

# COVID and Correctional Food Service

By Lisa Kopochinski

The current COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way the world operates. Nearly every industry has been impacted—some more than others.

In the corrections industry, there remains an urgent need to deliver meals to the incarcerated in as safe and effective a manner as possible to keep individuals healthy. This is no small feat.

Correctional News recently asked two industry professionals—

Keith Robinson, Departmental Food Administrator at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR); and Robert Zachrich, who is President and oversees Sales and Marketing for JonesZylon—how the pandemic is affecting food service/commissary operations.

Headquartered in West Lafayette, Ohio, JonesZylon was formed nearly 60 years ago, and specializes in a variety of products for the corrections industry, including a complete, integrated

system designed for foodservice operations. This includes everything from dinnerware, to all types of meal trays and carts to deliver them.

Robinson began his career with CDCR as a Correctional Supervising Cook at Avenal State Prison in May 2003. He was promoted in August 2010 to Correctional Food Manager II at California State Prison Solano. He then served as Correctional Business Manager I at California Medical Facility from January 2017 until April 2018, when he was assigned as the Departmental Food Administrator for the Division of Adult Institutions.

Here is what these two industry professionals had to say.

**CN:** How has the pandemic impacted your correctional food/commissary operation?

**Keith Robinson:** The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is ensuring the delivery of all nutritionally balanced meals—including those with religious or

medical diets—to the individuals within our care and that the storage, preparation and serving of our meals meet COVID-19 public health protocols. CDCR follows recommendations for COVID-19 response in a correctional setting as set forth by the California Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Robert Zachrich:** The main change to our own operation in how we provide our products to the market has been speed. When the pandemic hit, it caused a crisis at many correctional facilities, which necessitated very fast solutions. We drastically revamped our supply chain in order to cut our equipment lead time in half from eight weeks to four weeks.

**CN:** What changes have been made in how meals are provided to incarcerated individuals?

**Robinson:** As part of our COVID-19 measures, meals are served to some incarcerated people in their housing units instead of dining halls. Meals may be provided at staggered intervals to allow for disinfecting between uses and physical distancing.

CDCR has issued stricter measures for all staff and inmate workers, including those who are in food service. CDCR requires ongoing testing for inmates, physical distancing, and the use of masks and/or higher-level PPE as indicated by CDCR's PPE guide. In limited cases of staff or inmate worker shortages, CDCR institutions may temporarily reduce the number of daily hot meals each day to maintain the safety and security of the institution.

**Zachrich:** One of the more significant changes caused by the pandemic was the closing of cafeterias

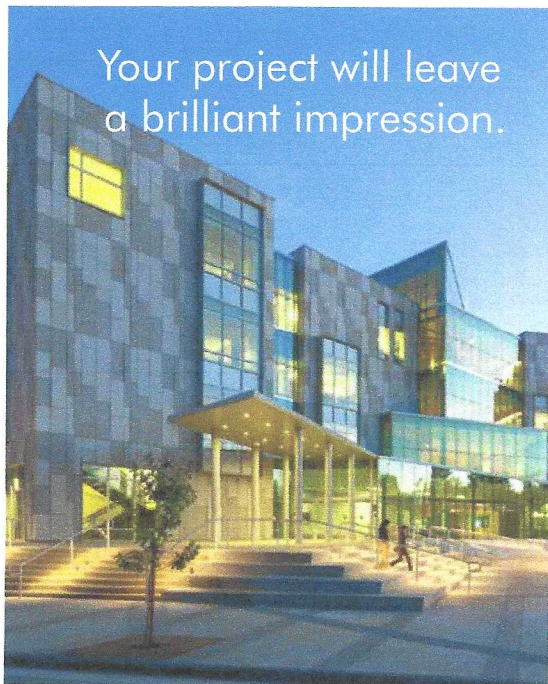


After the pandemic is over, racks can be installed inside JonesZylon's heated carts and converted to hot boxes so that the kitchen can hold bulk food pans.

Photo Credit: JonesZylon



The kitchen at Avenal State Prison in Avenal, Calif., has been operating under stricter measures for all staff and inmate workers issued by the CDCR.



So will we.

Vanir is one of the nation's leading full-service program, project, and construction management firms. We create solutions that ensure your project's success.

Program Management | Project Management  
Construction Management | Scheduling | Master Planning | Design Services | Constructability Review  
Cost Estimating | Condition Assessment  
Sustainability

888.912.1201 | vanir.com



Circle # 125 on reader service card.

and changing to meal delivery to the housing units. This didn't happen across the board, but wherever there was a "hot spot," they tried to keep the population from congregating in a place like the cafeteria. This spiked the demand for meal delivery carts so JonesZylon's first reaction was to dramatically reduce lead time for carts in order to support the need.

The second issue to address was to figure out what these facilities could do with these meal delivery carts after the pandemic is over. This fell into one of three categories.

Many of these facilities are going to stay with meal delivery to the housing units for the long term. This has been a trend in the industry over the last five years or so anyway. The pandemic is just accelerating it.

We designed these carts to be dual purposed. After the pandemic is over, you can install racks inside the heated carts and convert them to be hot boxes for your kitchen to hold bulk food pans. We have actually helped some K-12 schools with this method also.

Some states are creating a "quick reaction" suite of carts and trays. It is held in a central warehouse and then when a facility in that state has a flair up, they will send them enough carts and trays to serve in the housing unit until the flair up is over. Then they will go back to cafeteria feeding and send the equipment and trays back to the central warehouse to be used for the

next facility flair up. In the long term, this quick reaction can be used for other emergencies such as facility lockdowns, a hurricane threat, and the like.

**CN:** *What do you foresee for 2021 in terms of correctional food/commissary operations, particularly with respect to the vaccine that is being released?*

**Robinson:** CDCR and CCHCS

(California Correctional Health Care Services)

are actively working with our public health partners on a distribution plan for the COVID-19 vaccine both for staff and incarcerated individuals. These plans will align with state and healthcare guidelines for distribution prioritization and will aim to target frontline workers as well as medically high-risk patients.

Additional information will be provided when publicly available.

**Zachrich:** It is likely that most facilities that invested in equipment and dinnerware to deliver meals to housing units rather than cafeteria feeding will stay with this method. Those that started to convert to meals in housing units will probably continue to convert, but not at the "panic" pace.

**Maintenance Report, from page 12**

Camp in McCook.

"What makes this project different is that it employs JPay services, which are well-known to the inmate population and their family members. It has a fee, but it also has fewer limitations and allows up to 30 minutes of visitation time, which is a little longer than the program underway at WEC," said NDCS Director Scott R. Frakes.

Additional information about both video visitation programs is available on the NDCS website: [www.corrections.nebraska.gov](http://www.corrections.nebraska.gov). Visitors to the NCCW facility page will be linked to JPay where they can schedule a video visit.

"We are eager to see if these platforms live up to our expectations. Depending on the outcomes, one or both may be options for implementation at other facilities," said Dir. Frakes.

"These programs hold great promise for supplementing in-person visits, now and into the future," added Smith.

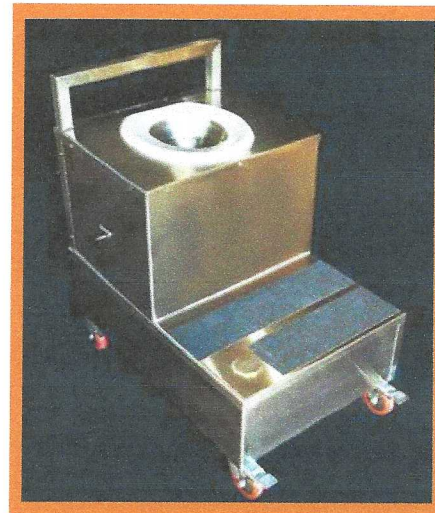
# ProCleanSolutions

Introduces

The

## Nomad

Contraband Separation Device



**Portable**

**Clean/Black Water Storage**

**Battery-Powered**

**Stainless Steel Construction**

**Safe & Easy**

**Built in USA**

### Separates & Sterilizes Contraband

The Nomad is a safe and easy solution to current dry cell procedures that are demeaning and dangerous. Eliminate staff contact with biohazardous material and ensure evidence has proper chain of custody.

**Staff Training & Warranty included.**

**For information, quote, or demonstration contact:**



(817) 905-5406  
mike@provco.us  
www.provco.us



Circle # 126 on reader service card.