

Food and Power at Cook County Jail:



**Volume 1: Introduction to CBM
Managed Services**

Q: What is the food at Cook County Jail like?

A: To be blunt, the food is shit. It is made up of ready-to-serve meals created by prisoners (who are paid 1 dollar a day for their work). Recipes are made from low-cost bulk food items. Meal plans remain the same every week, throughout the year, meaning that regular food items such as bologna, juice packets, and peanut butter tubes form the regular diet. Most “meat” is really soybean based imitation meat and virtually no vegetables or fruits are included. Prisoners experience multiple health problems including vitamin deficiency and drastic weight loss. The diet at CCJ keeps prisoners in a state of unending food insecurity, living in dietary and nutritional crises.

Q: Where does the food come from?

A: There are 6 different social forces, institutions of the State and/or the capitalist market, involved in bringing the food into the jail, organizing its distribution, and affecting the way food is consumed by prisoners. The 6 forces include: the *Cook County Board of Commissioners*, the *Cook County Sheriff's Office*, the *Service Contractor*, *Third Party Vendors*, the social hierarchies of *guards and gangs*, and the *collective actions of prisoners*, such as inter-prisoner solidarity, mutual aid, and protest against their confinement. We have chosen to call all these parts put together, the *Cook County Jail Food System*, a process that circulates between the free market, the government and the jail itself.

In this writing, we discuss the Service Contractor, or, the private company (itself, a combination of pre-existing companies) that arrange contracts with other private food suppliers and organize prisoner's access to food. The private company employed by the State to service CCJ is called CBM Premier Management LLC.



The food supply at CCJ is part of this political and economic system of racist oppression and class warfare. The health problems, indignity and basic lack of food caused by the diet are all methods of maintaining control over communities living without wage-work in the 21st century wage-economy. The food insecurity experienced by prisoners, combined with the overall insecurity of confinement, coerces most held at County into plea bargains rather than actual trials. Thousands of poor people are criminalized simply because they cannot stand the violent experience of Cook County. Part of the violence is having to eat the same disgusting food day in and day out, while you wait for your day in court.

Future work will detail the 6 other levels of the CCJ Food System. For now, it is worth reflecting on what a world might look like without capitalism and without prisons, where care and mutual aid act as the organizing principles of daily life. It is also worth reflecting on what collective action is needed to dismantle the systems that produce food insecurity at Cook County Jail.

Q: Who is CBM Premier Management LLC?

A: It is a collection of three businesses jointly paid 38 million dollars annually to privately manage the jail's food supply. CBM handles the receiving of food items, computer inventory, scheduled production of weekly meal plans, and the management of contracts with third party vendors. In other words, it gets the food in, designs the meals, and arranges payment and services from companies supplying specific types of food and ingredients.

CBM Premier Management LLC is a combination of three companies: Buona Companies LLC, Airport Restaurant Management Inc., and Catering By Marlin's (CBM) Managed Services.



Q: Who or what are these companies?

A: They are three different private corporations, operated by the managers of CBM Premier Management LLC.

In general, these companies show how confinement is a lucrative moneymaker for politically connected capitalists. For the ruling class, the economic utility of incarceration in the United States has two parts: 1. it isolates the collapse of the capitalist wage-relation in the lives of non-workers and 2. it redeploys the ideology of free markets and privatization to manage jails and prisons. The ideology of capitalism is recycled to temporarily fix the crises of capitalism. These food service companies are the barbaric social products of this pathetic and violent redeployment.

Buona Companies LLC runs Buona Restaurants, a fast-food chain featuring Italian beef, cheeseburgers, and other greasy drive-thru options. The company also runs Joey Buona's Pizzeria Grille located in Wisconsin. Additionally, the company operates Beyond Events Catering, which oversees large elite corporate events such as company picnics and business retreats.

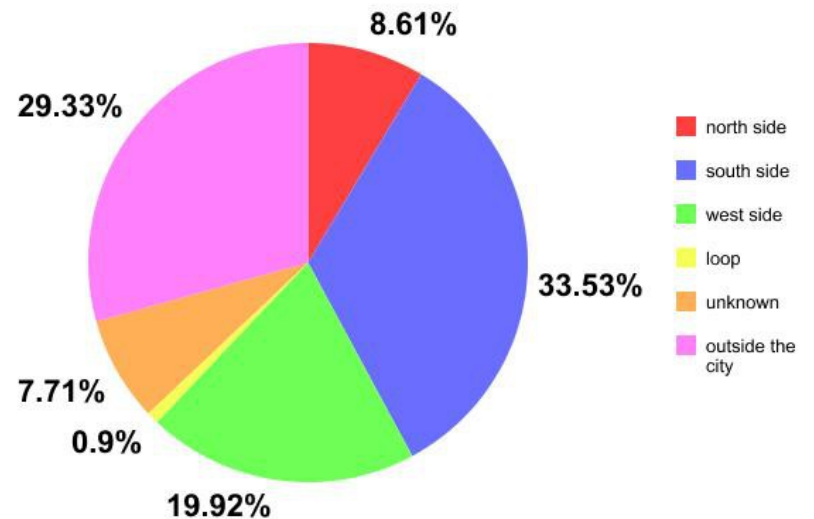


Buona's involvement in the jail contract shows how the daily housing and living management needs of large-scale incarceration is a part of the broader formal economy (in this case, the broader 'food-service' formal economy). While the jail makes poverty and racism invisible to middle class consumers, the business practices of corporations feeding upper middle class professionals, also get paid to feed prisoners diets of insecurity.

With this in mind, we must rethink our usual assumptions about jails and prisons and then ask how jail food consumption fits into this 'reframed' picture. Confinement is first and foremost a form of social control used by the government (namely, the police) to marginalize the poverty created by capitalism. Inequality in advanced capitalist cities, and the prison system used to contain it, unevenly targets and victimizes poor black and brown people. The criminal justice system is both a racist social structure, as well as an economic mechanism that reaches beyond the jail itself, helping to create a larger *social* prison for the city's poor.

Don't believe the criminal justice system creates and re-creates economic and spatial segregation? This is a fact that can also be shown scientifically. 53.4 % of the jail's population in 2012 lived in the south or the west sides of Chicago, some of the poorest areas of the city. By contrast, only 8.6% lived in the north side and 0.9% in the loop. In other words, arrest and imprisonment is an experience inflicted on poorer communities and in specific spaces with poor people, with far more frequency than in areas with large concentrations of wealth.

cook county jail inmate origin



The unparalleled explosion of people arrested and put in prisons, a process that started in the early 1980's, was not a response to growing crime rates, but a political solution for an economic problem facing the ruling class: what is to be done with all these (post)-workers in the urban United States we no longer need to control through stable contracts? People began to find themselves living in a world where traditional work had largely disappeared, creating crises in the way ordinary people gained access to resources.

Large American cities (Chicago being one of them) once contained large neighborhoods containing exploited workers. These old ghettos have become State-produced war zones, where young people face death and jail as their two most likely futures. Criminalization has been a popular answer to the wage-economy crises. The claim that the rich get richer and the poor get prison is truer today than it has ever been before in human history.

Don't believe the criminal justice system is racist? This is a fact that can be shown scientifically. In 2012 for example, the average annual population of Cook County Jail was 66.9% black and only 13.5% white, where as the percentage of black people in Cook County as whole is only 24.8 %. Roughly speaking therefore, black people in Cook County account for only 1/4 of the entire population whereas they account for 2/3 of the jail population. We can therefore say objectively, that black people are unfairly and unjustly oppressed by Cook County Jail simply by virtue of the fact of their over-representation in the jail population, which has been the norm since the late 70's.

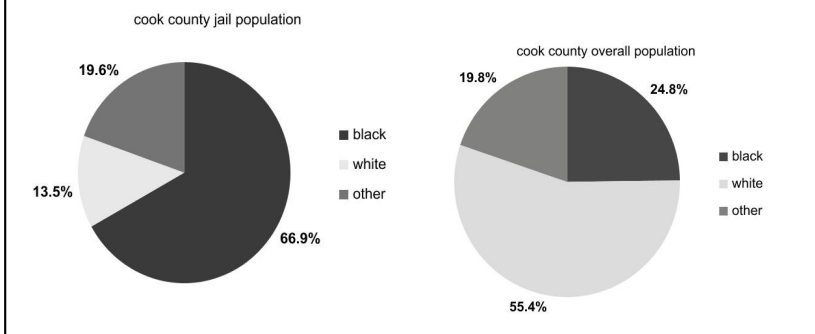


Image of a wedding reception from Beyond Events Catering's website, run by Buona Companies LLC; Recreation area at Cook County Jail.



Timothy Rand, a well-connected Chicago capitalist, runs Airport Restaurant Management Incorporated. His company also runs the food supply at Midway Airport. Rand is the founder of Chicago Restaurant Partners with Phil Stefani and Levy Restaurants, an on-site caterer who managed the food at the McCormick Center from 2007 to 2011. Rand himself has donated financially to Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, as well as a number of political donations throughout Chicago including the Urban League and the Rainbow Push Coalition.



Timothy Rand, President of Airport Restaurant Management Inc and co-manager of CMB Premier Management LLC poses for the Chicago Sun Times.

Again, we have an example of one of the double uses of confinement; The formal market's connection with the jail through the service industry. The organization supplying food for tourists and couples dining in local restaurants supplies the weekly dietary routine at Cook County Jail as well. Perhaps the privatization of incarceration and the Prison-Industrial complex is less a backroom conspiracy, and more a misguided faith in the market, taken to such an extreme that it is used as a management solution for the social violence of incarceration, itself a process created by capitalist society. The patronage relationship between Buona Companies LLC, Airport Restaurant Management Inc., and Cook County Jail demonstrates how feeding 10,000 prisoners a day is both a form of political control necessitated by the inequality of a market economy, and as a market lever of consumer demand, a perverse financial opportunity for specific capitalists.

Q: Well then who or what is Catering By Marlin's or CBM?

The third company on the contract is CBM Managed Services. It is a private food-service organizer that different jails and prisons can pay to oversee the bureaucratic requirements of feeding their prisoners. CBM Managed Services also provides food for hospitals, nursing homes, universities, and public schools. It is a nationwide company that uses complex computer inventory and production systems to organize different types of consumption in different public and private institutions.

CBM Managed Services is a corporation that exists to control life, and food is the means of this control. The service they provide is to create a diet that helps re-enforce confinement. It is a corporate-incarceration empire that protects a politically accepted standard of life for prisoners in jails across the country.



Nutril loaf, the all in one "disciplinary meal" served to prisoners at Cook County Jail as punishment for a variety of infractions; image from CMB Managed Services' website.

Q: Why should I care about what prisoners eat, they're criminals right? So don't they deserve bad food?

A: Jails and prisons do not prevent or deter the existence of crime. Poor treatment of prisoners does not lower the level of violence in society; it helps to maintain it. We cannot ignore the experiences of prisoners today, moral ideology has nothing to do with the actual reality of the American justice system. The purpose of incarceration is to contain and marginalize poor people, who are most often non-white, male and young. The main purpose of Cook County Jail is to accomplish this goal in the Chicago land area. The jail protects the ruling class by managing economic inequality into segregated 'socially-acceptable' spaces, denying the city's poor any access to its vast wealth and resources. What prisoners are forced to eat in jail is therefore first and foremost a tactic of class-warfare and racist social control, for it helps sustain the great 21st century confinement of poverty, joblessness, and racial apartheid.

The wage-economy is dying. Mass-unemployment and jobs without benefits, regular hours, or advancement opportunities are the new normal. The attack on poor people has gotten worse and worse in the past 20 to 30 years, which is no accident. It is because the traditional industrial form of daily survival (that is, working a job for a regular wage) is no longer capable of supporting the vast majority of the population. The criminal justice system, the prison, and the jail have become a wretched and temporary fix for the permanent social crises of wage-work.