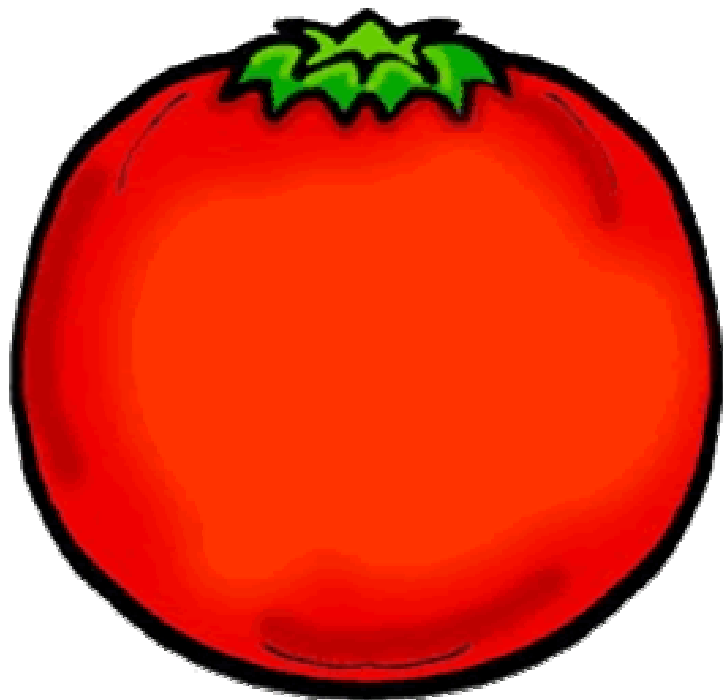


The Student Guide to

Gleaning



**Fresh fruits
& vegetables in
New York State**

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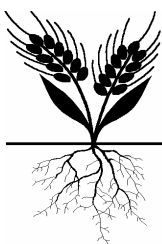
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Credits and use of this guide

This guide was compiled by the Hunger Action Network of NY State in Summer 2004. Much of the guide is based closely on, and quotes extensively from, *The Gleaning Handbook: How a community can feed its needy* published by the Community Action Agency of Franklin County and the NY State Department of Health.

This guide was made to be used. Please make as many copies as you need for distribution.

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*Getting to the
Root of the
Problem*

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Introduction

New York State's farmers grow over \$650 million worth of fruits and vegetables each year. Apples, potatoes, onions, snap beans, grapes, cabbage and sweet corn are New York specialties, and countless other crops are grown in smaller quantities.

However, due to today's mechanical harvesting techniques, the cosmetic standards of the retail food industry, weather, and other factors out of the farmer's control, much of this healthy produce never makes it to market-- on average nearly 20% of farmers' production goes to waste!

Around the state and the world, **Gleaning** programs have been organized to rescue this surplus of good quality, fresh food. Volunteers are organized to harvest the excess produce from a farmer's field, immediately after commercial harvesting is completed. The rescued food is then transported quickly to Emergency Food Providers such as soup kitchens and food pantries, or stored properly for later use.

Reasons for unharvested surplus



Weather Problems

Rain can inhibit mechanical harvesting; an early freeze may destroy enough of a crop so that systematic harvesting is not worthwhile.



Market Cosmetics

Considerations of shape, color, size and harmless defects will render crops unsuitable for commercial distribution.



Cost-effectiveness of additional harvests

Some crops such as broccoli are harvested repeatedly as the crop matures. At some point, it is not economical to harvest again for commercial scale.



Surplus

Farmers generally plant more than they can sell to cover potential losses. When nothing goes wrong, there is a surplus.

Examples of gleaning projects

Food Bank Farm, Amherst, Massachusetts: Food Bank Farm is a 60-acre organic farm in Amherst, Massachusetts. This farm is unusual in that it dedicates nearly half of its production to the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts-- essentially, the farm plans to have a surplus crop every season. The farm supports itself by selling its produce to over 600 families through a Community Supported Agriculture operation (CSA).

Food Bank Farm uses student volunteers for harvest from around the area. Several universities have an organized group of students that comes to the farm once a week. There is a contact person at each university who recruits volunteers, keeps in touch with the farmers, and arranges transportation for the gleaners. The volunteer visits usually last for about 4 hours, often on Saturdays when students do not have scheduled classes.

Benefits and barriers: The Food Bank Farm offers an extremely efficient model for growing and distributing fresh fruits and vegetables. However, this farm is very unique, and almost no other area has a resource of this magnitude and with this level of dedication to volunteers.

ComLinks Community Action Partnership Cooperative Gleaning

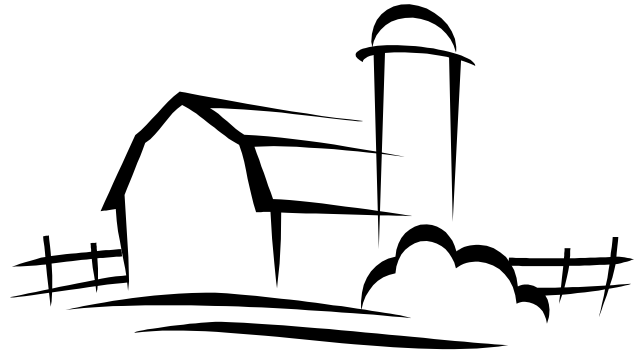
Program, Franklin County, NY: ComLinks operates a very large scale gleaning project that rescues over 1 million pounds of food each year from dozens of farms. Though they work with student volunteers, their outreach for gleaners includes groups of all ages and backgrounds, including churches, summer youth programs, department of corrections work crews, and community organizations.

Benefits and barriers: ComLinks has spent over 15 years developing relationships with growers and building their distribution network, which allows them to pour hundreds of tons of food into the emergency food network each year. However, a project of this scale is unrealistic for student volunteers to coordinate; also, some people object to their choice to recruit gleaners through the NY State Department of Corrections.

Hearty Roots Community Farm, Tivoli, NY: Hearty Roots is a small, diversified farm in the Hudson Valley that grows food for families (through CSA), farm stands and restaurants. The farmer regularly has extra produce that she is willing to donate Food Bank, but she does not have time to deliver it herself during the height of the farming season. Therefore, a community volunteer drops by once a week to bring the surplus to the Food Bank

Benefits and barriers: In many cases, surplus produce is just one step away from those who need it; a community volunteer who connects with a farmer to bring the produce to an emergency food program can be the difference that allows that food to be rescued. However, a very small farm is unlikely to have so much food that a team of gleaners is needed to harvest or transport it.

Identifying farms in your area



Things to consider:

Farm Size: The size of a farm can be misleading. Depending on the circumstances, even a small farm can provide enough produce to make gleaning worthwhile.

Farm crops: Farms that grow for roadside stands, community supported agriculture programs (CSA), or farmers' markets are likely to have a great variety of produce. Orchards or farms that specialize in only a few crops have less variety, but these can also be good candidates for gleaning. A large gleaned crop of apples, for example, could be donated to a food bank, to be distributed to food pantries and soup kitchens around the region.

Resources for identifying farms:

Cornell Cooperative Extension: Your county's Cooperative Extension Office can supply the names of major growers, their crops, and even their approximate acreages. To find your county's office, visit their web site at <http://www.cce.cornell.edu> or call (607) 255-2237.

New York Farm Fresh Guide: New York's Department of Agriculture & Markets publishes a *Farm Fresh Guide* that lists roadside farm markets, "u-pick" farms, and on-farm sales outlets by region. You can access the guide on their web site at <http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us> or request a copy by calling (800) 554-4501.

Farm Service Agency county offices: The federal Farm Service Agency has offices in most counties of New York. They have contact with many growers in their areas. To find the contact information for your county, visit the FSA web site at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ny> or call (315) 477-6300.

Farmers' Markets: Your local farmers' market is a great place to find out what's in season and make connections with growers in your area.

Approaching farmers about the project

Once you have identified farms that seem to suit the needs of your project, you should contact the farmer to see if gleaning can be arranged. Be sure to include the following detailed information:

The exact use of food gleaned: Give assurances that it will not be sold or misused. Include who will receive the produce.

The identify of the gleaners: Describe those who will pick. A group of approximately “X” students, etc.

The gleaners’ procedures, including supervision: Outline how the gleaners will work and describe the qualifications of their work supervisor/organizer. Ensure that the fields and orchards will be treated with care and other crops not disturbed.

A timetable that respects the farmer’s needs: Many farmers plow under a field within days of completing the harvest in order to plant a second crop or a cover crop. In your first discussion with the farmer, express your commitment to a schedule that does not delay the farmer in any way.

Contact person: Be ready to supply the name and telephone number of a group member for the farmer to contact when the field/orchard is ready for gleaning. The contact should also assume initiative, keeping in regular contact with the farmer concerning the crops.

Insurance information about the gleaners: Many farmers are rightly concerned about their liability for gleaners on their property. Make sure that your group is covered by the university’s insurance policy, or that the farmer’s liability insurance will cover gleaners.

Procedures for record keeping: Tell the farmer that the amount of produce gleaned from the farm will be recorded for the farm’s records (the farmer can deduct the value of the donated food from the farm’s taxes).

Publicity plans: Ask whether the farmer wants the farm’s name used in any public discussions or publicity.


As you compile this information, you will need to consider other aspects of the project, covered in more details in the following sections of this booklet.

Crops

Good crops for gleaning are nutritionally beneficial and appealing to the people to whom they will be distributed. This is common sense. The perishability of the crops, which determines how the crops are to be harvested, distributed, and stored, is a more complex matter.

If a crop requires refrigeration, the gleaners need to provide it immediately after the harvest or move the crop directly from the field/orchard to the recipient. For example, the average gleaner can easily pick 250 pounds of spinach or broccoli in a work day. If refrigeration is necessary before the crop is moved to the consumer, a cooler will have to accommodate the full amount likely to be harvested.

The following chart gives basic information about perishability of typically available crops in New York. Working from these average dates, gleaners can begin to organize a storage and distribution schedule. It is essential to stay in touch with farmers as the growing season progresses, because these dates can change by several weeks in any given year.



Crops	Harvest Period	Storage	Maximum
Apples	July-October	Refrigerate	7 days
Beans	July-September	Refrigerate	5 days
Beets	July-October	Refrigerate	5 days
Broccoli	June-October	Refrigerate	5 days
Cabbage	June-November	Refrigerate	10 days
Carrots	July-October	Refrigerate	10 days
Cauliflower	July-November	Refrigerate	5 days
Corn on the cob	July-September	Refrigerate	3 days
Potatoes	July-October	Cool, dark place	Months
Spinach	May-October	Refrigerate	3 days
Squash, summer	June-October	Refrigerate	10 days
Squash, winter	August-November	Cool, dark place	Months

Where to bring the food you've gleaned

Contacting and communicating with a farmer is only part of the gleaning equation. You must also do groundwork to ensure that the gleaned produce will end up getting to people who need it, while maintaining its freshness.

Food Banks: Every region in New York State is served by a regional food bank, which takes in large amounts of food and distributes it to emergency food providers, such as soup kitchens and food pantries, that serve local communities. Most food banks have the ability to store produce in proper conditions so it will stay fresh long enough to make it to someone's kitchen. For a large gleaning project, a food bank might be willing to help arrange transportation of the gleaned produce to its warehouse.

Emergency Food Programs: New York has roughly 3,000 soup kitchens and food pantries, serving up to 900,000 people every week. These range from large-scale operations with paid staff, to volunteer-run efforts that operate just a few hours a week. Therefore it is very important to communicate with an emergency food program about their needs, storage facilities, hours of operation, and hours of distribution. Emergency food programs may be located in places of worship, shelters, people's homes, or dedicated facilities.

Food Not Bombs: Food Not Bombs is a grassroots movement made up of hundreds of autonomous chapters around the world. Each chapter prepares and distributes free hot vegetarian meals in parks and at events their area without restriction. To locate a chapter in your area see the web site <http://www.foodnotbombs.net>

Other distribution opportunities: Some gleaning projects make arrangements to process fresh food so that it may be stored and distributed throughout the year. However, this incurs extra costs, and commercial facilities for canning or freezing are often necessary since food programs are unwilling to distribute food that has been home-canned, due to the risk of disease.

Who can glean, and how much can they pick?

Anyone who can pick low vegetables or fruit with ease can help with a gleaning project. Harvest skills can be easily taught, though there must always be a project leader to instruct gleaners on proper harvest technique.

The average gleaner will pick approximately 250 pounds of produce in a full day, depending on the crop. Many gleaning projects last only a half day, or a few hours.

Equipment and handling

The following basic equipment and supplies are needed for the first stages of gathering produce in a gleaning program:

Boxes/large bags for picking, transporting, short-term storage, and distribution. Plastic bags should be punctured so that air can circulate around fresh produce. A uniform box size is preferable for stacking. If you plan to use donated boxes, have a number of sources. You will need a lot of boxes.

Knives are necessary to harvest certain crops.

Gloves. Workers should bring their own, or you need to provide them.

Scale. A simple scale, even an old bathroom type, is needed to weigh the produce for the farmer's records.

Cooler space, sufficient to store the gleaned produce. Local businesses, institutions and fire departments are often helpful. If produce is distributed at the end of each day, cooler space is not necessary.

Water-proof clothing (pants and boots) are necessary for workers gleaning tall crops, such as broccoli, after rain.

Hats and sunscreen, for working in the sun.

Water and possibly water coolers.

Transportation

You will need to plan ahead to arrange:

Transportation of the gleaners.

Transportation of supplies, boxes and/or bags for the gleaners to use.

Transportation of the produce to a distribution site, food bank, or other temporary storage facility. A van or pickup truck is fine for short hauls or vegetables that are not prone to wilting, such as potatoes or apples. Consider the truck's ability to move through muddy fields.

Expense. Anticipate expenses for fuel and mileage.

Insurance

There are two basic insurance issues in a gleaning project: liability related to the gleaned produce and liability coverage for the gleaners.

Liability for gleaned produce

Farmers may worry that they could be held legally responsible if the produce that is donated were to make someone sick due to mishandling or other circumstances. Fortunately, liability related to gleaned fruits and vegetables is addressed by the Good Samaritan Law in New York State. This law exempts good faith donors of canned and perishable food to be distributed free of charge, or gleaners of any perishable food apparently fit for human consumption, from liability in certain cases. (New York State Agricultural and Markets Law Amendment LBD04420370A)

Liability for Volunteers

Liability for the volunteers who will be doing the gleaning on farms and orchards is a critical issue for the farmers and it is important to have coverage before contacting them. Fortunately student groups may be covered by their university's liability insurance policy. However, you will need to check on this ahead of time and you may need to provide documentation to the farmer.

In case the gleaners are not covered by a policy, they might be asked to sign an insurance waiver. However, some producers may not find this acceptable.

Tax issues

It is essential that records be maintained on all gleaned food. The records should track:

Date and location of each gleaning activity.

Amount and types of crops gleaned.

Distribution of the food, for example, the amount given to each food pantry.

Farmers may be able to deduct part or all of the value of the donated food from their taxes. It is best to consult with the food bank or emergency food provider to which you will be donating the produce about whether these donations are deductible, or to seek legal advice from an outside source.

The Fight for Food Justice

Gleaning is a good way to make sure that healthy, fresh food that would otherwise go to waste is provided to people who need it. However, in order to eliminate the problems of hunger, poor nutrition, and people going without enough food, we must also address the circumstances that lead to these problems. These underlying causes include:

- **Poverty.** Including lack of jobs, a minimum wage that is too low, lack of access to child care, lack of affordable housing, lack of opportunities for education, and lack of access to healthcare.
- **Inadequate transportation.** Often low-income communities have the least access to food outlets such as supermarkets and farmers' markets. Because many low-income families do not have cars, some are limited to buying food at corner stores and gas stations, where the available food tends to be high-fat and high-calorie.
- **A broken safety net.** Welfare reform has made it impossible for some people to receive the benefits that would help them out of poverty. Many New Yorkers who are entitled to food stamps are not enrolled in the program, due to stigma, lack of promotion, error, and difficulties in enrolling.
- **Disappearing family farms.** As corporate agri-business continues to tighten its grip on American farmers, urban sprawl makes it harder for the family farmers who are left to stay in business. Without locally-controlled, diversified farms, we will lose access to the freshest food, and our environment will be at greater risk.

On the other hand, a community that has achieved **Food Justice** is one in which all people have access to food that is affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate, and sufficient enough that they may lead active, healthy lives. There is no one model of Food Justice that fits every community; but there are many signs which reveal that a community is on the right track.

Food Justice is promoted when:

- **People have opportunities and resources to grow food** for themselves and their neighbors, whether on their own land or in community gardens.
- **Farmers make a good living** growing food and can sell it locally, while taking care of the land so that it will produce food for generations to come.
- **Children are taught about food and nutrition.** Schools that integrate hands-on garden programs, and that buy locally-grown food for their lunchrooms, offer children a healthier diet and a better understanding of how their food choices will affect their lives and their communities.
- **The government makes healthy food systems a priority** by encouraging farmers' markets, funding community-food based projects, and planning with food in mind.

Achieving Food Justice in your community

There are many steps that individuals, groups and institutions can take to help move their community toward Food Justice:

Buy locally grown food. Individuals and families can shop at farmers' markets; join Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms (these farms offer memberships to people for a yearly fee, in return for a bag of fresh veggies every week during the growing season); encourage their local stores to carry local food; and choose restaurants that support local farms.

Grow your own food. During World War II, people were encouraged to grow "Victory Gardens" to feed our communities; in 1943 there were estimated to be 20 million plots which produced about 40% of the nation's food! A similar effort today would ensure access to fresh, nutritious produce in all corners of our country.

Make farm to school connections. Many schools in New York State, both grade schools and universities, are beginning to purchase some locally grown food. Some schools incorporate gardening projects, nutrition education, cooking skills building, and farm visits in with this, giving kids hands-on experience with fresh food.

Take political action. Speak up and tell your elected representatives that you care about food and farm issues. There are many way that government, from local to federal, can help build a healthy food system. Zoning regulations can prevent suburban development from squeezing out farms; laws can make it easier for schools to choose to purchase locally grown produce; stricter regulation can prevent irresponsible factory farms from hurting the environment while undercutting family farmers' prices; and land in urban areas can be set aside for community gardens that allow people to grow their own food.

Support organizations working for Food Justice. Funding for Food Justice projects is extremely slim compared to the need. Many organizations, such as those listed on the following page, could make far greater strides toward a just food system if more resources were available. Consider joining, donating money to, or volunteering for an organization in your area that works on these issues. Also, encourage existing organizations that do not work on food justice issues to commit some of their resources in this direction.

Spread the word. The more allies we have working toward Food Justice, the sooner we will achieve it. There are some great resources for those who are being introduced to these concepts, such as Eric Schlosser's popular book *Fast Food Nation* and Marion Nestle's *Food Politics*.

Resource List

New York is home to many organizations that are working to create a more just food system. These include:

Hunger Action Network of New York State. Hunger Action is a statewide, membership organization dedicated to fighting hunger and poverty and promoting food justice in New York State. With offices in New York City and Albany, Hunger Action focuses on advocacy and statewide policy work; the support of community-based food projects such as community gardens and CSA's; and working with Emergency Food Providers to help end hunger and its root causes.

Phone: 212-741-8192 (NYC) or 518-434-7371 (Albany)

<http://www.hungeractionnys.org>

Just Food. Just Food is a non-profit organization that works to develop a just and sustainable food system in the New York City region. They do this by fostering new marketing and food-growing opportunities that address the needs of regional, rural family farms, NYC community gardeners, and NYC communities.

Phone: 212-645-9880

<http://www.justfood.org>

Community Food Resource Center. Founded in 1980 to promote access to nutritious food and adequate income for all New Yorkers, Community Food Resource Center is a leading advocate for improved government policies and programs and one of the city's foremost providers of direct service in these vital areas: emergency food assistance, food stamp access, nutrition services and income policy.

Phone: 212-894-8094

<http://www.cfrnyc.org>