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How Is the New Canteen?

The crude short answer is that it sucks!

Let's talk prices to start with. Most items are more expensive - some by only a few pennies, some by quite a bit. For those items which are cheaper, it is because it's a lower-quality item. There is no benefit to prisoners to switching canteen vendors. The ones who benefit are prison staff and any prisoner who is lucky enough to have a job in the new canteen delivery warehouse. The reason staff benefit is because the new vendor, Union Supply, delivers canteen items differently from how the previous vendor, Keefe, delivered items. Keefe bagged up every prisoners' order separately, billed the prisoner and shipped directly to each prison. Union Supply ships canteen items in bulk to Badger State Industries which fills prisoners' orders and delivers them to the prisons. If there was an error with Keefe, the staff member would have to do an account adjustment to the affected prisoner's account. When BSI fills the order, the prisoner is not charged until after the order is prepared so he/she is only charged for what actually goes in the bag which means prison staff do not have to do account adjustments for missing items. There are still many missing items from orders, but since it no longer results in staff having to do any work the staff consider the new contract a success.

I have received 4 canteen orders from the new system and haven't spent over \$7 each time - one order was only \$2. Even with my small orders, I was shorted on orders twice. There are 2 reasons I'm spending so little: first of all, having been through canteen changes in the past I knew the new canteen was going to be worse so I stocked up on the hygiene items I normally use (also, I managed to see a copy of the Waupun prison price list before it took effect at Stanley and knew which prices were going up). Secondly, the bidding was based on prices for the exact same items they have been selling us for years. I am sick to death of the same crap they have been selling us for years and quit buying most of it years ago. Frankly, there's very little worth buying (to eat) on either the old or new canteen. It's easy not to spend money when the stuff I want is too expensive and the stuff I can afford, I don't want.

Here are some price changes (note the change in package sizes):

Item.	Old price.	New price
raisin bran 20 oz.	\$2.57	
raisin bran 15 oz.		\$3.05
tortilla chips 12 oz.	\$1.20.	\$2.23

raisins 6 pack.	\$2.00.	\$2.48
coffee 3 oz.	\$2.20.	\$2.29
coffee 3 oz. (worse quality as well)	\$2.95.	\$3.29
decaf coffee 3 oz.	\$2.65	
decaf coffee 4 oz. (the new decaf is so bad it's undrinkable)		\$1.89
Denture tablets.	\$1.29.	\$1.67
Colgate toothpaste (6 oz.)	\$3.69)	
Colgate toothpaste (3.3 oz.).		\$3.12
Freshmint Sensitive toothpaste.	\$0.79.	\$1.14
Dial Advanced Therapy Lotion (12 oz.).	\$2.14.	
Suave Advanced Therapy Lotion (10 oz.)		\$2.95
sodas (20 oz.).	\$1.16.	\$1.37

These are some of the more egregious price changes. Just about everything went up at least a few cents and often the quality was the same or worse. I would speculate that the Union Supply contract actually had mostly lower prices. But when BSI added their markup, that's when it got ridiculous. They could have kept the Keefe contract which would have allowed us to keep the same prices and product selection. It wasn't all that great but it was much better than the crap we have now. But that wouldn't have allowed them to pay a handful of prisoners \$1.60/hr and create a few high-paying DOC jobs to supervise the prisoner workers. On paper it looks like a win for everyone. It's only when you compare it to previous canteens that the unfairness becomes obvious.

And finally, if they stopped requiring a kickback from the vendors, things would be much cheaper.

There's nothing I can do about it but bear witness to it and share the facts on my blog.