



Work Release Program for Farmers and Food Producers

Did you know the Dept. of Corrections provides some inmates agricultural training?

Many correctional facilities have farms and many inmates receive not only hands on experience cultivating vegetables, gleaning crops, and caring for livestock but also have access to nearly 200 hours of farm related course work. Through the Work Release program you can access a pool of reliable, motivated, and trained farm workers.

This factsheet will provide you with the basics of what is required by the employer, the limitations on working with this population, and the benefits and incentives for the employer and employee for participating in this innovative, community building opportunity.

Who is eligible for work release?

Inmates who are within 2 years of their release date may apply for work release. Their work release application is examined by several tiers of program staff before a determination is made. Many have already completed community service opportunities prior to entering work release.

What skills/credentials do inmates have?

- Several facilities have farms which include hands-on programming in areas such as greenhouse management, vegetable growing, beef cattle, pigs, and rehabilitating animal welfare cases.
- Many facilities offer a 40-hour Master Gardener course, a 24-hour Maine Compost School program, an 8-hour Pesticide Applicators course, MOFGA seminars, 30-hour Bee Keeping course, 80-Hour NCCER Construction course, and course work on equipment maintenance, marketing and management, welding, electrical, automotive, plumbing, masonry, among others.
- The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and other non-profit entities have utilized inmates to glean food and assist with hunger relief programs.

What are the benefits of hiring work release employees?

- Many inmates have already received practical and hands-on experience in agriculture.
- Inmates can work flexible hours and double shifts.
- Housing is not needed as inmates must return to the facility.
- Wages go directly to help inmates pay off fines, restitutions, and/or child support if applicable.
- Many inmates have a background in the trades and are comfortable around equipment and manual work.
- During reentry planning, inmates consider the ability to continue working for the employer upon reentry.
- Inmates who utilize the program to pay off fines and acquire some savings have lower rates of recidivism.
- Inmates may assist with the cost of transportation to/from the work site.
- There are no rules around pay parity in relation to non-incarcerated employees.

What are the rules, requirements, and limitations?

- Payroll must be set up directly with the Department of Corrections (DOC).
- DOC staff conducts periodic site visits that may include a K-9 unit.
- Typically, employers are located within 50 miles of the facility, though there can be exceptions.
- Employers must carry some form of workplace injury insurance, e.g workmen’s compensation insurance.
- Inmates cannot be responsible for handling money.
- Employers cannot allow inmates access to phones and/or computers.
- Transportation of inmates to and from the job is typically the responsibility of employer. However, DOC may be available to assist with transportation needs on an individual basis. FMI contact a Community Programs Coordinator.
- Individuals who transport employees to the job site must undergo a background check.

Employer incentives and services

- Work Opportunity Tax Credit—If you employ an ex-felon within a year of their release you may claim a tax credit of **25%** of first-year wages for those employed at least 120 hours, or \$1,500; and **40%** for those employed 400 hours or more, or \$2,400. No limit on the number of ex-felons employed. FMI: <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/work-opportunity-tax-credit>
- \$5,000 federal bonding program—No cost insurance for any employer or job. www.bonds4jobs.com

Is this right for my business?

DOC and Maine Dept. of Labor host hiring seminars where you can hear from other companies who have participated in work release, meet potential employees, and get other resources. FMI on these seminars contact: Anna.Black@Maine.gov or 207-530-3794.

If you are ready to get started contact your nearest Community Programs Coordinator to discuss your employment opportunities and have an onsite evaluation.

Some facilities include:

Bolduc Correctional Facility - 512 Cushing Road, Warren

Mae Worcester, Community Programs Coordinator, Mae.Worcester@maine.gov Phone: 207-557-2098

Southern Maine Women’s Reentry Center - 230 River Road, Windham

Mary LaRoche, Community Programs Coordinator, Mary.LaRoche@maine.gov Phone: 207-458-6725

Cumberland County Community Corrections Center - 36 County Way, Portland

Mark Renna, Community Programs Officer, Renna@cumberlandcounty.org Phone: 207-774-5939 x2131

Mountain View Correctional Facility - 1182 Dover Road, Charleston

Thomas Kirlin, Community Programs Coordinator, Thomas.Kirlin@maine.gov Phone: 207-592-5956

Somerset County Jail - 131 East Madison Rd, Madison

Michael Welch, Programs Manager, Michael.Welch@Somersetcounty-me.org Phone: 207-858-9566