

Combating prison recidivism with plants

September 6 2019



Inmates tending plants at Oregon's Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. Credit: John Vallis

A study out of Texas State University attempted to determine the number of available horticultural community service opportunities for individuals completing community service hours per their probation or parole requirements, and whether that brand of community service

generates a calculable offset against the common nature of repeat offenses for an inmate population once released.

Former graduate student Megan Holmes and her advisor Tina Waliczek delved into this complex topic, evaluating whether horticultural programs or exposure to horticultural settings can help to reduce the probability of recidivism. Their findings are detailed in the article 'The Effect of Horticultural Community Service Programs on Recidivism' available now in *HortTechnology*, an open-access journal published by the American Society for Horticultural Science.

Waliczek explains, "We became interested in this study because of observations made in our own campus garden where offenders often serve out community service sentences. Some of those serving would mention how they felt a sense of purpose and pride in working with the plants in the garden. Our study verified some of those initial observations."

As the researchers illustrate in their article, the average cost of housing a single inmate in the United States is roughly \$31,286 per year, bringing the total average cost states spend on corrections to nearly \$75 billion per year.

The United States currently incarcerates the greatest percentage of its population compared with any other nation in the world. Although the world average rate of incarceration is 166 individuals per 100,000, the US average is 750 per 100,000. And recidivism is a predictable factor of our criminal justice system.

Recidivism is the repetition of criminal behavior and reimprisonment of an offender and is one of the reasons for large inmate populations in the United States. Research tracked a total of 404,638 prisoners across 30 states for a span of 5 years and found 67.8% of prisoners released

reoffended within 3 years and a total of 76.6% reoffended within 5 years of being released. One third of those offenders were arrested within the first 6 months of being released.

Holmes added, "Further researching the role plants play on positively impacting an individual's life or decision to productively redirect their behavior has the potential to greatly benefit our society as a whole, long-term."

Past studies have shown that certain educational and rehabilitation efforts have helped to reduce a return to a life of crime. As a means of education and vocational rehabilitation, horticultural programs have been introduced into detention facilities across the United States. Many prisoners have participated in horticultural activities such as harvesting and maintaining their own vegetable gardens as a means of providing food for the institution, which can also serve as skill development for a means of earning income once released back into society.

Waliczek suggested, "Participation in horticultural programs upon being released from prison or while on probation partnered with educational and community service could provide a sense of meaning and purpose to offenders while also helping assist with a successful transition back into society."

In investigating the different types of community service opportunities available to offenders, Holmes and Waliczek found there were 52 different agencies available as options for community service during the time of the study. Of the 52 community service agencies, 25 of them provided horticultural work options.

The results and information gathered support the notion that horticultural activities can play an important role in influencing an offender's successful reentry into society. The researchers found that

individuals who engaged in horticultural programs demonstrated the lowest rate of recidivism over all other categories of released inmates.

Holmes interjected, "It was indeed notable the study found that those individuals who completed their community service requirements in a horticultural setting were less likely to recidivate when compared to those who completed their community service in a non-horticultural setting."

She further added, "I plan on continuing this research and studying the overall benefits of horticulture on the well-being and recidivism rates of both incarcerated juvenile and adult offenders on a larger scale."

More information: Megan Holmes et al, The Effect of Horticultural Community Service Programs on Recidivism, *HortTechnology* (2019). [DOI: 10.21273/HORTTECH04282-19](https://doi.org/10.21273/HORTTECH04282-19)

Provided by American Society for Horticultural Science

Citation: Combating prison recidivism with plants (2019, September 6) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-09-combating-prison-recidivism.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.