INTEGRITY – TRANSPARENCY – RELATIONSHPS – INNOVATION - HUMILITY

Sheriff Darrell Weaver

Chief Detention Deputy Michael Russell

Growing More Than Vegetables

How a correctional garden can support responsibility, rehabilitation, and public safety

Why a Correctional Garden Matters

SECURITY + ACCOUNTABILITY

Detention facilities must safely manage people in custody, follow policy, and protect staff and the public.

PREPARING FOR REENTRY

Most detainees will eventually return to their communities. We should consider what constructive habits and skills they can practice while in custody.

Rehabilitation and accountability can work together.

How the Program Works

JULY 2025

The Cleveland County correctional garden program launched, initially serving female detainees.

EARLY 2026

A second, larger garden expanded the program, with plans to include men in the future.

HANDS-ON WORK

Participants grow vegetables that are incorporated into detention center meals, adding fresh produce and helping improve meal variety and nutritional value.

PARTNERSHIP

Cleveland County + Sheriff's Office + Bergen Enterprises

Bergen Enterprises fully funds the program and provides a worker to guide participants and support the learning environment.

A Garden Is a Classroom for Everyday Skills

Responsibility

Crops need regular care and attention.

Patience

Growth takes time and sustained effort.

Accountability

Neglect has visible consequences.

Teamwork

Participants work toward a shared goal.

Purpose

Work creates a constructive way to contribute.

Practical skills

Participants are introduced to gardening and basic food production.







The garden is not only a rehabilitation program, but also a practical way to improve the nutritional value of inmate meals and reduce reliance on commercially purchased, processed food ingredients.

Fresh Food, Better Nutrition, Responsible Resource Use

- **Improved Nutrition:** Freshly harvested vegetables add nutritional value, variety, and freshness to inmate meals.
- **Reduced Reliance on Processed Foods:** Growing vegetables on-site can reduce the need to purchase some commercially processed or prepared ingredients.
- **Responsible Use of Resources:** Garden produce helps supplement the food budget by providing ingredients grown through the program.
- **Farm-to-Table Education:** Participants see how food is grown and how fresh ingredients contribute to healthier meals.
- **Community Benefit:** The garden supports rehabilitation while contributing directly to the daily operation of the detention center.

Better nutrition starts with fresh ingredients

- **Nutrient-rich food:** Fresh vegetables contribute vitamins, minerals, and fiber that support overall health.

- **Digestive health:** Fiber-rich produce supports healthy digestion and regular bowel function.

- **Balanced meals:** Garden vegetables can complement proteins, grains, and other foods to create more varied, balanced meals.

- **Fresher ingredients:** Harvesting produce for use in meals provides an alternative to relying exclusively on commercially packaged or processed vegetable products.

- **Potential cost benefits:** Using available garden produce may offset some food purchasing needs, depending on harvest volume, season, and menu planning.

- **Healthy habits beyond custody:** Participants learn practical food production skills and gain a better understanding of nutrition that they can apply after returning to the community.

Accountability Comes First

WHAT THE PROGRAM IS

- A constructive opportunity while in custody
- A way to practice positive habits and responsibility
- A practical learning environment
- A complement to preparation for reentry

WHAT IT IS NOT

- A replacement for discipline or consequences
- A reason to compromise security
- A guarantee that every participant will succeed
- Proof, by itself, that recidivism will decline

Early Results and Recognition

≈75

female participants

0

reported recidivism to date

2026

National Association of Counties Achievement Award

Encouraging early information—not proof that the garden alone caused the outcome.

Next step: continue tracking outcomes and define how success will be measured.

A Partnership That Expands Opportunity

PUBLIC AGENCY

Cleveland County and the Sheriff's Office maintain the detention mission, including safety, security, and oversight.

PRIVATE PARTNER

Bergen Enterprises fully funds the program and provides a worker to support instruction and participation.

SHARED BENEFIT

Participants gain a structured opportunity to contribute. Garden vegetables add fresh produce to inmate meals, support better nutrition, and can reduce reliance on some store-bought ingredients and processed food options.

A local partnership can be a model for other counties to evaluate.

Each location must consider staffing, security, available space, and local resources.






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What You Can Take Away

1. Safe custody remains the foundation.
2. Constructive programs can complement accountability.
3. Practical activities can build habits and basic skills.
4. Partnerships may create opportunities without shifting program costs to the county.

We are growing more than vegetables.
We are growing opportunities for change.

Responsibility. Purpose. Practical skills.
Rehabilitation and public safety can work together.

