



**Audit of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's Food Programs and Services
Within California's Prisons (Audit Report № 25-01, August 2026)**

Introduction

Prison food services provide daily meals to incarcerated people and support the health and safety of both incarcerated people and staff. Effective food service operations rely on proper sanitation and proper food handling to reduce the risk of contamination, foodborne illness, and other health hazards. In this audit, we reviewed the department's specific policies, procedures, and staff training relative to the food services program. We also assessed the department's ability to maintain industry standards and comply with food safety regulations and whether meals provided to the incarcerated population meet dietary guidelines, accommodate religious and medical needs, and are prepared and served under hygienic conditions.

We selected four prisons for our audit: California State Prison, Sacramento (CSP-Sacramento), California State Prison, Corcoran (CSP-Corcoran), Central California Women's Facility, and Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility. For the audit period, January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2024, we requested and reviewed documents from the four prisons we tested, verified compliance with caloric and nutritional standards, assessed the overall quality of food, and reviewed quarterly religious personal ethical diet audits. We also interviewed key personnel, tested key controls relevant to the audit objectives, conducted on-site fieldwork to evaluate overall quality of kitchens, and observed how meals were prepared and distributed.

Results

Chapter 1: The OIG Identified Significant Noncompliance With Sanitation and Hygiene Standards in the Kitchens at Three of the Four Prisons We Reviewed

Poor sanitation in prison kitchens can increase the risk of mass outbreaks of foodborne illness, affecting the health and safety of the incarcerated population and staff. We reviewed 11 general sanitation and hygiene areas using a checklist from California Correctional Health Care Services. The areas reviewed included: employee appearance, employee performance, food storage conditions, chemical cleaner management, refrigerator maintenance, freezer maintenance, environmental maintenance and safety, sanitation and cleanliness of kitchen and serving areas, ice machine sanitation and maintenance, compliance with standard operating procedures, and ware-washing area maintenance. Central California Women's Facility achieved 94 percent compliance with sanitation standards and best practices, showing that hygiene standards are achievable within the prison system. CSP-Sacramento, CSP-Corcoran, and Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility demonstrated significant noncompliance with sanitation standards and best practices at 69 percent, 75 percent, and 65 percent, respectively.

The department lacks a consistent statewide sanitation policy and provides minimal headquarters oversight, leaving each facility to manage its own hygiene standards. Without standard procedures and oversight by the department's headquarters, prisons will continue to operate with inconsistent sanitation practices, jeopardizing the health of incarcerated people and staff while increasing the risk of preventable foodborne illness.



Chapter 2: Kitchen Equipment Was in Poor Condition or Was Inoperable, Likely Due to Work Order Backlogs, Budget Constraints, and Weak Headquarters Oversight

Our review of kitchen equipment repair work orders across all four prisons demonstrated significant delays at CSP-Sacramento and CSP-Corcoran; Central California Women's Facility and Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility processed repairs promptly. CSP-Sacramento's departmental kitchens had 332 work orders open for a year or longer out of nearly 1,194 total, with some scullery machine repairs pending for more than two years. In contrast, the medical kitchen had only 29 equipment work orders, with just three remaining open. CSP-Corcoran had 108 of 503 departmental kitchen work orders and 17 of 45 medical kitchen work orders unfinished, alongside broken ovens, chillers, and damaged refrigerator doors. In contrast, Central California Women's Facility completed a total of 774 work orders for departmental kitchens and 65 work orders for the medical kitchen during the review period. Richard J. Donovan closed nearly 560 work orders for its departmental kitchens and 18 work orders for its medical kitchens during our review period, and nearly all work orders were closed within 30 days.

Work order delays result from inconsistent local procedures, funding constraints, and minimal headquarters oversight. Only Central California Women's Facility requires a 30-day completion time for equipment repairs, while the other prisons lack specific deadlines in their operating procedures. The department faces a special repair project backlog of approximately \$883 million dollars for kitchen repairs, but the *Master Plan Annual Report for Calendar Year 2025* approved only \$47.6 million dollars. In addition, the department's transition to a new work order tracking system created challenges in accessing and reconciling work order data between the old and new systems.

Chapter 3: Prisons Did Not Properly Log the Use of Utensils and Equipment as Required by Policy, and Scullery Machine Temperature Logs Were Not Properly Maintained and Monitored

The department has specific policies that require staff to log specific tasks at specific intervals. However, at the prisons we reviewed, we found incidents of lax monitoring of kitchen utensils, which is a safety concern and puts incarcerated people and staff at risk. Furthermore, prisons also failed to properly record temperatures for scullery machines used to sanitize meal service trays.

When in use by the incarcerated population, kitchen utensils must be checked out from a locked room by the officer on duty using a physical chit system and logbook. We reviewed logs from the four prisons for the period of June 1, 2024, through October 31, 2024, and found that three of the prisons had missing logs or log entries for utensils used by incarcerated kitchen workers. CSP-Sacramento could only account for logs on 51 percent of the days during our test period. When the logs were available, staff identified that a wire whip was missing for 10 days before it was recovered. CSP-Corcoran did not have logs available or had missing entries on 21 percent of the days during our testing period. For logs that were completed, staff noted that five different items were missing for a total of 24 days: locks, cube steak cutters, cube steak combs, green veggie brushes, and cables. Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility only had missing entries on nine days during our testing period, but we identified five missing items over 32 days: push brooms, mops, a toilet bowl brush, a mop and bucket combination, and masks. Central California Women's Facility did not have any missing kitchen items during our testing period.



Chapter 4: Meals Provided to the Incarcerated Population Are Wasted, and the Incarcerated Population Purchase Less Healthy Options Through the Prison's Canteen

The department provides meals that meet calorie requirements and follow heart-healthy guidelines, but the July 2023 introduction of plant-based protein products, such as pea protein, has generated food waste. Auditors found large trash bags filled with discarded meals at CSP-Sacramento, and both staff and incarcerated individuals confirmed that many food items are discarded by the incarcerated population. Through discussions with staff and incarcerated individuals, it became clear that while food provided by the department is thrown away in general, food items made with pea protein are likely wasted more than other food items. Many incarcerated people avoid the product due to the false belief that it contains soy and raises estrogen levels in men, a claim the OIG found unsupported by evidence.

Because incarcerated individuals frequently discard provided meals, 33 of 35 people interviewed reported supplementing their diets with canteen purchased food. Many incarcerated people reject the pea protein food items, and the heart-healthy diet in general, in favor of canteen food, much of which is ultra-processed. Consumption of ultra-processed food can lead to increased health risks such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. These health issues can lead to an increase in medical care, which costs the department additional money. Better communication about the new plant-based food items may improve acceptance.

Chapter 5. The Department Meets Requirements to Provide Specialty Diets to Incarcerated People but Should Improve Controls to Ensure Compliance With Specialty Diet Requirements

The department provides specialty diets to accommodate religious and personal ethical preferences, including religious kosher, religious meat alternative, plant-based, and vegetarian options. The religious review committee oversees program compliance by auditing meal provisions against the requirements outlined in the CDCR 3030-A form. We found that the most violated religious personal ethical diet was the religious kosher diet. The daily food budget per incarcerated person is \$4.45, regardless of whether the individual receives a specialty diet meal. When incarcerated people are on specialty diets, the cost ranges from \$5.28 per day for the religious meat alternative meal, to \$13.50 per day for the religious kosher diet meal.

We tested a total of 34 prisons and found an average of 48 percent of incarcerated people committed a first noncompliance violation each quarter. While a first noncompliance finding does not result in an incarcerated person's termination from the program, the department terminated an average of 21 percent of participants in religious personal ethical diet programs for ongoing violations.

See our Recommendations on the following page.



Recommendations

Chapter 1

- The department's headquarters should provide stronger oversight and monitoring of compliance with sanitation and hygiene protocols in its departmental kitchens by performing periodic audits and inspections.
- The department should develop clear policies that set forth the frequency at which specific cleaning tasks must be completed.
- The department should schedule Julian date training for all kitchen staff and provide access to vendor reference charts displaying how to interpret the Julian date on packaging. The department should also distribute a guide with estimated spoilage timelines for common food items.

Chapter 2

- The department should designate staff at headquarters to perform statewide oversight and monitoring of the work order management process to ensure that work orders are completed in a timely manner. The department should establish reasonable completion time frames for work orders based on their priority and severity.

Chapter 3

- To ensure staff properly safeguard kitchen utensils, prisons' management should ensure that chit logs for kitchen equipment and utensils are completed and monitored. Departmental headquarters staff should perform periodic reviews of each prison's kitchen equipment and utensil chit logs

to verify the logs are being completed by each prison. The department should issue training and corrective action to staff who do not complete utensil chit logs as required by policy.

- To ensure staff properly monitor scullery machine temperatures, departmental headquarters staff should perform periodic reviews of each prison's scullery machine logs to ensure they are being completed.

Chapter 4

- The department should measure the costs of using plant-based protein products and the rate at which incarcerated people waste the product to inform a cost-benefit analysis of its provision of plant-based protein to the incarcerated population.
- The department should educate the incarcerated population about healthy food choices and explain the nutritional differences between pea protein and soy-based protein to address common misconceptions.
- The department should take steps to monitor food waste and adjust menus based on foods that incarcerated people frequently discard.

Chapter 5

- The department's headquarters should conduct periodic monitoring and verify religious personal ethical diet program audits are being conducted to strengthen internal controls and improve oversight.