



# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **MDOC Inmate Gardens Produce Fresh Food While Building Skills**

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JACKSON, MS (September 11) – The gardens at MDOC facilities are doing more than producing fresh food – they are cultivating responsibility, entrepreneurship, and real-world skills that inmates can carry with them beyond prison walls.

From tending to gardens daily to learning how farmers' markets operate, participants gain hands-on experience that teaches discipline, teamwork, and the fundamentals of running a small business. Showcasing their diverse agricultural skills, inmates harvested an assortment of produce based on irrigation abilities and the availability of space and seeds. The crop acreage and pounds harvested include:

- South Mississippi Correctional Institution: 34,934 lbs. of blueberries.
- Mississippi State Penitentiary: 32,500 lbs. of fresh produce, including squash, cucumber, sweet corn, bell peppers, okra, and peas.
- Delta Correctional Facility: 55 lbs. of pumpkin, purple hull peas, okra, cucumber, and zucchini.
- Marshall Correctional Facility: Planted two acres and harvested enough butter beans, cucumber, squash, tomatoes, and peas to feed the population 17 times.
- Walnut Grove Correctional Facility: Numerous pounds of okra, tomatoes, eggplants, squash, cucumber, jalapenos, and sunflowers.
- Central Mississippi Correctional Facility: Harvested two acres of fresh produce.

Through MDOC's horticulture curriculum, inmates learn the fundamentals of soil preparation, planting, irrigation, seed germination, composting, pest management, and harvesting. Inmates also learn about the Mississippi Department of Agriculture Farmer's Market operations - how to prepare, price, and sell produce, booth preparation, product and inventory management, logo creation, and basic tax preparation. The program combines classroom instruction with hands-on work, giving participants a foundation for future employment opportunities in landscaping, agriculture, farming, and entrepreneurship.

These skills prepare inmates to open a booth at their local farmer's market or grow fresh produce for their families after release, providing an opportunity for income and a healthier lifestyle.

Commissioner Cain emphasizes the broader mission, "When they finally go home, they will be prepared to grow a family garden, producing high-quality food cheaply and efficiently. It's all part of moral rehabilitation, learning to take care of yourself. Congratulations to all for moving forward."

Inmate Erin Aycock, 46, agrees with Commissioner Cain that the program supports moral rehabilitation, "Everything grown in the garden is turned into the kitchen to be cooked for the population. The program teaches basic horticulture skills for gardening, a good work ethic, and how to maintain a garden. It also teaches us how to give back to the community. We had some individuals who did not know how to garden. They were taught the basics of gardening and picking the product as it grows. Our population has enjoyed eating what was grown," said Aycock, who is incarcerated for a drug conviction.

By combining education with practical application, the inmate garden project continues to produce results that benefit both the participants and the state of Mississippi.



*Cucumbers climbing the fence at Delta Correctional Facility are among the more than 50 lbs of produce grown there.*



*It's harvest time at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility, with okra still growing.*



*The crop at the Marshall Correctional Facility produced butter beans, cucumbers, squash, tomatoes, and peas for plenty of meals.*



*South Mississippi Correctional Institution Blueberry Harvest produced more than 30,000 pounds of blueberries*





*Inmates at Central Mississippi Correctional Facility planting their gardens in March.*