

# Starting a Gleaning Program at Your Food Bank



*Gleaning is the act of harvesting excess or unmarketable produce from farm fields and gardens for the purpose of providing it to needy populations.*

*“Up to 1/5 of America’s food goes to waste each year, with an estimated 130 pounds of food per person ending up in landfills. The annual value of this lost food is estimated at around \$31 billion. The real story is that roughly 49 million people could have been fed by those lost resources.”*

*--“A Citizen’s Guide to Food Recovery,” USDA, April 1997*

Note: If you would like a copy of any of the **highlighted** documents in the information below please contact:

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## **Locating Farmers for your Project**

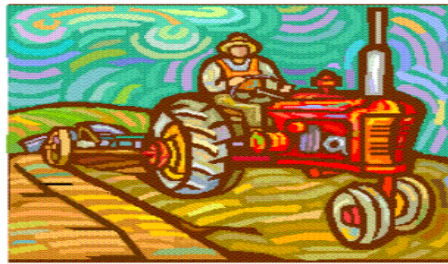
Your county office for the Department of Agriculture is the best starting point in seeking out the names and contact information of area farmers. In Humboldt County we have been able to obtain contact information for organic and conventional farmers through the Senior Inspector at the County of Humboldt Department of Agriculture. The State Department of Agriculture is also helpful in this regard, particularly if you are seeking out contact information for farmers across an area larger than your own county.

Grower’s Associations can yield important contacts within the farming community. These Associations usually oversee the farmers’ markets and they often hold annual or bi-annual meetings where farmers are present. If they will allow you to speak at a meeting, it’s a great opportunity to make connections with growers in your area.

Going directly to a farmers’ market is another option. You can pass out information to farmers at the market. Be conscious of the fact that they will likely be occupied with market activity, so don’t insist upon discussing the prospect of gleaning on the spot.

## **Approaching Farmers**

Farmers are incredibly busy people. This is especially true during planting and harvesting months. When building a gleaning program, make initial contact with farmers during the “off-months” in your area when they have more time to consider your proposal. If they are amenable to gleaning, ask them during what month(s) you should contact them to arrange gleaning. This will be an estimate, because harvest times vary somewhat each year according to the weather. Your best results will come from initiating follow up contacts yourself, rather than waiting for farmers to call. Some will take the initiative to call, others will not. The preferences of each farmer will be different, and it is up to you to determine what is the best means of communication for each donor.



### **Anticipating Farmers' Questions**

Questions of liability in relation to having volunteer gleaners in farm fields will arise. In your initial letter to farmers, make sure you mention this issue. If your program is being run directly out of a food bank, they may have insurance to cover volunteers. The **Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act** exempts farmers from legal culpability in relation to the donated food itself. It also provides some limited protection for property owners in the event that a gleaner is injured or killed. It is a good idea to give a copy of this law to any farmers who may be interested in participating in your gleaning program. Additionally, you may choose to have volunteer gleaners sign a waiver of liability stating that the farmer will not be held responsible in the event of an injury or death while gleaning.

Farmers may also be interested in learning about opportunities for deducting food donations on their taxes. Tax laws are often in flux, and it's best for the farmer to consult with their personal tax preparer about the feasibility of deducting donated food. It is worthwhile to mention that food donations **may** be tax deductible during your **initial letter**.

### **Gleaning Logistics**

You will need a steady supply of sturdy boxes or crates for your gleaning program. Wax boxes are ideal for most produce, and food banks tend to have these boxes moving through their warehouses. Supermarkets are another source for free boxes. The challenge is to find boxes that are strong enough to hold the produce you will be gleaning. Packaging is an expensive element of farming and the farmers will usually not be able to provide you with boxes.

Depending on what type of produce you are gleaning, you will also need harvesting tools. Leaf lettuce, for example, requires the use of a sharp knife. Apple gleaning may entail the use of a fruit picker or ladder. Kitchen knives are sufficient to accomplish most gleaning tasks; however purchasing actual harvest knives is also an option. Peaceful Valley Farm Supply has relatively inexpensive harvesting knives available on its website: [www.frostproof.com](http://www.frostproof.com)

## Volunteer Recruitment

Recruiting volunteers for your gleaning program may turn out to be one of the easier components of building the project. People tend to gravitate towards the activity because it is a unique and fun way to help others. You can approach church groups, volunteer centers, local newspapers and schools with an invitation to join a gleaning team. Develop a **basic flyer** to post in your community. Take advantage of the services local media outlets offer. Often they will announce or print a PSA free of charge for nonprofit organizations that are seeking volunteers.



## Leadership Development

If you are striving to have a program that is run primarily by volunteers, it is important to identify and recruit leaders among your gleaners. This can be accomplished through meetings with your gleaners during which you detail the need for volunteer farm coordinators. Start out by asking them to simply organize one farm. Provide them with a list of “team members” who they will contact when there is gleaning to be done at their farm.

The more you know about your volunteers, the stronger your program will be. Consider conducting a **volunteer survey** that includes questions regarding general availability, any health concerns, the best means for contacting the volunteer, *an emergency contact*, whether they have a vehicle that can be used for gleaning and the areas that they are willing to travel to. Email is a very useful tool in building gleaning teams, particularly when it comes to sending out directions to farms.

## Volunteer Waiver

It is a good idea to create a volunteer waiver. It is helpful if the waiver includes a general description of gleaning safety guidelines. For example, you may want to include language cautioning volunteers to do the following:

- Lift crates properly, never set food on the floor, even if it's in a crate or box
- Use appropriate lifting techniques: use legs, bend knees, keep back erect
- Whenever possible, use a cart to transport heavy objects
- Always wash hands before handling food, after using the restroom, eating, drinking and smoking

You may need to include any additional safety guidelines that are necessary for your food bank or pantry. Also it may be necessary for your organization to obtain signatures from volunteers agreeing to follow the guidelines:

- I acknowledge that I will follow the above guidelines. Any injuries should be reported immediately to a staff member. I understand that I will be asked to discontinue volunteering if I do not follow these guidelines or show good judgment.

### **Preparation Leading Up to the Day of Gleaning**

When you speak with the farmer, make sure you establish all of the following:

- The precise day and time they would like you to be there
- The type and amount of produce you are harvesting
- The method which the farmer would like you to use when harvesting, if applicable
- The number of boxes the farmer estimates you'll need, and what type/size of box would work best
- Directions to the farm and the area of the farm where gleaners should converge
- Where vehicles should be parked

Once you have these details set, you can contact your gleaners by phone and email. Provide them with all of the following information:

- The date, time and location of gleaning
- Directions to the farm and the area of the farm where they should converge
- Where they can park their vehicles
- Tips on what type of clothing to wear
- What your plans are in case of rain or other undesirable weather

It's a good idea to bring water and snacks for volunteer gleaners. Dehydration and hunger can become an issue while gleaning, particularly in the summer months. Sunscreen and gloves are also items to consider providing for your volunteers.

The coordinator should arrive at the farm slightly earlier than the volunteers. This will allow time to clarify with the farmer the area where you'll be gleaning and any last minute instructions. The coordinator will also be there to direct traffic and introduce the farmer to the volunteers. Establishing regular volunteers at individual farms is a good way to build trust between the farmer and your Gleaning Program. It also increases the comfort level for volunteers when they know how to get to the farm, what to expect when they get there and who they will be working with.

### **Transporting Gleaned Produce**

If you are working out of a food bank and have cargo vans or trucks, transporting gleaned produce is simply a matter of having a driver who can legally operate the vehicle. If you do not have access to these vehicles, you will need to recruit volunteers who are willing and able to transport the produce. Make sure you are clear with volunteers about these types of arrangements—they will want to know how much produce they may be asked to transport. If you are able to offer a mileage reimbursement, this often helps to offset the cost of gas and wear

and tear on the volunteer's vehicle. Some gleaners also write off travel expenses as a charitable donation on their taxes.

### **Preparing Produce for Distribution**

The produce you harvest in the field will need to be processed to some extent before distribution. Fruits and vegetables should be washed, as needed. Of course, food bank clients are always advised to wash donated produce before consuming it. Some produce that comes directly from farms/gardens will, however, clearly need to be cleaned before distribution. Depending on what you harvest, you may also need to package the gleaned produce into separate bags for food bank clients.

### **Record Keeping**

Keeping good records of farm donors, donation amounts, volunteer hours and a history of contacts made with area farms is imperative. Having this information on hand will help you formulate a solid plan for gleaning as the years move on. Strong, dedicated donors will emerge, as will the most committed volunteers. Should you decide to seek out grant funding for your program, its history will be documented. You will also have all the information needed on hand to support public recognition opportunities for donors and gleaners. Consider sending out a press release at the end of the year to recognize your farm donors and let the community know how much food your gleaning teams have recovered.

## **Gleaning and Food Recovery Resources on the Internet**

You can find more information about gleaning on the following websites:

- USDA Citizen's Guide to Food Recovery  
<http://www.usda.gov/news/pubs/gleaning/content.htm>
- Senior Gleaners of California  
<http://www.seniorgleaners.org/>
- Society of St. Andrew Gleaning Page  
<http://www.endhunger.org>
- Oregon Food Bank Gleaning Page  
[http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/ofb\\_services/food\\_programs/gleaning/](http://www.oregonfoodbank.org/ofb_services/food_programs/gleaning/)
- University of Maine Cooperative Extension Gleaning Bulletin  
<http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmlpubs/4301.htm>
- World Hunger Year  
<http://www.worldhungeryear.org/publications/whyhup.htm>
- Dannon Institute's "Gleaning for Hunger Relief" study  
[www.dannon-institute.org/pdf/CS\\_Glean\\_hung7oct02.pdf](http://www.dannon-institute.org/pdf/CS_Glean_hung7oct02.pdf)
- Food for People's Gleaning Page  
<http://www.foodforpeople.org/fgp.html>