



The Sustainable Food Trust's Harmony Project

An Action Plan for Greener Prisons

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'Green prisons could be key for improving wellbeing and reducing reoffending'

A new report by the Sustainable Food Trust's Harmony Project (SFT) [1] recommends that prisons in the UK should provide more opportunities for inmates to connect with the natural world with the goal of improving the wellbeing of staff and prisoners and supporting rehabilitation.

'An Action Plan For Greener Prisons' draws on research which indicates that access to the natural world, such as having the opportunity to grow food and work with animals, can improve mental wellbeing and reduce stress, anxiety and depression. Studies also suggest that active hands-on engagement with nature is effective in supporting marginalized people to reintegrate into society. This is a result of facilitating skills development, which builds self-confidence, provides meaningful activity and develops a deeper sense of responsibility. Within a prison context, horticultural programmes in particular have been proven to offer multiple benefits to prisoners.

In light of our research, our ongoing discussions with staff at HMP Bristol [2] and with the goal of improving staff and prisoner wellbeing, the SFT recommends that prisons across the UK look to:

- Increase opportunities for horticultural education and cookery classes
- Introduce animal husbandry and beekeeping courses
- Create a more harmonious interior colour therapy
- Optimise natural light and the presence of indoor plants
- Make use of video and photographic content depicting the natural world
- Increase the planting of pollinator-friendly, native plants across the prison
- Make use of food grown on-site for catering

Despite 97% of prisoners expressing a desire to stop offending, rates of reoffending in the UK have not fallen in recent years. Up to 48% of those who spend time in prison will go on to reoffend within a year. The Government estimates that reoffending costs the taxpayer £18 billion a year.

The Government has now recognised the urgent need for innovative solutions by allowing prison governors greater flexibility and control. International studies have shown that connection with nature can improve mental wellbeing, which fosters prisoner rehabilitation into society upon release and can help reduce rates of reoffending. This presents an opportunity to adopt policies that create 'greener prisons' and could see increased support for growing spaces, nature-inspired design, and improved educational training to help tackle the growing problems associated with mental health,

nutritional health and substance dependency, while delivering improvements to prisoner post-sentence employment opportunities.

In support of this report, James Lucas, Governor of HMP Bristol says:

“At HMP Bristol, we want to transition to a more sustainable future. Our goal is to embed sustainability at the heart of the prison environment. We believe that there are considerable benefits to prisoners and staff to considering a new, more environmental approach and we support innovative solutions. Consequently, we welcome the publication of this report by the Sustainable Food Trust and will continue to collaborate with The Harmony Project team to explore these ideas.”

More broadly, the report recognises the positive impact that land-based activities can have on prisoner wellbeing.

Patrick Holden, Chief Executive of the SFT says:

“The separation from the natural world and lack of opportunity to produce some of our own food that has accompanied urbanisation and agricultural intensification is a cause of many of society’s broader problems. But as this report shows, finding ways to give prisoners access to more green space as well as providing land-based activities such as gardening and horticulture, could bring significant improvements in the mental health and wellbeing of the prison population, where that separation is more extreme than elsewhere.”

Richard Dunne, Director of Education for The Harmony Project says:

“Building upon the clear benefits to wellbeing that an increase in green space can provide prison residents and staff, there is huge potential for educational projects linked to the natural world. Not only could this integrated approach provide a real sense of purpose, but it could help to catalyse diverse ideas to help tackle some of the broader challenges facing the prison system”

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Notes for Editors

[1] The Harmony Project is part of the Sustainable Food Trust, an organisation working to accelerate the transition to more sustainable food and farming systems. The Harmony Project forms an integral part of the SFT’s wider educational work and its commitment to promote an understanding of the impact our choices and actions have on the world, in which everything is connected. The SFT was

founded in 2011 by Patrick Holden CBE, former director of the Soil Association and the SFT's current chief executive.

[2] HMP Bristol is a Category B men's prison with an operational capacity of 520. The SFT has been working with HMP Bristol since the start of 2019. Prison leadership has already implemented several of the recommendations outlined in the SFT's report including planting pollinator-friendly plants across the prison, displaying photographs of the natural world and introducing chickens.