

**So your congregation wants to glean...** By Phina Borgeson, ISFC Advisory Board and Sonoma County Food Recovery Coalition

**Gleaning** is the activity of harvesting surplus fresh produce for charitable purposes. A broader term is **food recovery**, which includes as well picking up food that has already been picked or prepared and delivering it to those in need, referred to as **food rescue**.

Often congregations have members or friends with large food gardens or backyard orchards, and some may even have a local farmer who has invited them to glean. This sounds like a great intergenerational activity. And of course the idea of surplus produce or produce that it's not profitable for the owner to harvest being provided to those without access is scriptural. But before your members run willy-nilly into a field of greens or start shaking fruit trees, there are some things to consider.

First, be in touch with any local gleaning or food recovery organizations. They can often provide useful advice, particularly about safe practices and where to deliver what you pick. Many such groups, in Sonoma County and the East Bay, are listed below.

Second, consider where what you glean is going to go. This is particularly important if you are going to be gleaning on a weekend since many food banks, food pantries and feeding programs are closed then. You may need to avoid gleaning on the weekend things that are highly perishable. Ask your local gleaning group about the who, what, how and when of recipients, or do some homework yourselves. The Sonoma County Food Recovery Coalition, in conjunction with CropMobster, has a website which can help.

Third, tap into the expertise in your congregation. In our communities with agricultural roots and high interest in fresh local food, most every congregation contains or knows a farmer, orchardist or home food gardener who can lend her expertise to your efforts. Are there among you people who have had safe food handling or master preserver training? How about volunteers at food banks, food pantries or nutrition programs? All have some expertise to share in gleaning, from planning and preparing through picking and packing to delivery.

Fourth, be sure to work closely with the owner or manager of the property where you will be gleaning. They may want to have a conversation with you about liability. Are all aware of the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan law? Does your congregation's insurance cover volunteers? Any damage they may cause? Property owners also will advise you on how to pick, and any restrictions on what or how much to pick.

Checked off all those items? Then it's time to think about the nuts and bolts of gleaning.

You'll need to line up any equipment. Fruit pickers are particularly helpful for apples, pears and quinces. Some fruit require clippers for picking. Know what you will need for what you are gleaning. Drop cloths are a good idea for protecting any fruit that drop while you are picking from potential contaminants on the ground. The property owner may have an orchard ladder, or you may need to bring a small ladder. Buckets or trugs and picking bags are great to pick into. Clean boxes for packing and delivering produce are essential. Wineries and

shops that sell lots of wine (such as Trader Joe's) are good sources of boxes. Be sure you have some vehicles carrying volunteers which also have room for full boxes of produce ready for delivery.

You'll also need to think about the safety and comfort of your volunteers. Every volunteer should wear clothes they don't mind getting dirty, sturdy closed-toed shoes, and sunscreen. Hats are a good idea, as are gloves for some things. (Just try getting your hands clean after tomato picking!) Volunteers should bring a water bottle, but also beware that access to a bathroom might not be provided. Review rules about safe use of ladders with participants, and bring a first aid kit.

Now that your lists of equipment for the glean and for what each volunteer should bring are done, make sure that you have enough knowledgeable adult leaders on the day of your glean. Think about one leader for every four or five volunteers. If you are involving older children and younger teens, you may want a higher ratio of adult leaders to young people.

### **Helpful Resources:**

Let's Glean! from the U.S.D.A. has more information on getting started.

[https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda\\_gleaning\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda_gleaning_toolkit.pdf)

Village Harvest in San Mateo and Santa Clara County has an interesting website, even recipes:

[www.villageharvest.org](http://www.villageharvest.org)

CropMobster and the Sonoma County Food Recovery Coalition can help you find a food program that would love your gleaned donation. <https://ucanr.edu/sites/SCRFC/>

Sonoma County Gleaning Organizations: Farm to Pantry <https://www.farmltopantry.org/>

Bounty Hunters - <http://www.petalumabounty.org/programs/bounty-hunters/>

East Bay Gleaning Organizations:

Alameda Backyard Growers – <http://www.alamedabackyardgrowers.org>

North Berkeley Harvest –

<https://ecologycenter.org/directory/directory-entries/north-berkeley-harvest/>

The Urban Farmers – <http://www.theurbanfarmers.org>

Find links to other Bay Area Food Rescue and Gleaning groups here:

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/links-and-resources-about-food-recovery-san-francisco-bay-area#donations>

Agnes Varda's modern classic documentary is available for streaming on Amazon (free with Prime) or from public libraries. It's in French, subtitled, as *The Gleaners and I*.

Revised, March 2019