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For immediate release: May 29, 2020

Stafford Creek Corrections Center expands gardens to assist with community needs due to pandemic

ABERDEEN – [Stafford Creek Corrections Center \(SCCC\)](#) is adding 14,950 square ft. and a variety of produce to their existing 30,000 square feet of facility gardens.

There are multiple gardens and greenhouses throughout the facility along with about a dozen fruit trees and blueberry bushes in the facility's orchard. Despite the limits presented by the cool, windy, and unreliable marine environment, vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, collards, kale, mustards, spinach, Asian vegetables, radishes, carrots, beets, zucchini, squash, pumpkins, peas and green beans grow well at SCCC.

The facility has also expanded growing times to include winter gardening. SCCC has temporary use of three hoop houses this year with the permission of [Sustainability in Prisons Project \(SPP\) at The Evergreen State College](#). The facility is now growing tomatoes, cucumbers, melons and sweet peppers. They are adding clover to the lawns as bee fodder, starting a new herb garden and building a small aquaponics system in one of the greenhouses.

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.

Working with [SPP, Grays Harbor Master Gardeners and Coastal Harvest](#), the facility's gardens produce thousands of pounds of produce that is distributed to food banks, nursing homes, and other community centers in seven different western Washington counties including Jefferson, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Thurston and Wahkiakum.

Incarcerated individuals who are interested in the horticulture program request participation through their counselors for placement on the hiring list. The gardeners work year round, five days a week ensuring the gardens are free of weeds. Gardeners also provide all other upkeep necessary for the success of the gardens. Harvesting occurs one day a week during the busy season and only when needed during the lower growth times of the year.

While Stafford Creek incorporates some of the fresh produce into healthier meals at the prison, they also donate a majority of produce to Coastal Harvest. The facility began sending grown produce to the community in 2017 and by the end of that year donated 12,000 pounds. The individuals working in

Stafford Creek's gardens grew roughly 31,895.80 pounds for donation to Coastal Harvest and another 5,000 pounds for incorporation into the incarcerated population's meals in 2018. In 2019, SCCC donated 23,525.50 pounds to Coastal Harvest and another 10,000 pounds for incorporation into the incarcerated population's meals.

Prior to the garden expansion, the seven living units at the facility employed up to five full time gardeners along with 16-23 gardeners in other gardens throughout the facility. Three of those living units have expanded and given more incarcerated individuals an opportunity to participate in the facilities gardening programs. Those three units now employ 33 full-time gardeners.

"We feed people," said one of the gardeners participating in the program.

"It's the most rewarding job at SCCC because we get out of the units and I know the food I grow is going to feed people in our community," another gardener said.

The facility will continue to partner with Coastal Harvest to distribute the produce once it is ready to harvest.

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About Stafford Creek Corrections Center: Stafford Creek Corrections Center (SCCC) is an all-male adult medium-custody facility located on 210 acres in Aberdeen, Wash. It has been continuously operated since 2000. Total facility average daily population is 1,962.



The Lifer's Garden at SCCC gives the incarcerated individuals who were sentenced to life in prison the ability to participate in programming. (Kelly Peterson, Stafford Creek Corrections Center)



An incarcerated gardener assesses the new expanded area in the H5 Living Unit. (Kelly Peterson, Stafford Creek Corrections Center)



The H2 Living Unit Garden including newly added space. (Kelly Peterson, Stafford Creek Corrections Center)



Produce and flowers in the H4 Living Unit Garden. (Kelly Peterson, Stafford Creek Corrections Center)