



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI  
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Commissioner Gipson Presents Mannsdale Upper Elementary with School Garden Grant**

**Madison, Miss.** — Today, Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson visited Mannsdale Upper Elementary School (MUES) in Madison County to present faculty and students with a *Growing Lunch* School Garden Grant. The program was developed by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to provide financial assistance to schools to encourage the creation or expansion of school gardens.

“The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is proud to assist Mannsdale Upper Elementary with plans to expand and incorporate conservation practices into their outstanding school garden. I commend Principal Houghton and Coach Roman for incorporating agriculture into their curriculum in this manner,” said Commissioner Gipson. “Not only are these students sharpening their academic skills and learning many life-long lessons, they are getting to see first-hand the importance of agriculture. My hope is that through this experience, these students will gain an interest in agriculture and take advantage of the many career opportunities in agriculture in their future.”

MUES’s expansive garden contains a chicken coop, green house, compost bins and 39 raised beds. As part of their conservation efforts, they plan to purchase 20 Olla pots to assist with irrigating the garden beds and avoid water waste. These clay pots are first buried in the ground or neck deep then filled with water to supply water to surrounding plants. The roots will grow towards and around the pot. This project is part of MUES’s cross-curriculum initiative to incorporate math, science, and conservation as part of its new Junior Master Gardener Program.

“Mannsdale Upper Elementary School is committed to ‘Growing Citizens of Excellence.’ As we strive to achieve this goal, we offer many different opportunities for students to prepare for the world around them. Our gardening program is one of the many opportunities we offer. This program teaches students the importance of agriculture and the many benefits of growing their own food. Mannsdale Upper’s gardening curriculum incorporates principles that not only involve planting seeds but nurturing those seeds into becoming plants that produce food for our students and staff. Our program is designed to help students connect agriculture to the grocery store and to their own dinner table,” said Principal Debra Houghton.

Through the *Growing Lunch* program, eligible schools can receive a grant of up to \$500 to purchase supplies needed to develop a school garden or to further enhance an existing school garden. All schools,

K-12, and pre-schools providing appropriate documentation, in the State of Mississippi are eligible to apply. This school garden grant program is available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Only one grant can be awarded per school. Schools that have received a *Growing Lunch* grant from MDAC in the past are not eligible to apply for additional funds at this time.

This program is funded by the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program through the United States Department of Agriculture. For more information about the program or to view the application, visit [www.mdac.ms.gov](http://www.mdac.ms.gov) or contact Susan Lawrence at [susan@mdac.ms.gov](mailto:susan@mdac.ms.gov) or 601-359-1196.

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**Photo attached.**



**Commissioner Andy Gipson presented the *Growing Lunch* School Garden Grant to Principal Debra Houghton, Assistant Principal Nicole Cockrell, Coach Roman Rolando and students of Mannsdale Upper Elementary School in Madison County.**