



Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT



Contents

- I. Introduction to Gleaning.....Page 2
- II. How To Start a Gleaning ProgramPage 2
- III. Gleaning and United We Serve.....Page 6
- IV. Sources for Further Information.....Page 8

Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT

I. Introduction

What Is Gleaning?

Gleaning is simply the act of collecting excess fresh foods from farms, gardens, farmers markets, grocers, restaurants, state/county fairs, or any other sources in order to provide it to those in need.

Why Glean

“Some of the foods we receive [from gleaning] are things that would otherwise be too expensive to buy... One of the great benefits of working with farmers markets is getting fresh fruits and veggies that are healthy.”

– Staff Member at the [DC Central Kitchen](#), a non-profit organization in Washington, DC, which regularly takes surplus food and cooks it into 4,500 meals for the hungry each day.

Each year, well over 100 billion pounds of food are thrown away in this country¹. Some estimates from 2009 indicate that up to 20 percent of America's entire food supply goes to waste. At the same time there are 49 mil-



Gleaned fresh breads in a soup kitchen to be served the following day.

lion people, including more than 16 million children, who are at risk of going hungry. Gleaning – the practice of collecting and donating excess foods – helps simultaneously address these pressing issues. Importantly, it also gives low-income individuals access to fresh and locally grown foods that are not always available in their communities. In fact, more than 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods that are known “food deserts,” where affordable, quality, and nutritious foods are inaccessible.

In addition, because gleaning requires effort from and coordination between many different individuals (volunteers with community groups, gardeners and/or farmers, agencies that serve the hungry, etc.), it helps foster strong local community food systems. Furthermore, it provides vital resources to nonprofits who serve food to those in need, many of which have experienced severe cutbacks during the economic downturn.

II. How To Start a Gleaning Program

Find Donors

- You can find a farmers market near you and contact the manager of the market and individual vendors by using [The National Farmers Market Search Engine](#).
- You can find a community garden in your area which might be interested in sharing its harvest using the [American Community Garden Association](#) database and/or by searching the national network of [USDA People's Gardens](#).
- In order to directly reach out to farmers in your area, the best way to find them is to contact your [state's USDA office](#). You could also contact your State Department of Agriculture.

Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT

- Also consider visiting nearby restaurants, supermarkets (corporate or small businesses), and any other food sellers and distributors to see if they might be interested in donating quality excess food for a gleaning program. One incentive you can mention is that efforts to directly benefit the community would yield a great publicity opportunity for their business.



- If you would like to directly contact farmers, it is best to get in touch with them during non-harvest months, when they will be a bit less busy and have more time to consider playing a role in a gleaning programⁱⁱⁱ.

Find a Food Bank, Pantry, or Soup Kitchen That Accepts Fresh Foods

All food banks, soup kitchens, pantries, and other organizations that feed the hungry are happy to receive donations, especially high-quality, fresh food. However, not every organization has the capacity to accept such fresh donations (which require refrigeration, a well-equipped kitchen manned regularly by staff who can prepare the food while it is still fresh, etc.).

If you don't already have an established relationship with a nearby food bank, soup kitchen, faith-based or other community organization that has the capacity to accept fresh food donations, you can visit AmpleHarvest.org or [Feeding America](http://FeedingAmerica.org) to find one near you.

Convince Potential Donors To Get Involved

- All potential donors (whether they are gardeners, farmers market managers, restaurant owners, etc.) should be notified of the [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act](#). This piece of legislation, which was passed by Congress in 1996, removes all liability in regard to food donations from donors if they take necessary precautions to ensure the safety of the food. If, for whatever reason, a donation was given by someone who understood it to be in good condition, but that food later posed a health hazard, the donor would not be held responsible.
- Donors should also be notified that their food donations can be tax exempt. Well-developed gleaning programs immediately weigh donations, and donors are given a receipt documenting the transaction for tax purposes or otherwise.



Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT

Recruit Volunteers

Here are some tips on building a gleaning team to help make your program a success:

- Post your service activity on Serve.gov to recruit new volunteers.
- Invite prospective volunteers to a house meeting or potluck where you, as a group, can begin brainstorming and setting goals for your project.
- Conduct a volunteer survey so you are well aware not only of individuals' availabilities, but also their interests and skills which may be utilized to strengthen the impact of your gleaning program.
- Remind volunteers of relevant basic safety and food handling protocol.
- Seek volunteers who will be able to commit regularly to gleaning activities (as opposed to people with one-time availability), so that they are able to build positive relationships with the donors over time. This can help ensure the program's long-term success.

Prepare for Your First Glean

- Set measurable goals at the outset and track your progress throughout the project.
- Obtain sturdy crates, boxes, or other containers to be used consistently for gleaning.
- Be sure to confirm with the farmer(s), market, grocer, or other donor the following information:
 - Exact time and location for your arrival
 - How the donated foods will be identified
 - Estimated number of boxes or crates to hold all donations
 - Where vehicles should be parked
- If you are having volunteers drive to transport the donations, consider giving them mileage reimbursement if possible, or notify them of the possibility of writing off travel expenses as a charitable contribution on their personal taxes.

At a Glance: The Benefits of Gleaning

- Prevents the unnecessary wasting of quality food.
- Provides access to fresh, nutritious foods for low-income populations, who are often unable to buy healthy, local foods because of cost or availability.
- Provides resources to nonprofit agencies, many of whom have shrinking staff capacity and budgets due to the economic climate, so that they might better serve those in need.
- Builds good relations between community members, local gardeners, and farmers.

SUCCESS STORY

In the city of Lane, Oklahoma, employees at the South Central Agricultural Research Laboratory came together last year with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to start a community garden. Now, their harvest is thriving and they have begun sharing the bounty. In the month of June alone, they donated a remarkable 2,100 pounds of fresh produce to feed those in need!



Produce from the USDA People's Garden in Washington, D.C. ready to be harvested for donation. (USDA photo 10di1383-17)

Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT

Maintain a Positive Relationship Between Donors and Gleaners

(This advice is adapted from Steve Badt of [Miriam's Kitchen](#), an organization which annually prepares more than 55,000 healthy meals for the homeless and receives gleaned produce from the Foggy Bottom Farmers Market in Washington, D.C. Gleaning at the market saved the Kitchen about \$15,000 last year alone.)

- Respect the produce. Farmers may get frustrated when gleaners damage or treat carelessly the fruits of their labor which they have chosen to donate.
- It is much better to have volunteers, rather than hired staff, do the actual gleaning. Volunteers participate because they care about fresh produce and farmers, and their passion for this type of work will be seen by others, helping inspire those around them and making the program a success.
- Consider regularly bringing cold/hot drinks (depending on the season) or some other small token as a gesture to thank farmers or other donors for their efforts. This costs very little in time and money, but can lead to more donations and much better relations over the long term.
- Be sure to have volunteers arrive on time (or a bit early!) so they are able to greet the donors and learn about the appropriate gleaning procedures.
- Clearly label crates or other containers for the donations, and consult the donors to see what the preferred method of collection will be (e.g., leaving a few crates in a certain location and then picking them up, volunteers going individually to each donation site, etc.)
- If you are gleaning at the close of a farmers market, be sure not to rush the farmers when seeking donations, especially if they have had a long day.
- Create volunteer teams that may rotate but participate regularly so they build relationships with the farmers.

- Most of all, invest in cultivating relationships between donors and gleaners. This will lead to an efficient program which produces the greatest possible impact on a community.

Make the Program Sustainable

Be sure to keep good records of all the activities you and other volunteer gleaners perform (amounts of donations; contact information for donors, receivers, and volunteers; and any other pertinent information). It will be very helpful to have this information if you decide to revive your gleaning program the following year, and if you decide to seek out any grant funding to extend the program's reach and impact!

Also, be sure to write about your experiences and post on [Serve.gov](#) to help inspire others and share best practices.

III. Gleaning and United We Serve

This summer, farmers, gardeners, market managers, and volunteers can expand their impact in communities by connecting with the President's United We Serve initiative. This national call to service began last year to help meet growing social needs resulting from the economic downturn. The [Serve.gov](#) website was created as an online guide for this initiative where individuals can read inspiring stories of service, learn more about volunteer opportunities, and create their own impactful projects. Hundreds of thousands of prospective volunteers visit the site each summer.

In previous years, gleaning was typically done on farms and was an opportunity only available to those in rural areas. However, with the increase in farmers markets, more Americans can get involved in this important activity and simultaneously develop relationships with local producers by gleaning at farmers markets. Last year alone, the number of farmers markets nationwide

Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT

increased by 13 percent from the year before. Estimates now indicate that there are nearly 6,000 markets across the country. Serve.gov can help connect both emerging and well-established markets with volunteers so that many individual efforts can be synchronized to have a unified, positive impact.

Many farmers markets, of course, could not operate without the consistent commitment of passionate volunteers. Farmers market managers can utilize Serve.gov to find volunteers to help establish or expand a gleaning program. Any market manager can create a simple post on the site and find additional volunteers to fill a wide variety of needs at their market. In addition to helping with a gleaning program, market managers might also want volunteer assistance to perform community outreach, help equip vendors to accept SNAP/EBT nutrition benefits – formerly known as food stamps – or for other tasks. Just like market vendors, individuals who would like to spearhead a gleaning program can also make posts on the website to get others involved in their initiative.



Also, for prospective market managers who would like to start a gleaning program at their markets, it is worth noting that a significant number of markets across the country have already established gleaning programs. According to the 2006 Farmers Market Survey, 23.9 percent of all markets across the country are already involved in gleaning. Therefore, they would not be alone in their efforts and can utilize networks of market managers (such as the [Farmers Market Coalition](#)) to learn from and share best practices with others. One success comes from a sophisticated effort in Bloomington, IN, which began in 2002 and has flourished into a partnership with several businesses and community groups. Last year, thanks to these efforts, over 28,000 pounds were donated to the Hoosier Hills Food Bank to feed those in need.

IV. Sources for Further Information

If you have any questions about gleaning, please contact the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at USDA, which compiled this toolkit, by emailing collaborate@usda.gov or calling 202-720-2032.

Society of St. Andrew

The Society of St. Andrew is a grassroots, faith-based, hunger relief nonprofit organization working with all denominations to bridge the hunger gap between the billions of pounds of food wasted every year in this country and the millions of Americans who live in poverty. For over 30 years, they have worked with donors, volunteers, and farmers to glean nutritious excess produce from fields and orchards after harvest and deliver it to people in need across the United States.

Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT

Feeding America

Feeding America is a national network made up of local food banks, individuals, national offices, and corporate and government partners, all working together to combat hunger in the United States. The organization provides grants to local food banks, secures food donations from corporate sponsors, works to standardize services across food banks, and does advocacy on behalf of the people they serve.

Ample Harvest

Ample Harvest is a nationwide effort to educate, encourage, and enable gardeners with extra produce to easily donate to a local food pantry. AmpleHarvest.org gives food pantries the opportunity to be listed in a central nationwide directory so that gardeners can share their fresh produce and, garden-by-garden, help diminish hunger in America.

USDA Citizen's Guide to Food Recovery

This guide, made during the 1990s when a Gleaning Program was active at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides extensive information about the topic, including an introduction to food recovery, highlights of successful programs, USDA connections to such efforts, descriptions of the role of various different actors (businesses, nonprofits, youth organizations, etc.), safety and legal issues, and a feature on a summer of gleaning AmeriCorps effort.

Farmers Markets Homepage from USDA Agricultural Marketing Service

This website offers several useful resources regarding farmers markets including: the National Farmers Market Search Engine, National Farmers Market Survey, facts and statistics about growth in the industry, advice on how to start your own farmers market, and more.

Farmers Market Coalition

The Farmers Market Coalition is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization, which began in 2006 in order to provide educational resources and professional development opportunities for farmers markets across the country. It has 300 member organizations, representing roughly 2,800 markets (or 21,000 farmers who sell their produce to their communities). Its Resource Library offers a wide variety of information for farmers, market managers, market researchers, and organizations sponsoring or looking to start farmers markets.

"Plant a Row for the Hungry" Campaign From the Garden Writers Association

Plant A Row for the Hungry is a public service program of the Garden Writers Association. Garden writers are asked to encourage their readers/listeners to plant an extra row of produce each year and donate their surplus to local food banks, soup kitchens, and service organizations to help feed America's hungry. There are over 84 million households with a yard or garden in the United States. If every gardener plants one extra row of vegetables and donates the surplus to local food agencies and soup kitchens, a significant impact can be made on reducing hunger. Since the program launch in 1995, American gardeners have donated over 14 million pounds of herbs and vegetables to feed the hungry in their local neighborhoods.

Let's Glean!

United We Serve TOOLKIT

The Wholesome Wave Foundation

The mission of Wholesome Wave is to nourish neighborhoods by supporting increased production and access to healthy, fresh, and affordable locally grown food for the well-being of all. This site provides instruction for those who would like to help provide access to healthy, fresh foods to lower income populations but are unable to start up a gleaning program. The foundation provides other methods of accomplishing this goal through collaboration between people on the ground, Federal and State agencies, and private funders. One highlight of the website is a map which illustrates partnering markets which have the capacity not only to accept SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps), but also to double their value.

Best Practices for Food Recovery and Gleaning in the National School Lunch Program

This report highlights the experiences of 12 nationwide school districts that received funds in July 1998 from USDA through one-year Food Recovery Cooperative Agreements. This manual describes how the school districts used their USDA funds to help them recover food from their cafeterias and donate it to the needy. It addresses how school food service staff developed systems to recover, store, and donate the recovered food. It explains how partnerships were formed with local nonprofit agencies in the community, and how school districts were able to identify and overcome obstacles to developing a school-based food recovery program. Finally, it shows how students can take an active role in this effort, and how food recovery can be integrated into curriculum.

Footnotes

¹See a New York Times article from May 18, 2008, entitled, "One Country's Table Scraps, Another Country's Meal" for an illustrated graphic of the amount of food an American family wastes each month: "[One Country's Table Scraps, Another Country's Meal](#)"

²All photos in this document, except cover photo and photo on page 4, were taken by Nada Zohdy, Truman Fellow at the USDA Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

³This and other pieces of advice come from Food for People's guide, "[How to Start a Gleaning Program at Your Food Bank](#)," March 2009.

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