

Menard Correctional Center Sustainability

The Menard Correctional Center is host to a variety of sustainability initiatives, several of which have earned state and national recognition. The goal of Menard's staff has been to grow these efforts beyond the prison's walls by working with fellow stakeholders to help build a sense of sustainability that reaches to the main streets of local communities.



Recycling



The Illinois Correctional Industries (ICI) Recycling Program is located at Menard Correctional Center and has been operating since 1997. Over the years, the operation has steadily grown. What began as a cost-saving measure to pull used cardboard from the center's waste stream and compact the cardboard with a used baler has grown to collecting and processing recyclables from a number of state-operated facilities as well as most of the municipalities in Randolph County where the facility is located.

The program has been successful conducting "special event recycling operations," such as the recycling event conducted in partnership with DuQuoin State Fair.



A modest expansion of the Recycling Processing Center has allowed conversion to a single stream processing system to be implemented. The improved method will allow local communities to offer curbside pickup of mixed recyclables. Steeleville was the first local partner to take advantage of

this new service; it began curbside pickup of recyclables in the community on April 25, 2012, during Earth Week.

Gardens

Menard Correctional Center has a robust gardening program that provides fresh produce to the Dietary Department as well as gardening and horticulture skills to assigned offenders. Many of the center's offenders come from metropolitan areas; therefore, the "urban gardening" approach has been adopted to grow more of the facility's own food. The concept teaches offenders how to produce the highest yields in limited available space as would be typical in an urban high population area.



The goal is to have offenders take the skills with them when they return to their communities where vacant urban areas can be utilized for food production, helping reverse the trend of food deserts in many inner cities. This is an effective tool in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, since it facilitates access to food by an impoverished sector of the urban population. Low-income urban dwellers spend between 40 percent and 60 percent of their income on food each year. Additionally, 250 million hungry people in the world live in cities.

Composting

Composting food scraps helps mitigate the facility's production of solid waste and provides vital nutrients to the facility's many garden plots. As a part of the center's urban garden initiative, food prep scraps are collected in a cooperative effort with ICI. This important program helps to demonstrate the "Circle of Sustainability" to offenders participating in the effort. Offenders working in Dietary are taught that food scraps collected are composted and used to nourish and improve gardens, which produce some food they are preparing.

Rain Barrels



Illinois has been called the "Rain Barrel Capitol of the United States" and Menard ICI has played a large role in helping the state earn that designation. The respective chemical components for ICI's "green" cleaning products are shipped in 55 gallon plastic drums. Responsibly disposing hundreds of empty drums accumulated annually had presented problem for staff. Converting the empty drums into rain barrels serves as an example of a successful "Waste to Profit" Project. The manufacture of rain barrels also helps to grow "green collar" vocational training experience and presents another opportunity to instill the sustainability concept to offenders assigned to the programs. The ICI Rain Barrel Initiative has resulted in more than 2,000 rain barrels being placed throughout the state. Among the more prominent locations where ICI rain barrels can be found are the State Fairgrounds and Executive Mansion.

Individuals interested in purchasing rain barrels can find more information on the [ICI webpage](#).

Green Cleaning Products

ICI produces a wide variety of ["Green" cleaning products](#). Including USEPA Design for the Environment (DfE) certified cleaners as well as many items produced from "bio-renewable" and recycled content materials.

Additionally, all materials are 100 percent recyclable that ICI products are packaged and shipped in. ICI will also take back the center's containers and packaging to be reused or recycled.



ICI acts responsibly with its own industrial waste instead of landfilling textile scraps from the Menard Knit Shop. The center recycles and processes scraps, which go to mills in the U.S. to be made into items such as mop yarns. Rope mops are only one of many products produced in the Knit Shop, which has been in operation for more than a century.

Green Job Training

A common bond of the center's sustainability initiatives is to provide "green collar" job training opportunities to assigned offenders. The center has pioneered the effort to provide offender training in this rapid growing segment of Illinois' economy; it's an effort that is being replicated at many facilities across the state.

Additionally, many assigned offenders qualify for Industry good conduct credits. The statutorily codified program allows inmates with pristine institutional records to 'earn' time off their sentences for completing progress toward defined vocational goals.

