

PETITION TO ARAMARK CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

*Demand for Immediate Improvement of Prison Food Quality, Safety, and Nutrition
May 2026*

Why We Are Petitioning Aramark for Change

Nearly 2 million people are incarcerated in the United States, and approximately 405,000 of them, held in 381 state prison facilities across 17 states, receive their meals from Aramark Correctional Services (ACS). Tens of thousands more eat Aramark's meals in US jails. That's over 400 million prison meals served every year. Aramark controls 35% of the U.S. correctional food services market, generating an estimated \$1.78 billion in revenue from that business in 2024 alone. That scale of operation comes with an enormous responsibility to the people it feeds.

The evidence compiled in the report "Private Food, Public Harm" – based on a review of more than 130 publicly available sources; interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals, food service professionals, and advocates; and analysis of over 500 pieces of litigation – makes clear that Aramark is often failing its food service responsibility. Meals have been described as nutritionally inadequate, inedible, and at times contaminated or spoiled. People in custody report that they are routinely left hungry and forced to purchase overpriced food from prison commissaries or canteens to stave off hunger. In some cases, Aramark subsidiary Union Supply also runs these commissaries, creating a conflict of interest. And despite alleged violations of terms, including sanitation issues, employee misconduct, and food shortages, Aramark's contracts continue to be renewed.

This petition calls on Aramark to take immediate and meaningful steps to reform its business practices. Incarcerated people deserve food that is safe, nourishing, and prepared with dignity.

What the Report Shows

1. Nutritional Failure

The report found that meals in Aramark-managed facilities commonly fall short of key recommendations outlined in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Menus rely heavily on processed meats like bologna, refined grains like white bread and white rice, and starchy vegetables like potatoes. Fresh fruit and non-starchy vegetables are rarely served. Incarcerated people and correctional officers who experienced a transition to Aramark-managed food service reported significant declines in nutritional quality.

2. Inadequate Portions and Chronic Hunger

Portions served in Aramark-managed facilities are consistently described by stakeholders as insufficient. Various sources allege intentional meal shortages and dilution of food with water to stretch servings. This chronic hunger forces incarcerated people to purchase food from the commissary to stave off hunger, and in facilities where Aramark also operates the commissary through its subsidiary Union Supply Group, the company profits twice: by cutting costs on the meal service and by capturing commissary revenue driven by the hunger created by inadequate portion sizes.

3. Food Safety Failures

Incarcerated people, correctional officers, and independent auditors have documented widespread and recurring food safety failures in Aramark-managed kitchens across the country. These include:

- Meals containing maggots, rodent droppings, metal shavings, and food partially eaten by rodents
- Spoiled and undercooked food served to incarcerated people
- Food retrieved and served from the trash
- Persistent pest infestations in food preparation areas
- Failure to maintain safe food temperatures during storage and service
- Multiple alleged outbreaks of foodborne illness in Aramark-managed facilities in Kentucky, Nevada, Michigan, New Jersey, and Florida

These conditions are not aberrations or exceptions. They are documented across multiple states and time periods, and they continue because accountability mechanisms are weak and enforcement is inadequate.

4. Weak Accountability Despite Repeated Violations

Government auditors and news investigations have found that Aramark has overbilled correctional agencies in Kentucky, Ohio, and Florida by amounts ranging from \$84,000 to \$5 million. Aramark has been fined over \$200,000 each by the Michigan Department of Corrections and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections for contract violations including sanitation issues, employee misconduct, and food shortages. Despite these violations, contracts are routinely renewed — sometimes by the very agencies that imposed the fines. As one advocate interviewed for this report put it: “These companies, like Aramark, they get fined often for their bad practices. And then they still get their contracts renewed, which blows my mind.”

Aramark could take action internally to ensure that the types of violations resulting in fines do not reoccur, by strengthening internal accountability for its own policies and contractual commitments. Doing so would benefit both shareholders and the more than 405,000 people who eat Aramark’s food in jails and prisons every day.

5. The Human Cost

Behind every data point is a person. As one formerly incarcerated participant told our research team: “We tell people what we think of them three times a day. And if you want people to leave with some sense of self intact, you can’t hand them [expletive deleted] three times a day and expect them to leave with any kind of idea of self-dignity or self-worth.” Aramark’s practices do not merely inconvenience incarcerated people, they reinforce dehumanization and undermine public health when people return to their communities.

Our Demands

We, the undersigned, call on Aramark Correctional Services to take the following steps immediately:

On Nutrition and Meal Quality

1. Adopt company-wide daily serving standards for whole fruit, total vegetables, non-starchy vegetables, whole grains, and protein foods, with limits on sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar, consistent with the [2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's \(DGAC\) "Eat Healthy Your Way" Dietary Pattern for Ages 2 and Older](#) and [New York City's Food Standards for Meals Served](#). Establish a clear timeline for phasing in implementation across all correctional contracts, and work toward negotiating supplier prices that make these standards achievable within clients' typical budgets.
2. Prohibit the stretching of servings by adding cooking water or reducing portion sizes during progressive cooking. Ensure enough food is prepared to offer second helpings to individuals still hungry after eating where permitted by the institution.
3. Source more fresh foods locally for incorporation into menus.
4. Prohibit unauthorized substitutions of cheaper or less nutritious menu items, particularly for proteins and produce.
5. Ensure that therapeutic and religious diets also meet the nutritional requirements described above while being [consistent with recognized medically tailored meal standards](#). These meals should be prepared with appropriate food safety measures and reviewed regularly by a registered dietitian.
6. Ensure healthy commissary options are available and priced at or below other options in the same product category.

On Food Safety

7. Adopt the [CDC's Model Food Safety Practices for Correctional Facilities](#) as a minimum standard across all managed facilities, with at least "standard" practices required in company policies and procedures.
8. Create and protect robust internal whistleblower reporting mechanisms and protections so that food service staff can report violations without fear of retaliation.
9. Enforce internal protocols for discarding spoiled food, maintaining safe storage temperatures, and responding promptly to pest infestations.
10. Require mandatory, documented food safety training for all employees at hire and on an annual basis, including incarcerated workers.
11. Enforce adequate staffing levels to maintain supervision in food preparation and service areas at all times.

On Transparency and Accountability

12. Allow unannounced access to dining and food preparation facilities by independent third-party auditors, and publish audit results publicly that includes resident feedback.
13. Publish an annual public accountability report disclosing contract compliance rates, substantiated violations, meal satisfaction feedback from residents, financial penalties assessed, and corrective actions taken.
14. Require supervisors to maintain photographic records of sample meal trays for every meal served to document compliance with contracted menus.
15. Commit to not holding simultaneous food service and commissary contracts in the same facility, since doing so creates a financial incentive to reduce food quality.

Why Aramark Can and Must Do Better

Aramark is the dominant actor in this system. With a 35% market share and \$1.78 billion annually in correctional revenue, Aramark has both the resources and the leverage to lead meaningful change. Other institutional food service settings such as schools, hospitals, and universities have adopted evidence-based nutrition and quality standards while managing cost constraints.

The jurisdictions that have made the most progress on carceral food quality – including Washington State, Vermont, Maine, and California – have done so while largely retaining in-house control of food service. This is a signal about what privatization, as currently practiced, tends to produce. But it is also a model for what is possible when institutions and vendors commit to doing better.

Aramark has an opportunity and an obligation to use its market position to raise standards across the industry. The demands in this petition are achievable. What is required is the will to prioritize the health and dignity of incarcerated people over the bottom line.

We call on Aramark’s leadership to respond to the demands in this petition with a public commitment and a concrete action plan within 60 days of receipt.

Signatories

This petition is submitted on behalf of the organizations listed, and the thousands of people currently and formerly incarcerated in Aramark-managed facilities whose voices this document seeks to amplify.