

Aramark Case Study: FORT BEND COUNTY JAIL — TEXAS



The Wages of Respect: Better Commissary Choices Increase Revenues, Expand Vocational Programs, and Improve Behavior

Quick Stats

Partner since: 2013
Capacity: 1,766 beds
Aramark Services:
Commissary

Fort Bend County, in Houston's metro area, partnered with Aramark to run its commissary. In only the first six months, **spending per inmate rose 56 percent**, yet Fort Bend's success story goes much further than just higher revenues.

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in first 6 months.

After Troy Nehls was elected Fort Bend County Sheriff, to lead the jail he brought Maj. Thomas Goodfellow and Capt. Jule Brownfield, who had run Houston's jail system, the third largest in the country.

The Fort Bend commissary was self-operated and lacking in technology and popular brands. And Capt.

Brownfield knew the jail could improve both profits and products with the right vendor.

Aramark began with a focus group. *"They talked to the inmates and asked what they liked and which product lines."* After making the commissary more like a retail store, with the products preferred by the focus group, inmate spending surged to a rate yielding more than **\$560,000 in annual commissions**. *"And we don't pay the commissary salaries anymore,"* Capt. Brownfield adds. Aramark's *"attention to detail at Fort Bend County's commissary is much higher, and it is a better process because of that."*

Challenges

1. More choices of the **products and brands** inmates prefer.

Solutions and Results

Aramark conducted a focus group of randomly selected inmates and another of staff. Some themes that emerged were for:

- More commissary variety and promotions of new offerings
- Known brands rather than generics or private labels
- More meal items, and less candy and salty snacks
- Better hygiene products

Aramark's analysis included a reminder that captive consumers can still vote with their wallets. If we do not provide value, people will not buy as much. After the commissary change-over, the rapid rise in sales shows how much inmates value the new offerings.

Solutions and Results (Continued)

2. Finding the **technology** best for this commissary and this inmate population.
▶ Aramark made a major investment in efficiency- and productivity-improving technology, including commissary kiosks and CORE Trust software for inmate trust funds and secure transactions. These tech solutions also reduce paperwork and make administrators' lives easier.
3. **Reducing costs** and **raising profits** for the jail.
▶ Aramark had estimated weekly per-inmate spending to increase 34.1 percent in the first year. But we exceeded expectations with spending shooting **from \$20.54 to \$32.04** in six months. The extra money funds new vocational programs for inmates.
4. Improving inmate **behavior management**.
▶ The new commissary also aids inmate management, far beyond the traditional loss-of-commissary-privileges penalty. As Capt. Brownfield expands upon below, care, custody and control are *“easier with respectful treatment and more programs and choices.”*

The Payoffs Keep Coming

How did the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office use the commissary's windfall? *“Because of this new money we are able to build an Inmate Vocational Center with new programs for GED, and soon we'll be starting certification programs in things like HVAC and basic electrical wiring,”* Capt. Brownfield says.

Maj. Goodfellow adds: *“We already taught food service, janitorial services, barbering, tailoring, keyboarding, and landscaping. But heat/air conditioning certification will bring much higher wages when an inmate transitions back to civilian*

life, and we should see a greater reduction in recidivism.”

One last insight, informed by Capt. Brownfield's career in Texas and with the U.S. Justice Department around the world: *“The more respect you treat inmates with and the more programs you have for them—including more variety in products they can purchase—the easier it is to manage them. It's still care, custody, and control, but it's easier with respectful treatment and more programs and choices.”*



Capt. Jule G. Brownfield,
Director of Detention
Division Operations.



Fort Bend County's Inmate Vocational Center is under construction: Maj. Thomas E. Goodfellow, Detention Bureau Commander; Sheriff Troy E. Nehls; County Judge Robert Hebert; and Donald G. Brady, Director of County Facilities Management and Planning

“My experience with Aramark since they took over the commissary is a positive one. They have fulfilled their contract obligations and have exceeded them in many areas that have increased our productivity and revenue.”

— Capt. Jule G. Brownfield, Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office