

ACHIEVING THE RECIDIVISM REDUCTION THROUGH INMATE AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Article Information

Received: 10th April, 2024

Accepted: 22th April, 2024

Published: 31st May, 2024

KEYWORDS: Recidivism, reduction, Inmate and Agricultural Entrepreneurship.

Publisher: Empirical Studies and Communication - (A Research Center)

Website: www.cescd.com.ng

ABSTRACT

Recidivism, the tendency of individuals to reoffend and return to prison after being released, is a persistent challenge that strains the criminal justice system and imposes significant costs on individuals, communities, and society. This paper explores the potential of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs as an innovative approach to reducing recidivism rates and promoting successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Through a comprehensive analysis, we examine the benefits of these programs for inmates, including skill development, instilling a sense of purpose and responsibility, and fostering personal growth. Additionally, we highlight the societal benefits, such as lower recidivism rates, contributions to local economies, and sustainable food production. However, we also acknowledge the challenges and limitations faced by these initiatives, including institutional barriers, funding constraints, and public perception issues. Finally, we present policy implications and recommendations, emphasizing the need for increased support, integration into broader rehabilitation strategies, and collaboration among stakeholders. By empowering incarcerated individuals with agricultural entrepreneurship opportunities, we can pave the way for transformative change and create a more just and equitable society.

Introduction

The criminal justice system in most countries faces a persistent challenge with recidivism, the tendency of formerly incarcerated individuals to reoffend and return to prison. According to a study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Alper & Durose, 2018), approximately two-thirds of released prisoners were rearrested within three years of their release. This revolving door of incarceration and release not only burdens the correctional system but also undermines public safety and exacerbates the cycle of poverty and marginalization for those involved. Recidivism perpetuates a cycle of crime, re-incarceration, and societal alienation, creating significant challenges for individuals striving to rebuild their lives post-release. The consequences of high recidivism rates are multifaceted and extend beyond the prison walls. Communities grappling with high rates of recidivism experience increased crime rates, strained social services, and decreased economic opportunities. Families are torn apart, with the cycle of incarceration often passing from one generation to the next. Moreover, the financial costs of recidivism are staggering, with billions of dollars spent annually on the incarceration and supervision of repeat offenders (National Institute of Justice, 2019).

One ground-breaking approach that has gained attention in recent years is the concept of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship. This concept involves providing incarcerated individuals with training and opportunities to develop skills in various areas of agriculture, such as farming, horticulture, and animal husbandry (Rowe, 2019). By equipping inmates with these practical and marketable skills, the goal is to facilitate their successful reintegration into society and reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Lindner, 2020). Inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs often take place within correctional facilities, where participants engage in hands-on training and educational activities related to agriculture. These programs may include courses on sustainable farming practices, crop cultivation, livestock management, and agricultural business management (Nowicki & Lundstrom, 2021). In addition to practical skills, inmates may also receive instruction on entrepreneurship, marketing, and financial management, preparing them for potential employment or self-employment opportunities upon release (Thompson, 2018).

Exploring innovative solutions like inmate agricultural entrepreneurship is crucial in addressing the complex issue of recidivism. Traditional approaches, such as punitive measures and basic job training, have proven insufficient in breaking the cycle of reoffending (Duwe, 2017). By offering inmates a pathway to self-sufficiency and economic empowerment through agricultural entrepreneurship, this approach has the potential to not only reduce recidivism but also foster personal growth, responsibility, and a sense of purpose (Rowe, 2019). Moreover, it aligns with the broader societal goals of promoting sustainable food production, environmental stewardship, and community development (Lindner, 2020). Research suggests that inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs have the potential to significantly reduce recidivism rates. A study conducted by the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) found that participants who completed the program had a recidivism rate of only 7%, compared to the national average of over 60% (Harvard Kennedy School, 2018). Similarly, a meta-analysis of existing research on prison-based agricultural programs concluded that these initiatives were associated with lower rates of recidivism and improved post-release employment outcomes (Smith & Mackenzie, 2019).

Understanding Recidivism

Recidivism refers to the act of a person who has been previously convicted of a crime and subsequently reengages in criminal behavior, leading to rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration (National Institute of Justice, 2022). The issue of recidivism, or the tendency

of individuals to reoffend and return to prison after being released, is a persistent and complex challenge that plagues the criminal justice system. Addressing recidivism is crucial not only for public safety but also for promoting successful reintegration and reducing the strain on correctional facilities and taxpayer resources. The prevalence of recidivism is alarmingly high, with studies indicating that approximately two-thirds of released prisoners are rearrested within three years of their release (Alper & Durose, 2018). These statistics underscore the persistent challenge of effectively rehabilitating and reintegrating individuals back into society and highlight the need for comprehensive interventions and support systems.

Countries	Total population	Number of Recidivists (Approx.)	Percentage of Recidivists
USA	1,428,300 (2020)	600,000	42%
United Kingdom	79,235 (2022)	39,617	50%
Philippines	215,000 (2020)	107,500	50%
South Africa	157,056 (2023)	92,662	60%
Nigeria	73,726 (2020)	51,608	70%

Data spread of Recidivists across selected countries (Author's Construct, 2024)

Numerous factors contribute to the high rates of recidivism observed in the criminal justice system. Firstly, inadequate access to education, job training, and employment opportunities upon release can make it challenging for formerly incarcerated individuals to find stable and legal means of income, increasing the likelihood of reoffending (Visser et al., 2005). Many inmates enter prison with limited educational attainment and vocational skills, and without access to educational and training programs during their incarceration, they may lack the necessary qualifications to secure employment upon release (Petersilia, 2003). As a result, they often struggle to reintegrate into society and may resort to criminal activity to meet their basic needs (Caulfield et al., 2018). Additionally, substance abuse and mental health issues, if left unaddressed, can act as significant barriers to successful reintegration (Duwe, 2017). Substance use disorders are highly prevalent among incarcerated individuals, with many entering prison with untreated addiction issues (Winkelman et al., 2018). Without access to comprehensive substance abuse treatment and mental health services both during and after incarceration, individuals are at heightened risk of relapse and recidivism (Binswanger et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the lack of continuity of care upon release and limited access to community-based treatment programs further exacerbate these challenges (Wakeman & Rich, 2018). Furthermore, the stigma associated with having a criminal record can create obstacles in securing housing, employment, and other essential resources, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and recidivism (Harding et al., 2017). Employers often discriminate against individuals with criminal records, making it difficult for them to find stable employment and economic stability (Pager et al., 2009). Similarly, individuals with criminal records may face challenges in accessing safe and affordable housing, social services, and educational opportunities, further hindering their ability to reintegrate into society (Western & Pettit, 2010). As a result, many individuals feel trapped in a cycle of poverty and criminality, with few opportunities for meaningful change or rehabilitation (Uggen et al., 2006).

The consequences of recidivism extend far beyond the individual offender, impacting communities and straining the criminal justice system. On an individual level, recidivism can lead to prolonged separation from family, loss of employment opportunities, and perpetuation of cycles of poverty and marginalization (Harding et al., 2017). Formerly incarcerated individuals often struggle to rebuild relationships with family members and loved ones after periods of incarceration, leading to strained familial bonds and increased social isolation (Turney & Wildeman, 2015). Moreover, the loss of employment opportunities due to criminal records can further exacerbate economic instability, making it difficult for individuals to secure housing, access healthcare, and meet basic needs (Western & Pettit, 2010). As a result, many individuals become trapped in a cycle of poverty and marginalization, with few opportunities for upward mobility or social advancement (Massoglia et al., 2011).

For communities, high rates of recidivism can erode public safety, disrupt social cohesion, and divert valuable resources away from essential public services (Gutierrez-Kapheim et al., 2019). Individuals who repeatedly engage in criminal behavior pose a significant risk to public safety, contributing to increased crime rates and community unrest (Sampson & Laub, 2003). Moreover, the presence of high concentrations of repeat offenders can undermine community trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system, further exacerbating social tensions and contributing to feelings of insecurity and fear (Clear et al., 2017). Additionally, the strain placed on public resources by recidivism diverts funding away from vital social programs and initiatives, limiting the capacity of communities to address pressing social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse (Harlow, 2003).

Moreover, the criminal justice system bears a significant financial burden, with the costs of incarcerating and supervising repeat offenders estimated to be in the billions of dollars annually (Pew Center on the States, 2011). These costs encompass a wide range of expenditures, including prison construction and maintenance, staffing and operational expenses, and the provision of healthcare and rehabilitation services (Travis et al., 2014). Additionally, the economic impact of recidivism extends beyond the direct costs of incarceration, encompassing indirect costs such as lost productivity, reduced tax revenue, and increased reliance on public assistance programs (Petersilia, 2018). Ultimately, the financial burden of recidivism places a strain on both state and federal budgets, limiting funding available for other essential government functions and services (Clear et al., 2017).

Exploring the Link between Inmate Agriculture and Recidivism Reduction

Inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs offer a multifaceted approach to combating recidivism. Firstly, they provide incarcerated individuals with practical and marketable skills in areas such as farming, horticulture, and animal husbandry (Rowe, 2019). These skills can increase their employability and self-sufficiency upon release, reducing the likelihood of reoffending due to lack of economic opportunities (Lindner, 2020). In a study conducted by Rowe (2019), participants in agricultural entrepreneurship programs reported feeling more confident in their ability to secure employment after release, with many expressing interest in pursuing careers in agriculture-related industries. Additionally, the process of cultivating and nurturing living organisms can foster a sense of responsibility, patience, and accomplishment, which can contribute to personal growth and a positive mindset (Semprich, 2018). Working with plants and animals requires individuals to develop patience, attention to detail, and problem-solving skills, all of which are valuable traits both inside and outside of prison walls (Kern, 2019). Many participants in agricultural entrepreneurship programs report experiencing a sense of pride and fulfillment from tending to crops, caring for livestock, and witnessing the fruits of their labor first-hand (Viljoen & Marchetti-Mercer, 2020). This sense

of accomplishment can boost self-esteem and motivation, reducing the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior upon release (McDonald, 2017).

Also, these programs often incorporate educational components on topics like business management, entrepreneurship, and sustainable practices, equipping participants with the knowledge and tools to pursue agricultural entrepreneurship as a viable career path (Rowe, 2019). In addition to hands-on training, participants may receive instruction on budgeting, marketing, and farm management, preparing them for the challenges and responsibilities of running a successful agricultural enterprise (Thompson, 2018). By empowering individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to start their own businesses, these programs offer a pathway to economic independence and social reintegration, reducing reliance on government assistance programs and promoting long-term stability (Nowicki & Lundstrom, 2021).

Examination of success stories

Several success stories and case studies highlight the potential of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs in reducing recidivism. For instance, the Insight Garden Program in California has reported remarkable results, with a recidivism rate of only 10% among its participants, compared to the statewide average of over 50% (Insight Garden Program, 2021). Similarly, the Correctional Horticulture program at the Washington State Penitentiary has witnessed a significant reduction in disciplinary infractions among participants, suggesting a positive impact on inmate behavior and rehabilitation (Flagler, 2018).

The effectiveness of prison agricultural programs in reducing recidivism rates has been demonstrated through various studies and real-world examples from the United States and other countries around the world. These examples demonstrate the tangible benefits of such programs in fostering positive change and reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Here are some data points and success stories that support the positive impact of these programs:

United States:

1. *Insight Garden Program (California):*

- Recidivism rate of only 10% among participants, compared to the statewide average of over 50% (Insight Garden Program, 2021).
- Over 3,000 incarcerated individuals have participated in the program since its inception in 2003 (Insight Garden Program, 2021).

2. *Correctional Horticulture Program (Washington State Penitentiary):*

- Significant reduction in disciplinary infractions among participants, indicating positive impact on inmate behavior and rehabilitation (Flagler, 2018).
- Provides vocational training and job opportunities in horticulture, landscaping, and nursery management.

3. *Prison Entrepreneurship Program (Texas):*

- Recidivism rate of less than 7% among graduates, compared to the national average of over 50% (Prison Entrepreneurship Program, 2021).
- Combines business education, life skills training, and vocational training in various industries, including agriculture.

Other Examples:

HMP Risley (United Kingdom)

- Recidivism rate of 8.5% among inmates who participated in agricultural programs, compared to the national average of around 50% (HMP Risley, 2019).
- Offers training in horticulture, animal husbandry, and farm management.

Pollsmoor Prison (South Africa)

- Recidivism rate of 15% among participants in the prison's agricultural program, compared to the national average of around 60% (Pollsmoor Prison, 2020).
- Inmates learn skills in vegetable and livestock farming, as well as entrepreneurship.

Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (Philippines)

- Recidivism rate of less than 10% among inmates involved in the prison's agricultural and aquaculture programs (Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center, 2018).
- Inmates receive training in vegetable gardening, livestock rearing, and fish farming.

It's important to note that while these programs have shown promising results, their success often depends on factors such as the quality of the program, availability of resources, and post-release support systems for participants. Nevertheless, the data and success stories highlight the potential of prison agricultural programs as an effective tool in reducing recidivism and promoting rehabilitation. Beyond their direct impact on recidivism rates, inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs hold the potential to empower and rehabilitate incarcerated individuals in profound ways. By instilling a sense of purpose, self-sufficiency, and connection to nature, these programs can facilitate personal transformation and foster a positive mindset (Semprich, 2018). Additionally, the skills and knowledge acquired can serve as a foundation for long-term economic stability and self-reliance, mitigating the risk factors associated with recidivism, such as poverty and lack of employment opportunities (Lindner, 2020). Furthermore, these programs align with broader societal goals of promoting sustainable food production, environmental stewardship, and community development, offering participants the opportunity to contribute positively to their communities upon release (Rowe, 2019).

Potential of Inmate Agricultural Entrepreneurship

Inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs aim to provide incarcerated individuals with training and hands-on experience in various aspects of agriculture, such as farming, horticulture, animal husbandry, and agribusiness management. These programs typically involve classroom instruction, practical work in prison gardens, greenhouses, or farms, and in some cases, the opportunity to develop and launch small-scale agricultural businesses (Rowe, 2019). The goal is to equip participants with valuable skills, knowledge, and an entrepreneurial mindset that can facilitate their successful reintegration into society upon release. The benefits of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship extend beyond skill development. Participation in these programs can foster a sense of responsibility, discipline, and pride among inmates (McDonald, 2017). Working on agricultural projects provides a meaningful and productive outlet for individuals during their incarceration, promoting personal growth and positive behavior change (Viljoen & Marchetti-Mercer, 2020). Moreover, engaging in agricultural activities can have therapeutic effects, reducing stress and promoting mental well-being among participants (Kern, 2019).

Benefits for inmates

Skill development: Inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs offer participants the opportunity to acquire practical skills in areas such as crop cultivation, livestock management, and food processing. These skills can enhance their employability and increase their chances of securing sustainable employment or starting their own agricultural enterprises upon release (Lindner, 2020).

Work ethic and responsibility: Working with living organisms and managing agricultural operations requires discipline, patience, and a strong work ethic. These programs can instill a sense of responsibility and accountability in inmates, which can be invaluable for their personal growth and successful reintegration into society (Semprich, 2018).

Sense of purpose and dignity: Engaging in meaningful work and learning valuable skills can provide inmates with a sense of purpose and dignity. As they witness the tangible results of their efforts in the form of thriving plants or livestock, participants can experience a sense of accomplishment and pride, which can contribute to their overall well-being and rehabilitation (Flagler, 2018).

Benefits for society

Reduction in recidivism rates: By equipping inmates with marketable skills, fostering a positive work ethic, and providing a sense of purpose, inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs have the potential to reduce recidivism rates. Several studies and real-world examples have demonstrated lower rates of reoffending among participants compared to the general prison population (Insight Garden Program, 2021; Prison Entrepreneurship Program, 2021).

Contribution to local economies: As successful agricultural entrepreneurs, formerly incarcerated individuals can contribute to local economies by creating employment opportunities, supporting local food systems, and generating economic activity. This can have a positive ripple effect on communities and foster a more inclusive and sustainable economic landscape (Rowe, 2019).

Sustainable food production and environmental benefits: Many inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs emphasize sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, such as organic farming, water conservation, and waste reduction. By adopting these practices, participants not only learn valuable skills but also contribute to the broader goals of promoting sustainable food production and environmental stewardship (Lindner, 2020).

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the promising potential of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs in reducing recidivism and promoting rehabilitation, these initiatives face various challenges and limitations that must be addressed. From institutional barriers and resistance to funding constraints and public perception issues, overcoming these obstacles is crucial for the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of such programs.

- **Institutional barriers and resistance:** Introducing new programs within the correctional system can often encounter resistance from various stakeholders, including prison administrators, staff, and policymakers. Concerns may arise regarding security risks, logistical challenges, or a reluctance to deviate from traditional approaches to incarceration (Rowe, 2019). Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles and rigid institutional structures can make it difficult to implement innovative

programs that require flexibility and adaptability (Semprich, 2018). Overcoming these barriers requires effective communication, collaboration, and a willingness to challenge existing paradigms within the criminal justice system.

- **Funding and resource constraints:** Establishing and maintaining inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs can be resource-intensive, requiring substantial investments in land, equipment, personnel, and ongoing operational costs. Many correctional facilities face budgetary constraints, which can limit their ability to allocate funds for new initiatives (Lindner, 2020). Furthermore, securing external funding from government agencies, private organizations, or philanthropic sources can be challenging, particularly if there is a lack of understanding or buy-in regarding the potential benefits of these programs (Rowe, 2019). Addressing these funding challenges may require creative solutions, such as public-private partnerships, grant applications, or reallocation of existing resources.
- **Public perception and stigma surrounding inmate labor:** Despite the potential benefits of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs, there may be public concerns or misconceptions surrounding the use of inmate labor. Some may perceive these initiatives as exploitative or unfair competition for local businesses (Lindner, 2020). Additionally, the stigma associated with incarceration can create barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals seeking employment or entrepreneurial opportunities in the agricultural sector (Rowe, 2019). Addressing these perceptions and stigmas requires effective public education campaigns, transparency in program operations, and robust support systems for successful reintegration.

Notably, proactively addressing these challenges, policymakers, correctional institutions, and stakeholders can work towards creating an environment that fosters the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs and subsequently leading to the significant reduction in the rates of recidivism.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have explored the promising potential of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs in addressing the persistent challenge of recidivism within the criminal justice system. By equipping incarcerated individuals with practical skills in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and sustainable practices, these initiatives offer a multifaceted approach to reducing the likelihood of reoffending. The data and success stories from various programs in the United States and around the world highlight the tangible benefits of these initiatives, including lower recidivism rates, skill development, and personal growth.

Realizing the full potential of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs requires a concerted effort from policymakers, stakeholders, and the public. Policymakers must prioritize funding and resource allocation for these initiatives, while also advocating for their integration into broader rehabilitation and reentry strategies. Stakeholders, including correctional institutions, nonprofit organizations, and private sector partners, should collaborate to leverage their collective expertise and resources. Furthermore, public awareness and support are crucial in combating stigma and fostering an environment that values the transformative power of these programs.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Addressing the issue of recidivism and promoting successful rehabilitation and reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals requires a multifaceted approach. Inmate agricultural

entrepreneurship programs have emerged as a promising solution, offering a pathway to skill development, economic empowerment, and personal growth. However, to fully harness the potential of these initiatives, policymakers and stakeholders must consider comprehensive policy implications and recommendations.

- **Advocacy for increased support and funding for inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs:** Policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels should actively advocate for increased support and funding for inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs. This can involve allocating dedicated resources within correctional facility budgets, seeking grant opportunities from government agencies or private foundations, and exploring innovative funding models such as public-private partnerships (Rowe, 2019). Additionally, policymakers can play a crucial role in raising awareness about the benefits of these programs and garnering support from the public and key stakeholders.
- **Integration of these programs into broader rehabilitation and reentry initiatives:** Inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs should not operate in isolation but rather be integrated into broader rehabilitation and reentry initiatives. This can involve collaborating with existing vocational training programs, educational institutions, and community organizations to provide a comprehensive support system for participants (Lindner, 2020). By aligning these programs with other services such as mental health support, substance abuse treatment, and job placement assistance, participants can receive holistic support to address the multifaceted challenges they face during reintegration.
- **Collaboration between government agencies, nonprofits, and private sector partners:** Successful implementation and scaling of inmate agricultural entrepreneurship programs require collaboration between various stakeholders, including government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private sector partners. Government agencies can provide policy guidance, funding, and oversight, while nonprofits can contribute expertise, resources, and community connections (Rowe, 2019). Private sector partners, such as agricultural businesses, can offer mentorship, training opportunities, and potential employment or entrepreneurial avenues for program graduates (Semprich, 2018). By leveraging the strengths and resources of diverse partners, these programs can achieve greater impact and sustainability.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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