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**Airway Heights excited to work with local Master Garden to use every inch of garden space to grow and donate produce to the community**

**AIRWAY HEIGHTS** – Recognizing a heightened need for fresh produce in response to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, incarcerated individuals at the [Airway Heights Corrections Center \(AHCC\)](#) planted various vegetables in their approximately 1.5-acre J Garden. The garden will include tomatoes, kale, yellow squash, bush bean, carrots, snap peas, cucumber, radish, lettuce, celery, spinach, pepper, onion, broccoli, beets, turnips and cauliflower—all vegetables that will transport easily to local community non-profit organizations.

The facility also planted popular herbs that the local food banks consistently need, like cilantro, parsley and basil. In their main courtyard, Airway Heights now has two gardens where they plan to grow additional produce for the local community, one in front of M unit ( M unit garden) and another in front of the recreation building (E building garden).

It’s all part of the Department of Corrections’ Hope Gardens project to give individuals incarcerated in Washington correctional facilities an opportunity to give back to their communities at a time when its needed the most.

Gardeners directly seed a mix of herbs, flowers, onions, carrots, and/or any of the root vegetables in M unit garden. Airway Heights intentionally staggered the growth of its gardens so produce would ripen at different times of the summer allowing for multiple harvests and donations.

The facility’s E building garden holds transplanted garlic, shallots and chives. Other produce, planted from seed, includes beets, onions, turnips, carrots, and radishes. Gardeners also planted flowers, Indian blanket, sweet William, bee balm, aster, zinnia and field poppies. A 2,600-square foot pollination station planted in the center of the courtyard provides the facility’s bees with plenty of bee-friendly flora.

The Minimum Security Unit (MSU) will grow pumpkins for donation to the local elementary schools in the fall and will have additional pollinator stations for bees.

In an effort to garden in the most sustainable way possible, Airway Heights has added vermiculture --or composting with worms--into their main programming in the greenhouse. The team is working on creating worm tea to provide added nutrients to the soil.

Airway Heights also has four active beehives, used for pollinating all of the gardens. In partnership with [West Plains Bee Keeper](#), the facility has incarcerated journeyman beekeepers maintain the hives, providing additional jobs for incarcerated individuals.

Horticulture workers maintain the gardens and are required to have graduated one of the following classes (available in partnership with [Sustainability in Prisons Project](#)): [Roots of Success](#), Redemption, Department of Natural Resources training or composting class. The facility currently employs 10 incarcerated horticulture workers.

In 2019, the horticulture workers harvested a total of 6,256 pounds of produce and donated it to the facility's kitchen as part of the food-to-table project.

Additionally, AHCC donated 134 pumpkins to the [Woman and Children's Free Restaurant](#) for their annual [Dinner on the Bridge](#) and 131 additional pumpkins to a local elementary school, [Finch Elementary](#).

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Geese admire the gardens at Airway Heights. (Mark Barnhart, Airway Heights Corrections Center)



Progress on plants intended for J Garden at Airway Heights. (Mark Barnhart, Airway Heights Corrections Center)



In addition to produce grown at Airway Heights, sage is cultivated for use in Native American Ceremonies.  
(Mark Barnhart, Airway Heights Corrections Center)