



Foundation’s School Gardens Provide Edible Education

School Gardens Provide Healthy Hands-on-Experiences to Complement Academic Studies



Pictured above: Elementary students at Bell Academy (Cleveland School District) celebrate fall with classroom activities in the school’s pumpkin patch.

The **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation** is partnering with K-12 schools across the state to provide school gardens for healthy hands-on learning experiences. The Foundation’s school garden program uses the schoolyard as a classroom to teach students the importance of healthy nutrition that integrate with subjects such as math, science, reading and art.

With grant support from the Foundation, Bell Academy, located in the fertile soil of the Mississippi Delta, created outdoor and indoor edible gardens and built a greenhouse and an outdoor classroom to encourage healthy eating and active living among students and teachers.

“Our students eagerly participate in garden activities and enjoy learning about their food sources,” said Tiffanie Russell, Bell Academy Principal. “The teachers’ newly gained knowledge in gardening and agriculture is also helping build positive relationships with students as they work side-by-side in the school garden.”

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Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation

Vision

A Healthy Mississippi

Mission

Provide targeted grants to fund programs and initiatives to improve the health and well-being of Mississippians

Strategic Focus

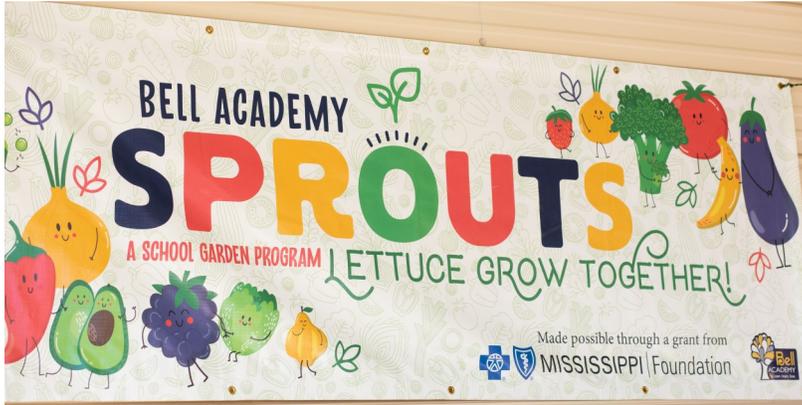
- Communities
- Schools

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Pictured below: “Sprouts,” the school garden program at Bell Academy, includes outdoor gardens, indoor hydroponic tower gardens, a greenhouse and an outdoor classroom where students learn about healthy nutrition.



In 2020, the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi funded 20 school gardens in 15 Mississippi counties. Since 2015, the Foundation has funded a total of 57 school gardens in 33 counties. For public and private K-12 schools interested in starting or enhancing a school garden program in 2021 with grant support from the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, please send an email to Foundation@bcbsms.com.



2021 Healthy School Awards Program

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation Healthy School Awards Program recognizes and rewards public K-12 schools that encourage healthy lifestyle behaviors. The Foundation may award a “Healthy School Award” to one school, or award “Healthy School Award” grants to multiple schools, each at **\$50,000**, regardless of school enrollment.

The 2021 Healthy School Award application will be available in January at www.healthiermississippi.org. Applications are due to the Foundation by April, and the winning schools will be announced in July at the Mississippi Association of School Superintendents / Alliance Summer Convention.

For more information about the Healthy School Awards Program or the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, please visit www.healthiermississippi.org.

University and College Tobacco-Free Policies Strengthened

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is providing ongoing support to Mississippi's universities and colleges by encouraging strengthened tobacco-free policies that align with the *Model Policy for a Smoke-free College/University* as published by the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation (ANRF). The Foundation is using a tiered approach for awarding grant funds to universities and colleges willing to adopt tobacco-free policies that include 100 percent of the elements in the *Model Policy*. Grant funds are provided for support of general health and wellness at the university or college, excluding support of athletic teams. Tier 1 grants support the updating of tobacco-free policies, and Tier 2 grants support the initial implementation of the updated policies.

Two universities, Delta State University and Mississippi Valley State University, have received Tier 2 grants in 2020. Community colleges receiving Tier 2 grants in 2020 are: Copiah-Lincoln Community College; Mississippi Delta Community College; Northeast Community College; and Pearl River Community College. Since 2019, the following universities and colleges have received grants from the Foundation to strengthen their smoke-free policies.

Universities

- Alcorn State University**
- Delta State University*
- Mississippi Valley State University*
- The University of Southern Mississippi

*Received Tier 2 grants in 2020
**Tier 2 grants in process

Community Colleges

- Coahoma Community College*
- Copiah-Lincoln Community College*
- East Mississippi Community College**
- Jones County Junior College
- Mississippi Delta Community College*
- Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College
- Northeast Mississippi Community College*
- Northwest Mississippi Community College
- Pearl River Community College*
- Southwest Mississippi Community College



Pearl River Community College installed new tobacco-free and smoke-free signage at all entries to campus and all entries to campus buildings as a result of the Foundation's support for tobacco-free universities and colleges. (Photos courtesy of Pearl River Community College)



**SMOKE
FREE**
**INCLUDING
ELECTRONIC
CIGARETTES**

Farmers' Markets: Connecting Mississippians to Healthy Foods



The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation has a vision for a healthy Mississippi and provides targeted grants to fund health programs and initiatives to improve the health of Mississippians.

The Foundation recognizes that eating a healthful diet is fundamental to well-being, and when combined with physical activity, promotes overall good health.

The Foundation also recognizes that farmers' markets are a staple in many Mississippi communities affording families the opportunity to access fresh, local produce.

Farmers' markets connect communities to their food system and create opportunities where farmers can sell fresh, local foods. Farmers' markets

also support the local economy and help families build and reinforce traditions based on healthy living in the heart of their own cities and towns.

A Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation grant program to expand farmers' markets across the state translates into increased market opportunities for farmers and increased healthy food access for families. The Foundation established the following strategic goals for farmers' markets:

1. Create and increase opportunities for farmers to sell their products directly to consumers;
2. Create and increase consumers' opportunities to buy local products directly from farmers;
3. Bring together families and neighbors to local food producers to create a sense of community; and
4. Provide a platform to educate individuals and families about the nutritional, environmental and economic value of buying local, sustainably-produced farm products.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce provides criteria for farmers' markets to receive the Mississippi Certified Farmers' Market designation. Through grants supporting the growth and development of locations throughout the Mississippi where Mississippians can purchase fresh, locally grown foods, the Foundation is encouraging farmers' markets to work toward and achieve this designation. This designation sets apart markets where Mississippians can purchase fresh, locally grown foods from markets than those that are flea markets, rummage sales, bazaars, etc.



For Mississippi mayors interested in starting a new farmers' market or enhancing an existing farmers' market in their municipalities with grant support from the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, please send an email to Foundation@bcbsms.com.

"The farmers' market is essential and serves as a source of healthy, nutritious food for the community, and many shoppers depend on the local farmers for their weekly grocery needs."

Andy Gipson, Commissioner, Mississippi State Department of Agriculture and Commerce

Is your town a **Mississippi Healthy Hometown?**



2021 Applications
Due : **March 15, 2021**

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is pleased to partner with the Mississippi Municipal League to promote community health and wellness through the Healthy Hometown Awards.

At the 2021 Mississippi Municipal League Annual Conference, the Foundation may award a “Healthy Hometown” grant to one hometown, or award “Healthy Hometown” grants to multiple hometowns, each at \$50,000, regardless of municipality population. The application and criteria are available online at:

www.healthiermississippi.org.

 **MISSISSIPPI** | Foundation
www.healthiermississippi.org

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For additional information about the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, please visit our website at www.healthiermississippi.org.