

# GRITS FOR BREAKFAST

WELCOME TO TEXAS JUSTICE: YOU MIGHT BEAT THE RAP, BUT YOU WON'T BEAT THE RIDE.

MONDAY, MAY 17, 2010

## Commissary Economics: Who Profits?

Matt Stiles at the Texas Tribune recently focused on "Buyers Behind Bars," creating an excellent [interactive graphic](#) showing what Texas prison inmates spend their money on.

Adding to that dataset on commissaries, I was interested to stumble onto a report at the Comptroller's [www.texas Transparency.org](http://www.texas Transparency.org) website that tells which companies benefited from inmate commissary sales. Go to [this page](#) to search spending by agency. Choose "Texas Department of Criminal Justice" for the agency and, say, 2009 for the fiscal year, the most recent complete one. (The app loads slowly on my computer, but works well once you pull the data down.) A page comes up portraying TDCJ's \$3.4 billion budget for 2009 in broad categories, including "Cost of Goods Sold."

Drilling down, we discover that TDCJ spent \$66,031,430.84 on goods purchased for resale, mostly for prison commissaries. (One wonders why J.P. Morgan Bank received \$6.9 million and Caldwell brokerage \$2.8 million under that category? The other payments seem more typical of what might go to commissary suppliers. and those seem like high finance costs for this function.)

Quite a few companies here making money from commissary customers, who are literally a captive market. Blue Bell Creameries alone sold TDCJ \$2.9 million worth of wholesale product.

Stiles said TDCJ inmates spent \$94.9 million on commissary fare in FY 2009. According to the comptroller, \$66 million of that paid for goods for repurchase (including nearly \$10 million to bank and broker). That's a generous 44% markup, so it's easy to see why TDCJ recommended diverting \$7 million in profits from commissary sales as part of the budget cuts it suggested in February. When not seized by the state, commissary profits are supposedly spent on inmate education and entertainment expenses, though I've never seen a precise breakdown.

**UPDATE:** Explains TDCJ spokesperson Michelle Lyons, "It's a JP Morgan

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Bank credit card that is used to purchase the U.S. Postage Stamps sold in the commissaries. And Caldwell Brokerage? It's actually a commissary distribution company from whom we have purchased quite a bit of trail mixes and other snacks that are popular with the inmates -- it's not a bank."

POSTED BY GRITSFORBREAKFAST AT 8:26 AM 

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LABELS: COMMISSARIES, TDCJ

#### 4 COMMENTS:

Anonymous said...

The "key word is supposedly. I like to see what money goes back for education or recreation programs. They seem to be in short shrift from the small sample I've seen.

5/17/2010 09:01:00 PM

TDCJEX said...

Anon 9:01.

That would be interesting to see considering that most educational programs outside of a GED classes are paid for by prisoners families or friends in the freeworld . I know that any college course is paid for by some oone in the freeworld . I think maybe the parenting and substance abuse programs are paid for out of this .It has been a while I can ask my gal .Bit She has not taken any thing other than college courses .They are mostly business type courses. Form my experience if you want to get a eduction in TDCJ you have to overcome many obstacles. TDCJ does not make it easy . If you do not have any freeworld support you are out of luck

See this on Grits or more

<http://gritsforbreakfast.blogspot.com/2010/05/texas-prisoners-cant-read-texas-prison.html>

In fact read the book Texas Tough it is very well researched book that will explain why we are at this point and a blog such as Grits exists . There is not much if correcting or rehabilitating going on in any prison in the US.

As for entertain met that consists of Television in the day room . If I recall right the television were provided by charitable organizations usually religious. .They have rec as long as they are in population

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