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**JHA COVID-19 Prison  
Survey Comment  
Report**



# **Perceptions and Experiences from People inside Prison during the Pandemic**

**Section: Commissary & Dietary**

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# Overview

JHA's COVID-19 Prison Survey Comment Report presents information from comments shared in response to [JHA's COVID-19 survey](#), contextualized with survey data and other information. This survey was responded to by 16,351 people incarcerated in IDOC in late April and early May 2020.

This section of the report summarizes people's comments regarding commissary and dietary. This is one of 12 sections reflecting the comments JHA received from people in prisons; the report's Executive Summary and all other sections can be found on our website [www.thejha.org](http://www.thejha.org).



## Commissary & Dietary

**J**HA COVID-19 surveys asked if commissary had run on schedule. Many people chose to comment on issues with their access to commissary and commissary items, such as hygiene products and food. Additionally, many people wrote about issues with dietary at their facility although there were no COVID-19 survey questions on this topic.

### COMMISSARY

*I'm a state pay without a job con and I only get \$10.00 a month and that has to cover a lot, so, for me to have to wash my hands constantly, it would cost more than I have. I'm an older man so I have a lot to pay for. – Graham*

*Our commissary schedule is based on their schedule. We are on a \$40 limit for food and hygiene. Last week was a \$30 limit before that was \$25 limit only hygiene products no food. Week before that was \$25 food and hygiene. – Graham*

*Commissary is beyond slow, if you complain they say it's a privilege not a right. – Stateville*

*We are basically starving with these limited commissary shops. – Dixon*

*We are not allowed to buy food enough, forcing us to starve. It is much harder to deal with the stress of a lockdown with no food. – Robinson*

*I am diabetic, so having a limited shop makes it difficult for me to buy what I need to help control my diabetes. Especially, after we were denied a 'normal' shop in late February because of a discipline problem in another cell house. – Western*

*The imposed commissary limits, i.e. \$15 C-grade, \$30 B-grade, \$100 A-grade, are already restrictive, but then being forced to choose between the purchase of food and hygiene, which is vital, or communicating with family and friends. It's unfair. The purchase of telephone minutes should not count against the imposed commissary limits, just as the purchase of music and email does not count against the limits.*

– Pinckneyville

*Commissary is very slow and we are not able to buy enough of what we need because of their limitations on the amount of money we can spend and how many of each item we can buy. It's not enough. – Danville*

*With the limit so low, we're forced to choose between food and hygiene, and some inmates are not purchasing necessary hygiene items. – Jacksonville*

*I have legal deadlines and cannot purchase any paper, pen, envelopes to take care of my legal affairs. – Western*

*We are on a limited \$50.00 shop for commissary. We are supposed to shop every 2 weeks and the COs deliver our stuff. They do not hand out enough order slips. We have averaged every 20 days prior to March 28. Now once every 14-15 days. However, when we do get to shop, we are limited to \$50 total for food and hygiene. When we need more hygiene than ever. So, choose to eat or be clean. They were out of hand sanitizer. Also, with limited laundry tried to buy more clothing and that counted in to the \$50, ridiculous. – Illinois River*

*Commissary is not scheduled, it happens whenever. Once monthly and limited. – Shawnee*

*This particular institution (Shawnee) does not distribute indigent bags like other prisons (e.g. Western) for inmates who have no money or a negative balance on their trust fund accounts ... under administrative quarantine protocol, commissary has been reduced to running every 21-24 days. Also, the limit for spending has been decreased from \$150 to \$75. Inexplicably, we have been prohibited from buying clothing items and shoes. I must also state that on 5/16 bags of food [presumably from IDOC to improve morale] were passed out. That bag contained 1 hot-n-spicy summer sausage, 1 bag of white rice, 1 pack of chili and 1 fish steak. – Shawnee*

In [JHA's April 8 recommendations](#) we reiterated that IDOC should articulate what expected commissary frequency and spending limits would be during this period. Commissary issues have been a concern frequently reported during the pandemic as we have communicated to administrators. During lockdown and the pandemic more generally, as in the community, people in prison are comforted by being able to have reserves of items they need to use. However, in JHA's COVID-19 survey responses **43.1% of people reported that commissary had not run on schedule in the prior week** and many people commented that they were unable to obtain needed items. Some people noted prior to the pandemic the commissary was not consistently run on schedule.

Under normal circumstances, most IDOC facilities do not let people shop every week; however, many people reported that they were having far less frequent shopping opportunities and spending and item limitations when they were able to shop. The facilities with the highest reports of normal access to commissary in the prior week were Vienna, a male minimum-security southern prison (68.4%, 256), and again smaller facilities Joliet (54.5%, 30) and Murphysboro (53.7%, 22).

Another **41.1% of survey respondents reported that although they were able to shop, their purchases were limited**. Other state correctional systems (e.g. the Pennsylvania Department of

Corrections) have increased – not restricted – commissary spending limits, recognizing people will want to supplement their supplies given uncertainty and lockdown.

Several people commented that they felt they needed to buy hygiene items and food because what was provided by IDOC was insufficient. People felt they could not get all the hygiene products they needed or that after buying necessities (e.g. hygiene, cleaning, and communication items), they could not buy much food to last until their next shopping opportunity. People wanted the spending limit raised or for certain items (clothing, electronics, write-outs, hygiene) not to count toward the spending limit. People mentioned in comments also not being able to buy things including detergent, soap, feminine hygiene products, toothpaste, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, lotion, powder, vitamins, over-the-counter medications, etc. due to lack of access to commissary, to funds or item unavailability. Some reported their commissary was only selling travel size hygiene items, suggesting some supply issues. Many others commented that needed items such as soap were no longer available during their turn to shop. Some commenters believed this to be more of an issue for their particular unit, based on their place in the facility supply and shopping rotations.

*There's never any hand sanitizer at commissary. I've ordered it numerous times and never receive it. – Robinson*

*Many times, they are out of items. They don't order properly and can't keep essential items stocked. Over the last 3 months, items that I ordered that have been out: Oatmeal, laundry detergent, hand sanitizer, multi-vitamins, and dandruff shampoo. – Robinson*

*Shopping is limited and commissary out of toilet papers and soaps. – Graham*

*We're limited to \$75.00 2xs a month but can only get \$30.00 worth of stuff out of our limit because they're out of everything, or just lazy. – Decatur*

*Commissary often runs out of soap, shampoo, tampons, etc., and they will not provide a care package if you have no money in your account. If I can't buy it, and you won't provide it, how do I practice good health and hygiene? – Decatur*

People also reported that there were not opportunities to correct mistakes in orders.

*Commissary threatening to "shut us down from shopping" if we were overcharged or missing something – like it was our fault. They considered that complaining if we let them know and told us we would be the one to get it "shut down" for everybody. They tell us we can't grieve commissary because it is a privilege, not a right. – Logan*

*Commissary is 2 weeks behind and when they do come everything that's ordered is not there in the bag. They make us sign the receipt stating that we received all our commissary before we have checked and if we protest we get nothing, and once we check our bag and find out there's things missing we're out of luck because if we speak on it they're going to take it back. – Pinckneyville*

*As for commissary, they do not run on schedule at all. Last time it took us over 5 weeks to shop! Plus when they did shop us they gave wrong items and when I complained they said 'you don't like it, return it for a refund!' of course I took it because it had a couple of items I did order. – Danville*

Some people reported they were not permitted to buy clothing or electronics such as TVs or tablets to pass the time. At a few facilities people reported not being able to buy art supplies, including at Big Muddy where people said they were unable to participate in an IDOC art contest because of this. Others reported not being able to buy fans at the onset of summer heat. Some people commented that they did not have access to razors for the month of April, which were reportedly typically allowed to be replaced weekly. This was an issue for transwomen in particular, which should have been addressed. Others reported that they could not buy hair trimmers or batteries for these during a time when people could not get barber services and people wanted haircuts.

*We cannot get razors, clothes, electronics til this next coming Friday, which will almost be three months. – Robinson*

One reason administrators implemented commissary limits was because at most facilities, commissary was being delivered to housing units instead of having people go to the commissary area to get their items in order to limit movement and risk of contagion during the pandemic response. Some people wondered why they could not walk to commissary when they still had other movement, e.g. to dietary. Some prisoners reported that commissary at their prison was short-staffed. Others expressed concerns regarding commissary workers not wearing PPE. Some administrators also reported that they had issues with vendors and suppliers to be able to get certain items, for example, pre-packaged meat products.

Concerningly, some people also reported that commissary schedules or restrictions impeded their ability to communicate with their families because they could not buy write-outs or Securus phone and GTL credits. Hill administrators responded to JHA's COVID-19 survey feedback with commissary concerns that they allowed people regardless of grade to purchase electronics and communications credits over and above the normal spending limits and that they increased the limit of soap from three to five bars, but that they did not sell clothing during the lockdown when all offenders were bag-shopped. They also shared that since that time, movement to commissary in groups of less than 10 had resumed, which should allow for more frequent shopping.

*Due to restrictions, inmates could not work, therefore, we only get \$10.00 monthly for state pay. We have to clean our own cells, bodies and clothing at our own expense and for those inmates that have no support (financially) find it very difficult to clean and sanitize our living quarters, beds, sink, toilet and keep up with other hygiene; deodorant, lotion, toothpaste ... with only \$10.00 monthly. – Graham*

Many people reported during the survey period they could only shop once a month or month and a half or more. Some people on "state pay," or the \$10 a month given to most prisoners who do not have other assignments, reported being denied their limited chances to shop, likely due to where in the shopping rotation their housing unit was and fund availability date.

*If our money doesn't make it and we miss that shop we are dead until next month. This is not good because in seg you don't get to have the same hygiene items as population so if you come to seg right after they run commissary you will not be able to buy hygiene items you need to last the month. The only thing property would send you is two bars of soap that is not enough to last the month and if you are not indigent they will not give you shampoo or toothpaste. So what are you suppose to do to take care of your hygiene? If you ask the staff they will look at you like you're crazy. – Pontiac*

*People who have state pay have not been able to shop because state pay comes on the second week, and you only get to shop on the first week. So, people can't even get their hygiene together. – Menard*

JHA also had considerable concern regarding people's inability to buy clothing when people reported not having clean clothes or infrequent laundry services, and clothing issue or re-issue seemed to be problematic.

*Some people don't have any underclothes and have to wear their blues 24/7. – Western*

Many people commented on disciplinary grade or other commissary restrictions affecting their ability to purchase needed items. There were several comments that commissary restrictions were being used as punishment even more than usual.

*This may not seem like a huge issue but about 80% of us are on "commissary denial" or some other form of limited shop. Leaving us essentially destitute. – Pontiac*

*Being in C-grade I can't buy food so with that and food shortage I must go to sleep hungry every night ... – Pontiac*

*They only let B and C grad get food for \$100 one time. Now, C grade can't go to store. B grade only goes for \$30 once per month, that is counting cleaning supplies. So, with \$30, you either buy food, cleaning supplies, or writing stuff. – Menard*

*At Pinckneyville C.C. they are refusing to shop B-grade and C-grade offenders which is against the rule which states we are to shop every 30 days, once a month. We shopped April [X], 2020 and we will not be shopping again until May [X], 2020, which is about 7 weeks without being able to purchase any soap, detergent, or any other hygiene items. – Pinckneyville*

*They say if you're in B or C grade you aren't able to buy these things until your week to shop (B or C grade shop). But if they're on the wing and you have money, why can't you shop for these things to keep yourself clean and keep in contact with your family? Especially if you haven't shopped in over a month. ... I haven't shopped in over a month. 3 bars of soap, 1 toothpaste, and 1 detergent will not last a month let alone over a month. On top of this the write outs are counted towards our \$30 shop ... Especially having to use my personal soap to make sure my living area is clean because Pinckneyville refuses to pass out cleaning supplies. – Pinckneyville*

*Some people in B-C grade can only spend \$30 a month, no food. – Shawnee*

*Us in C-B grade cannot shop a regular shop we are only allowed to shop once a month and all C grade can only shop for hygiene items. – Graham*

*They don't let us buy enough soap, I only get to buy two bars of soap for a month! Because I am on C-grade ... I only shop once a month and I can only get 2 bars of soap, one laundry soap and no toilet paper. – Graham*

Under administrative law people who are on **B grade** can only purchase \$30 of commissary a month, while those on C grade can only typically only purchase hygiene items and write-outs once a month. JHA believes that such restrictions should be reconsidered, particularly in light of the pandemic, as with other grade-based restrictions discussed elsewhere in other sections of this report (e.g. communications, audio-visual, etc.)

Some people reported they had other commissary restrictions that were harmful to them during the pandemic, e.g. it is common for commissary purchases to be limited when a person is close to their outdate. People may not have funds to shop for various reasons, including owing restitution. People in segregation and on court writs also do not receive any funds from the State and IDOC also restricts state pay also during non-administrative lockdowns.

*They have a restriction placed on all offenders 60 days prior to MSR or discharge. That restriction is \$15 per shop and that \$15 has to last 2 weeks or 17 days between shops. A \$15 shop does not allow one to shop for enough food items to last a month. – Robinson*

*Due to owing court fees, all money is being taken if my family is able to send me any. This is preventing me from ordering things I need, like new clothes, electronics, fans, grooming items, and hygiene items like soap, shampoo, toothpaste, lotions. So, if you guys could ask the courts to put a hold on taking court fees until this COVID-19 stuff is over, that would be great. – Menard*

JHA's understanding is that court fees are only supposed to be taken at a percentage of state pay (see the Restitution section of the Communications part of the report for further information.) If people are indigent, they should be provided with essentials including hygiene and means for some communications, e.g. a set number of free write-outs.

Although people at various facilities, in different status, and over time reported different shopping rotations and spending limits, people universally commented it was not enough.

*With that one shop we must get hygiene, write-outs, paper, pen, clothes, and food/beverages to last a month, which isn't enough. The only they are doing to make up for it is to allow us to buy 1 extra deodorant, 4 extra soap, that's it no extra anything else. – Pontiac*

*They have stopped commissary from us going 2 times a month to only 1 time a month and with a limit. They are barely feeding us, they should let us shop at least 2 times a month or if it's only 1 time, at least lift the limits. – Pontiac*

*We can only shop for \$20, which after soap, deodorant, and toothpaste, only leaves \$6 for 10 envelopes. – East Moline (segregation)*

*\$15 does not allow inmates to purchase enough cosmetics for a month and writing supplies. So, inmates are having problems communicating with their loved ones. – Menard*

*Commissary is only running food items once a month and hygiene separately once a month. We are running out of food because we can only shop for it once a month, and we are limited to what we can buy. – Robinson*

*They are running 1 unit every 3 days in commissary so we only get to go once a month!!! Plus they put a \$75 limit on commissary. \$75 doesn't last a whole month. 3 weeks with no food, soap, or laundry soap. – Shawnee*

Some commissary comments were specific as to what items people wanted greater access to. Several people commented that they could not buy enough drinking water on commissary and were concerned about the quality of drinking water. Someone at Robinson commented that they were limited to buying only eight bottles of water a month despite there being an issue with brown water at the facility. Some people commented particularly on not being able to access or afford vitamins, which people wanted to boost immune response for COVID-19. People made various requests to be able to buy certain items on commissary, such as healthier food items, disinfectant, and dish soap. People commented on not being able to buy specific items they felt were needed for their health and people in special statuses such as in reception and classification or in segregation reported increased issues, as discussed in the Special Populations part of this report.

*We can't even purchase the over the counter medication that they sell on commissary, while healthcare hoards it like a narcotic. – Graham (R&C)*

*Our hygiene items in R&C are limited. We can't buy foot cream, Tylenol, lotion, shoes, warm clothes or nail clippers ... they expect us to share old rusted clippers. We are allowed to shop every 30 days but hygiene items don't last. – Graham (R&C)*

Some people commented regarding commissary about the inconsistency of what is sold and permitted at different facilities.

*They took a pillow I bought at Lawrence for \$8.34 at Big Muddy saying that BMRCC does not sell that type so it was considered contraband. Funny thing, two months later they sold the very same pillow! (Needless to say, I was never compensated.) Living off of \$10.00 a month, \$8.00 means doing without other things that are needed, and therefore means more to a poor person than a rich person. – Big Muddy*

People also commented that they were not provided with notice or information about limits or expected time between shops. Without scheduling, people were not able to plan for their needs. Many reported the rules regarding commissary were erratic, unpredictable, and caused additional unnecessary stress.

*They didn't notify us till afterwards that we could purchase double of cosmetics and now there are a lot of people looking for soap, toothpaste, and shampoo. – Pontiac*

*There was no posting on my deck as to commissary schedule, also there should have been a Spanish one for the people that don't speak English. – East Moline*

Several people commented about commissary's effect on morale. Someone at Centralia commented that commissary access affected the overall climate at the facility and that things were "getting to be unstable." Several people reported that hunger strikes were initiated to get commissary at various facilities.

*Commissary is not grieved for fear of losing commissary. Shopping is all we have at times. – Decatur*



*We truly need commissary 2x a month. Once a month is very hard on us. Being locked down this much is hard enough mentally. By getting commissary 2x a month helps us in so many ways. – Pontiac*

JHA agrees that increasing instead of limiting commissary would help with morale during the pandemic. Again, other state correctional systems reportedly reacted by increasing instead of decreasing commissary. For example, as mentioned above, PADOC reportedly increased commissary spending limits from \$70 to \$100 a week, or \$400 a month, compared to what we were hearing of \$0-\$100 spending a month from people in IDOC. Administrators do have some legitimate concerns about excessive property issues and food attracting pests, but such costs and benefits should be considered and worked through.

Again, different IDOC facilities had different commissary practices that seemed fairly arbitrary, including frequency, restrictions, permitting various spending and items, or counting or not counting certain items towards spending caps. Additionally, there also still appears to be some price variation across facilities, e.g. the cost of a pack of ramen might be more than 15% higher at East Moline than at Hill, both facilities that JHA visited in March 2020 and received commissary lists from.

**JHA recommends IDOC articulate uniform standards for commissary expectations** as practices seem to be varying widely and adversely affecting morale and people's access to essentials, including communications, healthcare, and hygiene items. IDOC should review commissary schedules and limits and ensure supply chain integrity. Again, IDOC must improve communication and access to information about what can be expected.



## DIETARY

In [JHA's April 8 recommendations](#) we reiterated that IDOC should respond to issues with dietary. JHA's COVID-19 survey did not contain any questions about dietary but many people commented about it. Of the 12,780 people who responded to [prior JHA surveys](#) at 21 facilities between April 2018 and May 2019, 68% of people reported they were not satisfied with food from dietary. In COVID-19 surveys many people commented on limited commissary's effect on their reliance on dietary and vice versa.

As noted in the social distancing section, many people expressed concerns about movement to dietary and contact with others. Others commented on lack of consistency around the issue of social distancing vs. cohorting in dietary.

*Currently the prison is requiring us to walk to chow every 3rd day (due to a storage of plastic trays.) Many people avoid going and don't eat! For fear of catching COVID-19 - many guys are scared, and distrust the information being given by IDOC. – Centralia*

*We are in the chow hall with 30-40 inmates. Yet our all-day dayroom has been taken from us so we are not all together at once. Makes no sense. – Centralia*

*We are being made to walk 6 feet apart from another, but yet when we go into chow hall, we are all bunched up and when we are sitting down to eat, we are not 6 feet apart from each other.* – Dixon

Many people were aware that dietary was a high-risk area for COVID-19 transmission, and some knew that staff or workers had been infected and expressed heightened concerns. People believed that workers were going to work sick and that they were not properly quarantined.

*When staff in the kitchen became infected [with COVID-19], never at all not, even wiped down.* – Sheridan

*Inmates serving food in chow hall do not wear any mask even when serving our food. Some of the dietary staff don't wear a mask even though they are closer than 6 feet to the food.* – Taylorville

As noted in other sections of this report, there were also COVID-19 related concerns about food workers not wearing PPE and lack of sanitation. For example, some people reported staff did not wear masks or gloves while serving, reported that tables and seats in dietary were not being sanitized, or expressed concerns about pests in dietary areas. Dietary workers reported some issues getting access to cleaning supplies and laundry services in addition to PPE concerns. At a few facilities there were concerns that dishwashers do not reach the proper temperature to sanitize items. There were also concerns regarding drinking water. At Taylorville, someone expressed an additional concern about physical plant design that staff dining, where people will be unmasked out of necessity, is so close to prisoner dining and the risk of disease spread between these two areas. Again, we would recommend expert review of ventilation concerns and consideration of where more protective measures can be put in place, e.g. more physical barriers, air flow diversions, etc., particularly in areas where masks cannot be worn. Again, JHA recommends outside health and safety inspections.

*Our drinking water is not monitored by a reliable authority. It's tested by staff, who I overheard saying the pH level was very high and nothing was going to happen to amend it. Staff won't drink the water. Our camp has pallets and pallets of water shipped in and is only used by staff.* – Shawnee

One usual issue that JHA encountered in COVID-19 survey responses was that people at a few facilities reported they were not provided with eating utensils in general population for extended periods and had to eat with their hands.

Some people reported too short an amount of time to eat in dietary. For example, at East Moline people reported only getting five minutes to eat on second shift. At Lincoln people reported five to 10 minutes. Some administrators replied that meal service times are documented to ensure adequate time is provided.

*They rush us out of the chow hall. We spend more time walking to chow than eating. Literally 5 minutes to eat.* – Vienna

*Less than 15 minutes to be served, eat, and digest every meal. Unhealthy! Even an inmate deserves respect/humane treatment.* – Big Muddy

At some facilities, people commented on inconsistent mealtimes or long stretches between meals. For example, at Pontiac someone wrote dinner at 3:30pm and breakfast at 6am. At other facilities

people reported breakfast at 3:30am. At Pinckneyville someone commented that breakfast was served at 3am and lunch at 9am. People at Vandalia noted they were hungry when dinner was at 4pm and there was a lengthy period between the evening meal and breakfast.

*Last meal at 3:30 then don't eat for 12 hrs is extensive.* – Graham (R&C)

Many people commented on food portions being less during the pandemic and being hungry. Some people reported having lost significant amounts of weight. Some prisoners reported being told by staff that food was being “rationed” or that there were issues due to budget. People reported being served trays with empty slots.

*They are starving us in here. The trays are always missing something on them.*  
– Graham

*They're not giving us normal portions of food, like they're running out. Portions get smaller and smaller every day, and we're hungry.* – Decatur

*The meals are nutritionally deficient. Since lockdown, they have become very small, 40% less than normal.* – Shawnee

*Food is short and hardly ever in compliance with the Master menu.* – Danville

*There are not nearly enough food/calories given to us to survive comfortably.*  
– Jacksonville

*The portion size of food is less than what a 5-year-old child gets.* – Southwestern

*Our meals are delivered to our cells. The quality of food we are served has dropped since going on lock down. Chicken breasts (if we get them) are now cut in half 2 inch x by 2 inch if that. It seems we are getting far less real meat.* – Illinois River

*The breakfast trays are so small they are not giving us the right amount of calories. We get half a scoop of cereal and one slice of slick meat and that's the whole tray.*  
– Sheridan

*Today for breakfast, I got literally 13 pieces of apple jacks cereal and 1 piece of slick meat that was at least 3 different colors.* – Sheridan

Many people reported being served cold food. In Pontiac MSU, for example, it was reported that this was likely because it was prepared on the maximum side of the prison and delivered to the medium side without being insulated and sat before being served. Other people reported that cold food was due to equipment being broken or observing trays sitting on housing units for significant lengths of time before they were distributed.

*Food is delivered to the units and the food sits in the hallways for hours, especially breakfast.* – Illinois River

*I'm tired of my food being cold because they don't use hot boxes to transport the food. And who knows how long the trays sit there after being loaded. This is one thing I learned needs to be done in my food safety sanitation class to get my license in the state of Illinois.* – Graham

Many people commented on the lack of cleanliness with dietary and trays. There were reports that the hard trays are not well cleaned or were delaminating, or cracked and broken, and someone commented that they could find plastic chippings of the tray in their food. Some people commented they wanted to use Styrofoam trays to reduce risk of virus spread.

*Trays routinely come on the next meal with traces of the previous meal still on them. – Danville*

*The tray machine used to wash trays in the kitchen has broken down on many occasions and trays are washed by hand in water known to not meet the required temperature. – Illinois River*

*We are now forced to eat out of barely cleaned plastic trays, empty trays are placed on nasty floor. One worker said all they do is a quick dip and rinse as they have to hurry us and feed another cell house with the same trays. Food is always ice cold. They rush you so they can get trays back for another cellhouse. – Stateville*

At some facilities people noted particular repeating menu items, for example at Pontiac many people wrote about being served boiled eggs repeatedly. At Sheridan people reported getting bologna four to six times a week. People at Stateville noted being served hot dogs for breakfast and lunch. At several facilities, people wrote about being served food, particularly milk, that was spoiled, old or stale. Others reported not getting milk or juice. Some people reported being served food beyond its expiration date. Some people reported that they were served undercooked meat.

*The dietary has greatly reduced the amount of food we are given, especially at breakfast. We are being given less than half the amount we are allotted and the majority of our meals at breakfast we are given cracked wheat (80% of the time). This 'cracked wheat' as they call it is animal food. It says right on the container that it comes in, 'Not for human consumption!' – Big Muddy*

*I don't know if there is a lack of food, but we have eaten leftovers for 2 or 3 days at a time. – Robinson*

*The officers are eating all of our food, giving us outdated desserts, expired juices and milk. – Decatur*

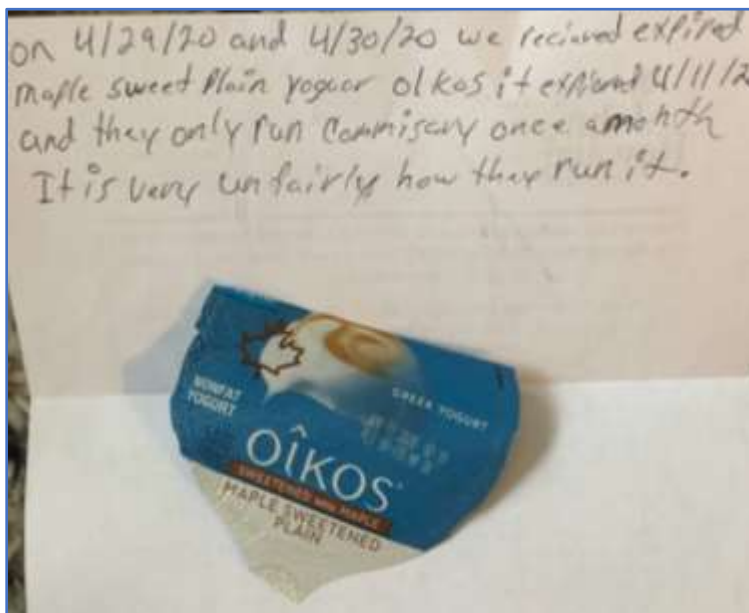
*We have been getting a lot of soured or rotten milk for breakfast (which is the only time we get milk.) I know this is prison but losing our freedom is bad enough. We are people, human beings, not caged animals! – Big Muddy*

*Dietary staff are not following protocols that ensure inmates' healthy meals. I am diabetic and for breakfast the milk is spoiled all the time, lunch and dinner trays are always cold. The chicken is not cooked correctly, the meat is sometimes pink. – Big Muddy*

Some people commented that they did not believe they receive all of the donated food or that it was taken by staff.

People also expressed desire for particular foods, some which are known to help with immune system responses, including fresh fruits and vegetables, or foods with vitamin C, vitamin D, iron, protein, and fiber.

*We are being punished for other inmates, which is against the law. They tell us it's because people make hooch, but every other prison in the state of Illinois gets fresh fruit. – Lawrence*



A few people reported not getting special diets due to COVID-19 response. There were also concerns about pork being served without telling people or offering alternatives. Some people reported issues with access to evening meals, and the ability to break fast at the appropriate time during Ramadan. Other observants reported that they were not given adequate food, e.g. double dinner portions after fasts.

*Dietary refusing to follow medical eating permit with excuse of low supplies due to COVID-19. – Joliet*

*I'm a vegetarian due to my religious beliefs, and they refuse to do anything to make my state portions up to caloric par. So, with these limited shops, it's hard for me to live. – Decatur*

*Supervisors laugh at Muslims and say they don't care if we eat or don't, they are mad because they are here longer hours during Ramadan. Plus now they have to deliver trays to every unit. – East Moline*

*It is the month of Ramadan, and due to Muslim inmate's obligatory fasting, we miss lunch. So, at night, we are only receiving double portions on main courses like chicken patty, burgers, etc. (Food that we can count) and no double portions on other foods served. – Lawrence*

Some administrators replied to concerns stating that dietary is supervised by licensed food service professionals, all meals provided fall within the unspecified daily allowance of calories, that the menu is determined by statewide master menu, and dates on products are checked prior to service.

Food is an important factor in morale and is an area where the Department should work on improvements.



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