Department of Corrections
WASHINGTON STATE

Winter 2026

FOOD SERVICE NEWSLETTER

A Note from the Administrator

As we have moved fully into winter, I want to take a moment to reflect on the work taking place across our kitchens statewide. Food Services does not slow down with the seasons. Winter brings weather-related challenges and additional demands that require steady execution and teamwork.

Over the past several months, we have implemented menu changes, supported specialty meals, navigated holiday service, and prepared for an upcoming operational transition. None of this happens without the daily effort of staff and incarcerated workers in our kitchens. The work you do matters, and it shows.

LOOKING BACK: HOLIDAY MEALS AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

The holiday season required extra coordination and effort from kitchen teams across the state. Thanksgiving and Christmas meals are always more complex than routine service, and this year was no exception.

One notable change this season was the use of whole-muscle turkey rather than the processed product we have used in the past. This required additional preparation and attention to detail, but it resulted in a higher-quality meal. Feedback was positive, and we appreciate the work it took to make that happen. Efforts like this reflect our continued focus on improving food quality where possible, and we will continue to look for similar opportunities moving forward.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to making holiday meals successful and consistent across facilities, we hope the entire population had great holidays.

THE NEW MENU: IMPLEMENTED & MOVING FORWARD

Over the past few months, we successfully implemented the new statewide menu. This menu reflects feedback received from facilities, incarcerated individuals, and staff, and represents a balance between preference, nutrition, cost, and operational ability.

Several new items were added, and some lower-preference items were removed. Early feedback has been encouraging, and we hope people are enjoying the updated offerings. Menus are not static, and ongoing input remains important. Suggestions for continued improvement should be shared through facility channels so they can be reviewed and considered.

Consistent preparation and service remain essential to ensure fairness, predictability, and nutritional integrity across all facilities.

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS: REVIEW AND PLANNING

The newly published Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) are currently under review by Food Services and Health Services staff. We are evaluating what these updated guidelines mean for our existing menus and identifying any areas that may require adjustment.

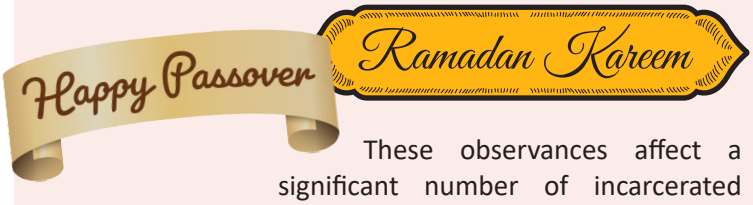
At this time, no immediate changes are being implemented. If updates are needed to align with the new DGAs, they will be addressed as part of the fall menu revision cycle. This approach allows for careful evaluation while maintaining menu stability and operational consistency.

Did you know that eating popcorn can be traced back 5,000 years ago?

The wheel gets way too much credit!

PREPARING FOR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AHEAD

As we move into early spring, Food Services is preparing for upcoming religious observances that will impact meal service across every facility, including Ramadan, beginning in February, and Passover, in April.



These observances affect a significant number of incarcerated individuals statewide and require advance planning. Food Services works closely with Religious Services, Health Services, facility leadership, and incarcerated individuals to ensure meals are provided in a manner that is respectful, consistent, and operationally sound.

Recognizing and supporting religious observance is part of operating orderly, and respectful facilities. The professionalism shown by kitchen staff during these periods plays an important role in maintaining stability and trust across institutions.

SPECIALTY MEALS: CONTINUING THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

In addition to regular menu service, the monthly specialty meal program continues to be an important part of Food Services operations. Outside of the holiday period, facilities have been able to provide scheduled specialty meals, including a dessert not normally on the menu, while remaining within operational and fiscal expectations.

These meals require planning, coordination, and consistency, and they are made possible through careful purchasing and execution at the facility level. We appreciate the effort it takes to deliver these meals successfully and will continue supporting the program as part of our broader approach to engagement and morale.

January's special meal is a Double Cheeseburger with all the trimmings (lettuce, tomato, pickles) and the all popular Oreo cookies! Future meals under consideration are chili dogs and pizza.

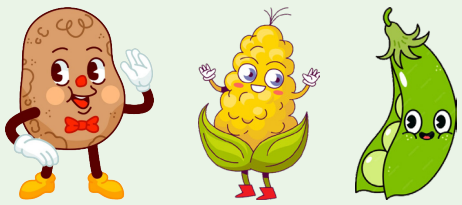
WSP GARDEN TO PRISONS PROGRAM: REAL IMPACT, REAL VOLUME

The Garden to Prisons program at Washington State Penitentiary continues to make a meaningful contribution to Food Services operations in the southeastern region of the state. During the 2025 growing season, 250,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables were grown, harvested, distributed, and served through kitchens at Washington State Penitentiary, Airway Heights, and Coyote Ridge.

This production included a wide range of fruits and vegetables incorporated directly into meals served across multiple facilities. The program supports fresher ingredients, reduces reliance on outside purchasing, and provides meaningful work opportunities tied to real outcomes. We look forward to more products this summer. Some of the products provided were zucchini, cucumbers, peppers, watermelon, and cantaloupe.

FOCUS ON STARCHY

The vegetable group is an important part of our day. Did you know that vegetables are organized into five subgroups based on nutrients that we need to eat throughout the week? The subgroups are dark green, red and orange, beans/peas/lentils, STARCHY, and other vegetables.



The most common starchy vegetables on our menu are white potatoes, corn, and green peas. Other vegetables from this group include breadfruit, cassava, and plantains. Starchy are higher in calories and carbohydrates than other vegetables, and are sources of energy. White potatoes are rich in potassium which is important for maintaining healthy blood pressure.

HEART HEALTH AND NUTRITION

February is Heart Health Awareness Month, and a reminder of the role everyday habits play in supporting cardiovascular health. Nutrition is one of the most consistent and controllable factors, working alongside other lifestyle elements that influence overall wellness.

A heart-healthy diet emphasizes balance and moderation. Foods high in fiber, such as whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables, help support healthy cholesterol levels. Lean protein choices and mindful sodium use also contribute to healthy blood pressure and heart function.

In addition to nutrition, regular physical activity is widely recognized as a general contributor to heart health. Activities that fit individual abilities and facility guidelines, along with daily movement as permitted, can support overall wellness when paired with balanced meals.

Food Service menus are developed to meet established nutritional standards and support long-term health. This includes consistent portion control, appropriate sodium levels, and ingredients aligned with dietary guidelines. Heart health is built over time, one meal and one routine at a time. February provides an opportunity to highlight how nutrition, paired with healthy daily habits, supports long-term health and stability for our lives.

SUPPORTING WASHINGTON AGRICULTURE: LOCAL PURCHASING

DOC Food Services continues to support Washington agriculture through both institutional programs and commercial purchasing. Over the past year, Food Services purchased over 2,000,000 pounds of locally grown fruits and vegetables from commercial vendors, supporting local agricultural businesses.

These purchases directly support Washington farmers and farms while improving product freshness and reducing transportation impacts. Local sourcing remains an important component of our overall food supply strategy.

Closing Thoughts

Food Services work is demanding, particularly during the winter months. It requires coordination, attention to detail, and a commitment to consistency. Kitchens that meet production standards, maintain clean and safe workspaces, and support training contribute directly to institutional stability. Please take the time to thank those who work every day to provide everyone statewide with meals that meet your daily nutritional needs. The professionalism and commitment from the people in the Food Services areas make a real difference across the Department, and their efforts are appreciated.