



# Start with a GOAL Prison Program

(Guidance, Opportunity, Accomplishment, Learning)

## College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

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### **Situation**

- **Recidivism:** An estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years. *Bureau of justice Statistics, 2018*
- New Mexico has the second-highest recidivism rate in the country, with half of its former inmates landing back behind prison bars within three years.
- The most recent FBI data shows New Mexico had the country's second-highest violent crime rate in 2016, and the nation's top spot for property crime.

*(KUNM Reporting, May Ortega, February 5, 2018)*



(Photo: NMSU: Carlos Andres López)

### **Extension Response**

In October of 2016 the Doña Ana County Extension Agent received a request for assistance from the Southern New Mexico State Correctional Facility, (SNMCF) in Las Cruces, NM. The request was for assistance in creating a sustainable educational program in prison community gardens and landscape maintenance skills for maximum security inmates. These lessons would be taught within the prison by the local county extension agent for the purpose of reducing recidivism rates in New Mexico.

The program was initiated in March, 2017. Inmates from the SNMCF applied for the eighteen positions within the allocated F-Pod unit designated by the prison for this program. Once inmates passed selection and screening they were relocated to the F-Pod Unit. The agent began teaching lessons in soils, mineral nutrition, plant growth, vegetable production, watering, maintenance and post harvest handling of vegetables in April, 2017. Additional classes in food safety and handling, and nutrition were added later. The prison supplied the space for the prison community garden and the lumber for constructing raised beds. The agent supplied educational materials, soil amendments, vegetable plants and one on one, hands on instructions for inmates.

**Results:** Since the program began in April, 2017, five inmates have paroled out of the program and five new inmates have been added. The remaining 13 inmates have indicated that they have experienced a positive change in their lives as a direct result of this program. One hundred percent of inmates interviewed indicated that they felt calmer, less aggressive, more caring towards their fellow inmates and families and had renewed interest in making a better life for themselves and their families. Inmates have indicated a sense of changing their lives in a positive way to become productive citizens once paroled back to their communities.

<https://www.krqe.com/news/new-mexico/inmates-learn-life-skills-through-gardening-program/1401368283>

<http://newscenter.nmsu.edu/Articles/view/13255/nmsu-helps-inmates-grow-skills-at-southern-new-mexico-correctional-facility>



Christopher Dee holds a yellow squash in July at the Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility. Dee is involved in the prison's therapeutic garden program that was founded in 2016 with assistance from the Doña Ana County Cooperative Extension Service, part of New Mexico State University's College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. (Photo's: NMSU photo's by Carlos Andres López)



**G.O.A.L. Program: (Guidance, Opportunity, Accomplishment, Learning)** was created by, and for maximum security inmates, as a way to help reduce recidivism through a community approached vegetable garden and learning experiences provided by a partnership of the Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility and the NMSU Cooperative Extension Service.

**GOALS:**

- Provide an environment where inmates live, learn and implement lessons in agriculture.
- Reduce the recidivism rate in the New Mexico prison system.
- Change lives in a positive direction by developing empathy within maximum security inmates.

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