition Education Topics of Interest

Topic	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Protein	941	
EO1306	644	Prisoners express desire to understand jurisdiction, implementation, enforcement, monitoring, etc.
Caloric Needs	563	Many prisoners want to know caloric needs for exercise and weightlifting, since many are active
Fruit Veg Needs	560	
Carbs	532	
Nutrition Facts Labels Of CI Food	25	
Vitamins Minerals Micronutrients	11	
Safe Soy Consumption For Men/ Soy Ingredients In CI Food/ List Of CI Foods Containing Soy	10	Male prisoners are concerned about effect of soy phytohormones on adult male health and testosterone levels
Medical Diets Diabetic PreDiabetic	9	
Micronutrients In CI Fortified Juice Packets	7	Brand is Global Foods Fortified Beverage Base, flavors are Raspberry Lemon, Grape, and Orange
Cost Of CI Food Production And Meals Budget Profit Margin	6	
Amino Acids How To Make Complete Protein	5	
GMOs	5	
Sugar	5	
Processed vs. Whole Foods	5	
Sodium	5	
Calories Per CI Meal	5	
Portion Serving Size For Prisoners	4	
Religious Dietary Requirements	4	
Medical Diets And Mainline Alternative Diets	4	
All State Federal Laws Governing Prisoner Nutrition In Washington	4	
AHCC Water Contamination CI Factory	3	Information on current status and effect on food ingredients
Effects Of Freezing Cooking Reheating On Food Nutrients	3	
Recommended Dietary Allowance RDA	3	
Cholesterol	3	

(Table 5 Continued)

Topic	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Personal Nutrition Goals On An Institutional Diet	3	
TVP	3	
Fats	3	
Chemicals Preservatives Additives In CI Food	3	
Nutrition Aggression Violence Mental Health	3	
Brain Function Nutrition	2	
Diabetes And CI Diet	2	
Nutritional Quality Of CI Food Compared To Organic Non Processed	2	
Other Options For Meals Besides Current System	2	
Fiber	2	
Processed Meats	2	
Veg vs. Animal Protein	2	
Vegan Options	2	
Antioxidants	2	
Nutrition And Testosterone	2	
Food Pyramid And More Recent Equivalents	2	
List Of Foods CI Is Able To Order From All Vendors	2	Should include education on Food Umbrella Contract through DES
Iron	2	
Better Diets	1	
CI Food Quality And Portions	1	
CI Menu Development	1	
CI Recipe Development	1	
Digestive Issues	1	
Food Prep Standards	1	
General Nutrition	1	
Gluten	1	
Nutrient Absorption	1	
Nutrient Breakdown	1	
Omega3s	1	
Red Meat And Disease	1	
Refined vs. Complex Carbs	1	Should address CI wheat products: CI's white wheat cultivar and whole grain content of CI whole grain foods. Many prisoners do not believe that the white wheat cultivar is a whole grain.
Senior Nutrition	1	
Triglycerides	1	
Vegetable Protein and Iron Compared To Meat	1	
Vendors From Which CI Purchases Food	1	
Vitamin K	1	
Vitamin Rich Foods	1	

(Table 5 Continued)

Topic	Quantity of Responses	Additional Info
Organic Foods Including Benefits	1	
Food Allergies Cross Contamination	1	
FDA Guidelines	1	
Carbon Footprint Of Food	1	
Food Freshness Standards	1	
Cancer And Food	1	
Calcium	1	
Vitamins Minerals Derived From Food	1	
Saltpeter In Prison Food	1	
Grades Of Meat Used By CI	1	
Nutrition And Bone Muscle Loss	1	
Flavor Taste Food	1	
Food Sensitivities	1	Sensitivities to spices, onions, etc.
Bioflavonoids Catechins	1	
Long Term Health Effects Of Institutional Diet	1	
Local Facility Dietitian	1	
Strategies To Avoid Unhealthy Institutional Meal Components	1	
How Micro Macro Nutrients Work Together	1	
Components Ratios Balanced Meal	1	
Pre Pro Biotics	1	
Legality Of Denying Commissary Food To Prisoners In Solitary	1	
Daily vs. Long Term Nutrient Needs	1	
Aphrodisiac	1	
Grains Starch	1	
Food Light Eye Health	1	
Dairy And Health	1	
Adult Nutrition	1	
Disease And Food Ingredients	1	
OCO Jurisdiction Over CI Food Monitoring	1	
Food That Makes One Feel Full	1	

Conclusion

The findings of the OCO WSP Food Survey provide much insight into prisoner food preferences and concerns. Through collaborative work that engages CI Food Services staff, custody staff, and prisoner food reps, it may be possible to identify several low-cost improvements that could built trust between CI and the prisoners it feeds, and that could alleviate tensions over food for all stakeholders.