Social and environmental dimensions of prison agriculture
in Ark Valley, Sterling, and Buena Vista correctional facilities

METHODS: DATA COLLECTION

Mixed Methods: Qualitative & Quantitative Methods
This study designed to employ a two-pronged, mixed-methods approach
to data collection, employing both qualitative and quantitative data and
utilizing interview and survey methods. Mixed-methods offer the
opportunity to combine the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative
research methods, while navigating and overcoming the limits of each.

Interviews: This study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 4 out of 10 staff participants in the beekeeping course and facility programs, for a 40% response rate.

Survey: This study employed a survey that included both forced-choice and free-response components. Survey participation was very low, with only 1 out of the 10 total course participants completing and returning the survey. For this reason, survey findings were not quantitatively analyzed and instead are synthesized with reporting from interview findings.

FINDINGS: BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES

Trust, Responsibility, and Agency
The beekeeping program appears to help build trust between staff and incarcerated participants. Staff participants further emphasized how the incarcerated participants have taken on the primary responsibility for taking care of the bees, and through this means, staff also named the ownership and agency that the program has afforded incarcerated individuals as a primary benefit.

‘Greening’ and Beautification of Prison
The beekeeping program has led the facility to cultivate previously unmanaged plots of land, planting a variety of plants on unutilized areas of facility grounds as support for the bee program. The resulting planted areas, and the aesthetic improvements they created are one of the primary beneficial outcomes of the bee program overall.

Stress Relief, Morale, and Mental Health
The beekeeping program offers opportunities for stress relief and to improve mental health of both staff and incarcerated participants. The beekeeping program offers reprieve from the limited and mundane day-to-day experiences of incarceration. Staff participants also experience important opportunities for improved mental health for them personally.

FINDINGS: LIMITATIONS & BARRIERS

COVID Impacts
One of the central limitations to the development and flourishing of the beekeeping program is the rise of the COVID-19 virus and the impact of pandemic conditions, limiting staff capacity, the ability to access outside support and resources, and the ability to formalize the program.

Organization opacity & lack of clear objectives
The second primary barrier to the beekeeping program in the first year is organizational opacity and a lack of clear program objectives among participants. All staff participants named an uncertainty about the purposes of the beekeeping program and its goals.

Lack of ongoing program support
All staff participants spoke about the need to reach out for additional forms of support since the creation of the program and while staff were successful in accessing additional support, others feeling inadequately prepared to run the programs and were unable to access the resources they needed.

Lack of access to additional learning resources
The structure of the beekeeping course itself carried with it some limitation, specifically, the lack of engagement through and with different kinds of learning resources and modalities. The reliance on extensive readings and lack of hands-on learning opportunities was a challenge for some participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarify program objectives across all participants & stakeholders
All stakeholders should be more clearly involved in identifying the objectives of the program. Having a purpose and goals that are clear to all participants and decision-makers can help guide decision-making and program design as the Beekeeping program grows, develops, and formalizes.

Build broad program support for beekeeping staff & participants
This study recommends building a structure for ongoing support and resources into the program design. Overall, it will be important moving forward for all program staff to have ongoing support and resources to enable them to better encounter and overcome challenges with the program.

Incorporate multimedia materials into beekeeping curriculum
This study recommends that future courses incorporate and prioritize the use of multimedia resources, in addition to the text, as well as opportunities for hands-on beekeeping opportunities during the course.