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Prison Inmates Harvest and Donate Food to South Central Wisconsin Food Bank

*750 Pound Vegetable Donation Part of Prison Garden Programs Statewide
Which Help Local Food Pantries and Cut Inmate Food Costs*

MADISON, Wis. – Inmates at Oakhill Correctional Institution (OCI) in Oregon Wednesday harvested over 3,000 thousand pounds of tomatoes and peppers, donating about 750 pounds of the bounty to Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin.

The last major harvest of the season at the minimum security prison netted a total 3,216 pounds of tomatoes and peppers, with 746 pounds of the produce donated to Second Harvest. The other roughly 2,500 pounds of vegetables will be used in OCI inmate meals to reduce food costs.

Ten inmates started early in the morning harvesting large ripe tomatoes and green peppers and then loaded the fresh produce onto trucks bound for Second Harvest as well as the OCI kitchen. Tom Vande Brink, OCI's gardener, drove the donated vegetables to Second Harvest.

"Our garden harvest is so plentiful and to have this many tomatoes and peppers at our fingertips all summer long at Oakhill and still have plenty that we can give to local food pantries is a win for everyone," said OCI Food Service Administrator Steve Bremer. "Giving inmates this opportunity to garden not only gives them skills they can take with them upon their release but also allows inmates to give back to the community and contribute to the institution in a positive way."

Since 1996, OCI has donated nearly 70,000 pounds of vegetables, including nearly 4,000 pounds this year, to local food pantries. This year OCI has made six donations by OCI to Second Harvest.

Overall, OCI has grown around 500,000 pounds of food since the mid-90's and uses much of the food grown at the institution for its own kitchen. The program saves OCI up to \$20,000 per year in food costs. Similar garden programs, pantry donations and food savings are going all over the state thanks to individual garden programs at numerous state correctional facilities and the work of the staff and inmates who tend them.

The 4-acre garden at OCI contains roughly 6,000 plants. Tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, cabbage, sweet corn and squash are planted from seed, cared for and harvested by Vande Brink and about 10 inmates.

Please call the DOC Media Line if you would like photographs of the OCI inmate harvest.