

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office

Joe Arpaio, Sheriff



Date: May 29, 2009

AS HUNGER STRIKE FINALLY ENDS, ARPAIO TELLS INMATES TO PAY UP FOR BETTER TASTING FOOD

(Phoenix, AZ) As periodic inmate hunger strikes finally come to an end, Sheriff Joe Arpaio is announcing today that inmates will now have to pay for the privilege of better tasting food served in the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office jail system.

Over 9,000 inmates are incarcerated in Sheriff Arpaio's jail facilities, including Tent City, requiring the serving of nearly 12 million meals per year.

Since May 2, 2009, hundreds of predominately Hispanic inmates protesting Arpaio's illegal immigration policies completely stopped eating the dinner meal as a way to get public attention about the quality and taste of Arpaio's famously low cost inmate meals.

While the average cost of inmate meals has risen recently to nearly 35 cents each, inmate meal costs at Sheriff Arpaio's jails remain among the lowest in the nation. They may also be among the blandest tasting.

New guidelines suggested by food nutritionists are now being more strictly adhered to by the Sheriff's food service staff regarding use of sodium and other food enhancements during food preparation. Since adhering to these guidelines, inmate grievances concerning the taste of the food have greatly escalated.

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"For years, food has been the chief complaint by inmates," Arpaio says. "I've always responded to them by saying I don't run a first class hotel. I do recognize that the dinner meal has recently declined in flavor and I've decided to do something about it."

Because the county is in dire straits financially and his own agency has recently been cut a staggering \$11 million, Arpaio says he will not increase food costs by purchasing tasty food additives like salt, pepper, and other condiments. In fact, Arpaio ceased serving salt and pepper to inmates several years ago as a cost cutting measure saving taxpayers nearly \$50,000 a year.

Now salt and pepper will make a return - but at a cost to inmates or their family members willing to pay.

Effective immediately, inmates will now be allowed to purchase a packet of food enhancements containing salt, pepper, ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise through the inmate canteen at a cost of 50 cents each. The move is predicted to generate about \$1,100.00 per week or \$57,000 a year - money which will go toward inmate programs to fight drug and alcohol dependency and parenting classes that help reduce domestic violence.

Arpaio has garnered much attention over the years, both good and bad, for his inmate food policies. He has reduced the numbers of meals served each day to only two, banned coffee, eliminated salt and pepper, utilized sporks (spoon/fork combination to reduce the use of plastics), started a fish farm, served rocky mountain oysters, and used donated foods like free hogs, 100,000 free corndogs, and farm raised emus have been widely discussed and often debated.

On the Sheriff's birthday, June 14th, will be another first - the first zero cost meal to feed 9,000 inmates. The kitchen staff is working diligently to determine how best to prepare this "special" meal in a way that won't cause a ruckus from nearby neighbors. The smell that will emanate from the kitchen is expected to be bad. Still, the birthday bash meal is considered by many to be a "delicacy."

"I'm not sure inmates will like this particular meal much, but if I were an inmate, I'd love it. It's my personal favorite" END

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