



Department of
Youth Services

Message from DYS Director Harvey Reed

Youth Gain Business, Gardening, and Cooking Skills through New Aquaponics Program
September 17, 2015



Tilapia delivered to the facility this morning

Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility (CJCF) has begun a unique program that affords youth an opportunity to dive into the world of aquaponics, gaining entrepreneurial skills while learning about gardening and cooking. Aquaponics is raising fish and plants in one integrated system. Fish are kept in large tanks, and plants are grown hydroponically (in water, without soil). Unlike traditional farming methods, no chemical fertilizers are required for the plants since all that is needed is provided from fish waste.

CJCF youth had been eagerly awaiting the delivery of 55 tilapia today. More will be delivered next week. For the five youth participating in the aquaponics program, today is when the real work begins. To keep everything operating smoothly, youth will complete tasks on a daily basis: feeding the fish, cleaning the tanks, ensuring the quality of the water, and making necessary repairs.

Paul Rybicki, Storekeeper Supervisor and Sustainability Chairperson at CJCF, heads up the new program. He says the program will benefit youth immensely. "After leaving Circleville, they will have the skills and knowledge to start their own business," he said.

Representatives from Southern Aquatic Fish have assisted to get the project off the ground, including the supply of tilapia, at no cost to CJCF. When the tilapias are mature, CJCF will return some of the fish to Southern Aquatic Fish to be sold. A portion of the fish and plants will be used to instruct youth in cooking skills. In addition, some of the plants, including lettuce, green beans, zucchini, squash, and strawberries, will be donated to the Mid-Ohio Food Bank.

It is so exciting to watch this new program unfold. I applaud Superintendent Phillip Elms and his team for working tirelessly to create and develop a new program that will enrich the lives of our youth and prepare them for the workforce.