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## **New Partnerships Emerge for COVID-19 Relief: Florida Farmers Team with State Leaders to Launch Farm to Inmate Program**

Harvested produce crops feed Florida Department of Corrections' (FDC) more than 87,000 inmates; action saves food costs while reducing COVID-19 related supply chain impacts.

**HOMESTEAD, FL** - Florida farmers are uncovering new solutions to address supply chain disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. With Florida's emergency order to shutter businesses who routinely have a need for fresh produce, a pilot team of South Florida producers will supply and distribute more than 380,000 pounds of locally-grown squash, green beans, cucumbers, and lettuces directly to 35 correctional facilities across the state.

Produce from Accursio & Sons Farm of Homestead and TKM Bengard Farms of Belle Glade will be handled and distributed by 5 Brothers Produce Company of Florida City to FDC directly. This collaborative effort will serve as a future model as more producers work together in efforts to maximize capabilities and drive-down pricing for locally-grown foods.

Due to pandemic impacts, Florida agriculture will continue to suffer grave economic and environmental impacts as harvesting continues across the state. Florida producers estimate that at least 10 million tomatoes will go unpicked this year while hundreds of thousands have already gone unused or plowed back into Florida soil. In addition to produce growers, many ranchers are also unable to break even on their livestock and are looking for alternative markets.

Tyra Phillips, Executive Director of Dade County Farm Bureau, expects that more public-private partnerships will emerge as producers seek opportunities to update their supply chains for resiliency: "It is imperative for state leadership to maintain inclusion of local producers in state procurement," she said. "Working with the FDC would not be possible without State Senator Jeff Brandes and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services whose commitment raised the awareness and the focus needed for the team to execute quickly."

Although local producers tend to be more competitive on pricing than their imported counterparts, some farmers are concerned that pipelines to new markets, such as the inmate population, could decrease once the pandemic subsides, leaving producers' supply chains vulnerable to the next disaster. Commissioner Nikki Fried has advised that all producers interested in competing for public contracts register with the State's eProcurement platform "[MyFloridaMarketPlace](#)."

"Whether it's hurricanes or viruses, we must have access to serve our own communities with goods from our respective regions and be more resilient to change, working together locally," said Steve Mathis CEO of Mathis

Farms. Although Mathis has yet to participate in any public bids, he is following suit of many other producers and has registered his business in the State's online marketplace in preparation for future opportunities.

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