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Washington State Penitentiary expands gardens by 101 acres to assist with community needs due to pandemic

WALLA WALLA – The [Washington State Penitentiary](#) is adding 90 acres of garbanzo beans, 10 acres of other vegetables and another acre of pumpkins to the 10 and a half acres already planted in its sustainability garden and its [Sustainable Practices Lab Green Zone](#).

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.

The individuals working in the penitentiary's 457,380-square-foot sustainability garden grew roughly 110,000 pounds of produce in 2018. While the penitentiary incorporated much of the fresh produce into healthier meals at the prison, they also donated 2,471 pounds of produce to the [Blue Mountain Action Council](#) and the [Christian Aid Center](#).

The Sustainable Practice Lab, a program that is in the secured perimeter, gives individuals opportunities to work with Farm to School, Lettuce Grow, and educational programing. The penitentiary's [Sustainable Practices Lab Green Zone](#) produced 7,350 pounds of produce in 2018. A full 80 percent of this produce went to 13 food banks in Walla Walla County and 20 percent stayed in the prison kitchen.

In mid-May, Engineers Garden Supervisor Daniel Randolph delivered 1,908 pounds of radishes to the West Complex Kitchen in his first delivery of the year. According to Correctional Industries Manager Wes Marcum, the radishes produced and delivered are a very appealing and flavorful addition to food services for the facility population. There will be more radishes planted in addition to the cabbage and a variety of other vegetables currently thriving in the garden, and pumpkins are scheduled to be planted on June 1.

Traditionally WSP donates pumpkins to Walla Walla County schools just in time for Halloween. In 2018, nearly 3,000 pumpkins were distributed to area students and their families, and just over 2100 were donated in 2019. The 90-acre garbanzo bean crop anticipates producing around 135,000 lbs. of beans first processed locally, then donated to local communities.

The institutional garden at WSP is the largest of any prison in the state. More than ten acres of produce once harvested, goes to the kitchen or to the community. The massive garden expansion gives the existing crew of incarcerated individuals an opportunity to broaden their knowledge in the facility's gardening programs.

“Giving back is important to the men incarcerated here,” said WSP Superintendent Don Holbrook. “These individuals are not only learning a new skill that could help them in the job market or even in their own personal gardens, they know they are making a difference at a time when people are going hungry.”

The penitentiary will be partnering with the [Blue Mountain Action Council](#) again to distribute the produce once it is ready to harvest.

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About the Washington State Penitentiary: The Washington State Penitentiary is located on 540 acres of farmland near the City of Walla Walla and has been in continuous operation since 1886. It consists of four separate facilities, housing individuals at different custody levels. The facility employs approximately 1,100 staff and houses an average of 2,500 incarcerated males.



Greenhouse tomatoes thriving in the Bato Bucket growing system. (WSP Sustainable Practices Lab)



Garden progress in early spring of 2020 (WSP Sustainable Practices Lab)



WSP garlic plot, planted in October of 2019 that will be ready to harvest in the first part of June 2020. (WSP Sustainable Practices Lab)



Spring thunderclouds loom over the garbanzo bean field. (Richard Thompson, Washington State Penitentiary)



The sky breaks loose over WSP as the garbanzo fields are irrigated. (Richard Thompson, Washington State Penitentiary)



Local students line up to receive their pumpkins, donated and delivered by WSP. (James Atteberry, Washington State Penitentiary)



WSP staff deliver and stage pumpkins at local schools for students to take their pick of the patch. (James Atteberry, Washington State Penitentiary)