

Southwind Dairy Inmate Dairy Worker Pilot Program

In June of 2014, responding to a chronic and almost desperate shortage of dairy workers, Al, Linda, Justin and Bill Squire of Southwind Dairy in Hagerman, NM, contacted Roswell Correctional Center (RCC) which is located 7 miles west of the dairy. Fortunately for all, the RCC Warden Aaron Vigil, Program Director Mary Christensen, and Guard Captain Lee Seyler were trying to find opportunities for inmates at the same time. Over the next four months we worked together to design a work program that could help everyone. By the end of October 2014, the Southwind Dairy Inmate Dairy Worker Pilot Program was ready to launch and we were being told that a contract was imminent; so we began training 16 inmates to milk cows under the guidance of an M.O.U. between Southwind Dairy and RCC. The inmates milked cows from November 9 until March 2 as we struggled to construct a suitable contract between New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) and Southwind Dairy.

What we have learned so far about the Pilot Program and the inmates:

1. Screening is very important. We started training 16 inmates and 15 worked out well. One man quit. RCC prison officials did an exemplary job of pre-screening. Only non-violent offenders who were soon to be released were accepted into the program.
2. Punctuality: The men were waiting for their van ride at the gate at 5:45 a.m. every day.
3. Dedication: The inmates worked six hour shifts with four days on and two days off for four months. If a man was sick or had a program to attend, someone took his place.
4. Teamwork, Responsibility and Procedure: The men accepted the responsibility to produce clean milk and understood how their actions and teamwork accomplished that goal.
5. Pride: The men responded greatly to positive reinforcement from dairy personnel and others who worked with them. One young inmate in his late 20's told us that this was the first job he had ever had and he was so proud of it!
6. Animal Therapy benefitted both the cows and the inmates. The cows responded well to quiet, gentle handling. The inmates were tired after their 6 hour shift and caused little problem for officers at the prison.
7. Savings: Some of the participating inmates had a chance to save several hundred dollars that they planned to use upon their release. The value of having a job and having some savings upon release are well documented as methods of reducing recidivism.

Since the pilot program does not fit neatly into any Corrections Programs, we struggled for solutions to these issues:

1. Even though the inmate working area was somewhat secluded from outsiders and other workers, full time corrections officers were a necessary part of the program and were mostly paid for out of the inmate wages from the program.
2. The dairy paid \$7.50/hr. Inmates were paid \$2.00/hr with an additional .50/hr set aside to be available upon release (Gate Fund).
3. The cost to the taxpayers for this program can approach zero, with a few more inmates working per officer and adequate staffing of officers.
4. Our major obstacle has been the dilemma of insuring both Corrections Department and Southwind Dairy against any adverse events while still covering inmates for any injuries on the job. The risks of a bad situation occurring are minimized but not eliminated by pre-screening.

February 2, 2015

Gregg Marcantel, Secretary of Corrections
Joe W. Booker, Jr., Deputy Secretary of Operations, NMCD
Mark Myers, Acting Deputy Secretary of Administration
Anna Martinez, Acting Director Prison Industries
Jerry Roark, Director of Adult Prisons
Aaron Vigil, Warden, RCC
Mary Christensen, Programs Director, RCC

Re: Southwind Dairy Inmate Training Program

In late June of 2014, the Squire family met with Aaron Vigil, warden at RCC, Captain Lee Seiler, and Programs Director, Mary Christensen to discuss setting up a pilot program to train inmates for dairy jobs. We are now starting our fourth month of operation of the pilot program that was designed to help a select group of inmates by providing valuable job training and meaningful work experiences. We had high hopes that the program could be structured in a way that would emphasize the importance of saving and planning as a way of preparing inmates for eventual release and self-sufficiency.

The Squire family and the people at RCC have worked very hard to put this program together and to make it work. We have not had much encouragement from Santa Fe, but we have certainly felt a lot of pressure to submit to the bureaucratic and financial burden of forced participation in the "Corrections Industries" category. We do not think it is reasonable of you to expect us, as owners and managers of a private sector dairy business, to experience continued and extreme uncertainties, especially those pertaining to such critical items as payroll, labor and employee training. We have been forced to bear the burden of an additional \$15,000 monthly in expenses for labor. We need to resolve our differences soon.

Our objections to arbitrarily changing our local, "hands on" pilot program into a compartment of Corrections Industries stem from several serious concerns that you may not have even considered. Inmate participation in Corrections Industries programs had dropped to an all time low as of June 2012, as cited in the report to the Legislative Finance Committee entitled, *Reducing Cost and Recidivism in the Incarceration and Supervision of Adult Offenders*. This report also stated that "although institutional support jobs such as those offered at the NMCD have been recognized as valuable, programs that offer private sector experience, fair wages and include vocational training have been proven to be effective more often." The report further mentions that the Corrections Industries Commission apparently had not been fulfilling requirements to provide annual reports containing detailed financial statements for each enterprise in each facility. We believe that it would be unwise for our dairy to be linked organizationally or financially to Corrections Industries.

Apparently Corrections Industries is planning a goat farm and dairy at RCC with provisions to transport goat milk off site for processing and cheese making. While the benefits of animal therapy are numerous, this program would be very costly to taxpayers, requiring the state to build the farm facility and incur all costs and liabilities arising from the business of producing, refrigerating and transporting a food product. Also, water rights, locally grown forages, hay, and commodities would need to be purchased by Corrections Industries, placing the program in direct competition with local farmers, ranchers and dairy producers. It would create a conflict of interest for us to be associated in any way with the Corrections Industries goat farm as taxpayers and as dairymen.

We are aware of the "Roots of Success" program being offered to certain inmates within the New Mexico prison system. Forced participation in the "Roots of Success" program as mandated by Corrections Industries does not seem to fit into our dairy worker training program. The requirement for "Roots of Success" participants to purchase a book and study materials does not seem appropriate to impose upon the inmate dairy workers, as many of them are very close to being released. Money that they would be forced to put towards participation in this program would be better saved now and used later to cover expenses the inmates will incur immediately upon their release. The Colorado recidivism reduction strategy refers to the "time period immediately following release from prison" as the riskiest. In a previous letter, we listed speakers who reside in surrounding communities and who would be willing to donate their time to present a wide variety of interesting topics that would enrich the experiences of our workers in many meaningful ways. These meetings would also help get the community more involved in the program.

We propose allowing the pilot program to continue with the same basic structure and with officers being on premises whenever inmates are present. Currently 15 inmates are rotating through day shifts at the Secondwind barn. 5 men work 6am-noon and 5 men work noon to 6pm. 5 men are off each day. One officer is on the premises daily for a 12 hour shift.

We could easily expand the existing program by curtailing the inmate day shifts at Secondwind and instead employing inmates to serve as night milkers at both the Secondwind and the Southwind milking barns. They could cover two night shifts, 6pm-12m and 12m-6am. Only one officer, provided with a dairy vehicle, would be needed to supervise 10 men at a time. This would allow at least 30 men to participate in the rotating schedule, while still only utilizing one officer for each 12 hour period.

10 men on the job @ \$7.50 per hour x 12 hours each day x 365 days each year amounts to: \$328,500 gross pay generated by 30 men participating.
15% of gross pay for Victims Restitution Fund = \$49,275
20% of gross pay for Cost of Confinement = \$65,700
15% of gross pay for Mandatory Gate Fund = \$49,275 This 15% might be a point of compromise, possibly by using it to help RCC defray costs of officers and transportation and taking it off the inmate side of the ledger.

This leaves 50% of total earnings, which amounts to \$164,250. Perhaps the mandatory gate fund deduction could come from this half of the earnings instead of the other half which could be designated for RCC. If 30 men are participating and they get to keep 50% of what they have earned, each man could save a maximum of \$5475 per year, which should be enough to cover one to two months worth of living expenses after release. A real benefit for the Corrections Department is that these funds originate from a private sector business activity and require very little financial input from taxpayers.

If, in addition to the proposed night shift, we continue to staff the day shift at Secondwind with inmates, and we utilize a few select inmates to perform other tasks in farming, repairs, and calf care during the day at Southwind, we could employ at least an additional 8-10 men per 6 hour shift each day, creating a need for 30 more participants and resulting in doubling all of the above figures. Compare these figures to the current "in prison" work opportunities. In the 10 man scenario outlined above, earning \$.75 per hour would result in only \$4,927 in Victim Restitution per year, \$ 0 in Cost of Confinement, and only \$54 for gate fund per man per year.

Surely it is within the power of the Corrections Department to display some flexibility and to exercise some decision making options here so that this program is not stalemated out of existence. Work with us to continue to make this promising new program available for select groups of New Mexico inmates.

We invite each of you to tour our dairy and learn more about the program, but we request that any visits be planned ahead of time so that we may be present. While we defer to your expertise in supervising inmates, we must impose our rules for maintaining biosecurity and for limiting the access of outsiders to our farm and dairy.

Sincerely,

Al, Linda, and Bill Squire