

GLEANNING HANDBOOK

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This handbook was made possible through the assistance of Agriculture Canada, PEI ADAPT Council and the Canadian Microcredit Educators Group.



Introduction

This handbook is intended to serve two purposes. It is a guide for communities interested in starting a gleaning initiative and it is a training aid for new gleaners.

Gleaning is defined as harvesting leftover crops from a farmers' field after the commercial harvest. Often the crop has already been harvested and just needs to be collected.

Gleaning is an ancient practice that is being revived in urban and rural settings, on public and private land, and most often includes fruit, nuts, and/or vegetables.

Gleaning is a way to empower individuals to participate in the process of securing food in a dignified manner. Typically, volunteers receive a share of the harvest in exchange for their labour. Gleaning is not charity.

The information provided in this handbook is based on gleaning organic vegetables after the commercial harvest.

Food connects us all and gleaning is a fun way to get connected to the food we eat and to a community of like minded people.

Gleaning Basics

Gleaners and farmers are the backbone of any gleaning initiative.

Being a gleaner

“This was my first time harvesting and I would do it again a heartbeat! There is something so gratifying about putting your hands in healthy soil and pulling out good food. The company was great - you know the expression - many hands make light work - so true. It didn't feel like work at all!” Anita, fall 2013



Reasons for gleaning:

- satisfaction of making the world a better place by helping provide fresh produce to people who can't access it,
- pride in taking control of your own food supply (gleaners receive a share, typically one third, of what they harvest),
- learning how to grow, harvest, store and cook food for maximum nutritional value and taste,
- gratification of saving food that would otherwise be wasted,
- meeting like-minded people,
- appreciation of the diversity of crops being grown by local farmers and being able to make better food choices.

Whatever the motivation to participate, everyone is surprised how much fun gleaning can be!

Farming experience is not necessary to be a gleaner - just follow the guidelines in this handbook and instructions that are provided in the field.

Age, skill or physical health should not be a barrier to participating in a gleaning project. There are many tasks associated with gleaning: organizing the harvest, making telephone calls, directing gleaners to the field, and providing first aid and transportation.

In many cases, much of the gleaned food has already been harvested and just needs to be collected from the field.

People who feel unable to harvest can still participate by trading services or skills (child minding, food processing) for food collected by other gleaners.

Connecting with potential gleaners

Some of the methods used to inform people about gleaning projects are:

- social media,
- community organizations like the Salvation Army and other service agencies such as soup kitchens and shelters,
- word of mouth,
- meetings where topics of common interest are discussed (e.g. poverty, food systems, gardening),
- media coverage.



Benefits for the farmers

Farmers who are willing to donate their surplus crops are absolutely crucial to a gleaning initiative.

A sense of having contributed to the community is perhaps the greatest motivation for farmers to donate surplus crops. But other benefits can include:

- crops left in the field may attract pests or disease,
- farmers are happy the food is going to a good cause and not wasted,
- increased community awareness of agricultural practices,
- potential to harvest more commercial produce (a third of what is gleaned goes to the farmer),
- opportunity to get labour intensive tasks done in exchange.

Reasons for a crop surplus

Due to factors beyond the farmers' control, much good healthy produce doesn't make it to market. Some of the reasons for this are:

- mechanical harvesters eliminate small potatoes,
- crops such as broccoli are harvested repeatedly as the crop matures. At some point, it is not economical to harvest again,
- an early freeze may destroy enough of a crop so that harvesting is not worthwhile,
- considerations of shape, color, size and harmless defects will render crops unsuitable for commercial distribution,
- farmers generally plant more than they can sell to cover potential losses. When nothing goes wrong, there is a surplus.

Identifying farmers

Your local farmers' market is a great place to make connections with growers in your area.

A list of farmers in your area can be found on the internet or through a farm association (e.g. PEI Certified Organic Producers Co-Op, National Farmers Union, Federation of Agriculture).

You can spread the word by putting notices in the newspaper, on social media, and in newsletters of community organizations.

Approaching farmers for crops

When approaching farmers to participate in a gleaning project, it is desirable to have experienced gardeners or farmers on your team who can discuss any concerns in an informed manner.

Farmers need reassurance that the donated food will be used properly and not misused and that the gleaners will not cause damage or interrupt the farm schedule.



Organizing the Harvest

Pre Harvest communication with the farmer

When planning a gleaning harvest the following points should be discussed with the farmer:

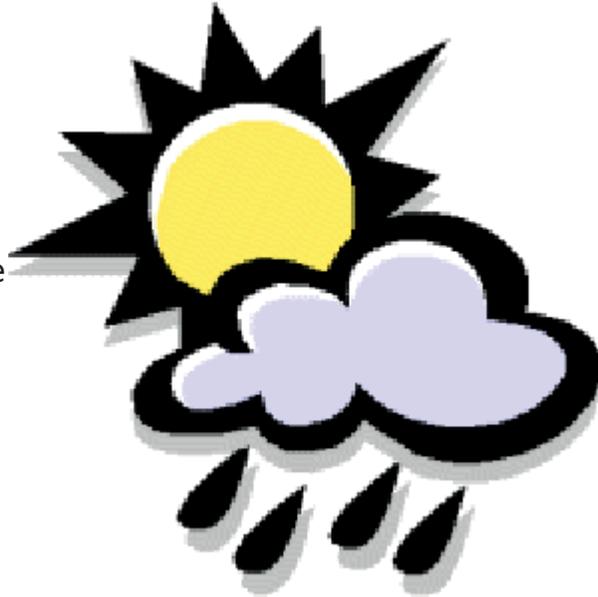
- qualifications of the harvest manager and gleaners,
- reassurance that the fields will be treated with care and other crops not disturbed,
- commitment to a schedule that does not delay the farmer in any way,
- approximate date the gleaning can take place,
- if the farmer wants to be at the gleaning,
- clear directions to the field,
- if the field is child friendly,
- estimated amount of produce to be gleaned in order to determine the number of gleaners needed
- any special equipment required for the harvest,
- if the farmer wants a share of the gleaned crop or any exchange of labour,
- whether the farm name can be used in public discussion or publicity,
- other instructions (e.g. parking).

Timing of the harvest

Gleaning usually occurs after the main harvest and the timing of the harvest is dependent on when the farmer does the harvest and the weather.

The best time of day to glean depends on the season:

- in the height of summer the harvest should be done as early as possible in the morning before the sun heats up the crop,
- as the weather cools in September, it is safe to wait until early afternoon to harvest,
- in the autumn it is best to plan to harvest mid-afternoon so crops can thaw before they are harvested.



Autumn harvests are particularly unpredictable and subject to last minute changes.

Communicating with gleaners

The communication system put in place to advise gleaners of a harvest and any last minute changes should be robust and inclusive.

Social media (e.g. Facebook) can be a valuable communication tool. However, gleaners may not use social media or may not have access to a computer or smart phone.

An email database and a telephone tree should be included in the communication strategy to keep everyone informed on a timely basis.

When gleaners sign up it is helpful to record their preferred method of communicating.

Transportation

Transportation can represent a barrier to participation, especially for people on low and fixed incomes.

Gleaners should meet at central locations to organize car pooling. Car pooling reduces congestion, damage in the fields and access roads, and overall cost of gleaning.

For the majority of harvests, a half ton truck should suffice to transport produce to the delivery point.

Equipment and supplies

These items should be available in the field:

- scale to weigh the produce gleaned,
- harvest containers,
- sharp knives,
- first aid kit,
- food grade storage containers,
- a method to clean hands.



Harvest records

The following information will be useful for harvest management, farmers' records, and to track tangible results of the project:

- date and location of each gleaning activity,
- amount and type of crop gleaned,
- distribution of the food,
- name of gleaner and number of hours worked.

Distribution and storage

It is critical that cooler space be available to store large quantities of fresh produce if it is not distributed or processed immediately. This should be arranged well in advance of the harvest.

The availability of refrigeration space may determine the amount of produce that can be gleaned at any one time.

For heat sensitive produce like leafy greens and lettuce, there must be a cooling/hydration plan to ensure the produce is delivered to the delivery point in good shape (e.g. wet towels over the produce).

It is useful to provide identification labels and recipes for any unusual produce.

Food skills workshops and community processing parties are often a feature of gleaning projects.



Safety on the Farm

Personal safety

Most safety issues are common sense, but the following should be reviewed at each harvest:

- safe knife use,
- proper lifting technique,
- buddy system for heavy loads,
- working to one's own capacity: no one should overexert themselves,
- awareness of the designated first aid person and the location of the first aid kit.

Proper lifting, stretching and warm up will help avoid most common farm injuries. A good resource for agriculture injury prevention is http://www.greenherontools.com/staying-healthy_warm-ups.htm



Food safety

There are primarily two food safety issues to be concerned with:

- the risk that produce may become contaminated due to handling during harvest or post harvest,
- the risk that contaminants are brought to a farm.

To reduce these risks the following should be adhered to:

- tools, harvest and shipping containers should be sanitized,
- storage containers such as boxes and bags should be stored in an enclosed storage area to protect them from insects, rodents, dust and other potential sources of contamination.
- domestic animals should be kept out of fields to reduce the risk of fecal contamination.

Appendices

Appendix A - Role of the harvest manager

The harvest manager has farm experience and is able to intuit the farmers' concerns and direct the gleaning team accordingly. The primary responsibility of the harvest manager is to ensure the gleaning is completed to the satisfaction of the farmer.

Checklist for Harvest Manager:

Pre harvest

- contact the farmer for information about the planned harvest and if possible visit the field and report anything that needs to be considered in organizing the gleaning.

At the harvest

- ensure gleaners receive proper instruction on how and what to harvest,
- determine that procedures are followed to minimize the risk of introducing pests or disease,
- do a safety orientation with new gleaners and ensure everyone is aware of the location of the first aid kit,
- pair experienced gleaners with inexperienced gleaners,
- collect waiver forms,
- assess how to get the produce from the field to the truck,
- ensure no damage is done to the farmers' crops or access roads.

Post harvest

- record the amount harvested ,
- ensure all gleaners record their time and sign the photo release (if applicable),
- complete the harvest record.

Appendix B - Harvest administration

Many people may be involved in the gleaning and to help ensure nothing is overlooked, one person should take overall responsibility for the administrative function.

Checklist for Harvest Administrator:

- Inform gleaners of the event either by phone, email, or Facebook,
- Advertise the event (PSA, newspaper, social media, on line event calendars, post on community bulletin boards),
- Arrange car pooling,
- Ensure transportation is available to deliver the produce,
- Arrange for the produce to be received (and stored, if applicable) at the delivery point,
- Ensure equipment and supplies are brought to the field (scale, harvest containers, knives, food grade storage bins, first aid kit),
- Collect and record the harvest record (date, location, amount, crop, name of gleaners, number of hours worked, where produce was delivered).

Appendix D - Gleaning release form - example

FOOD EXCHANGE ("FE")

I willingly participate in the gleaning of agricultural fields. I will do so at my own risk. I voluntarily assume full responsibility and agree to discharge, waive all claims against and to release FE, its employees, director, officers, organizers, representatives, the owner of the field upon which the gleaning will occur and, those owning or farming the crops that will be gleaned, including their subsidiaries, affiliates, predecessors, successors, lenders, lessors, lessee, sub-lessees and assigns, and anyone providing transportation to me, including the driver and the owner of any vehicle providing transportation, (hereinafter individually and collectively referred to as "Released Parties"), from any and all liabilities, claims, demands, actions, and causes of action arising out or related in whatsoever way to any loss, damage or injury including death that may be sustained by me, or to any property belonging to me, whether caused by the negligence of the Released Parties or otherwise, while participating in the gleaning, including traveling to and from the gleaning site.

I will have with me proof of insurance in my vehicle and a valid driver's license while carrying passengers on FE activities. I understand that I am responsible for my own actions and the actions of my minor children who may come with me. I agree to uphold the FE policies and procedures, and to make sure my minor children do also. I also understand that FE does not endorse anyone nor will be responsible for anything that might happen while another gleaner is providing childcare for my minor children so that I may glean or fulfill my volunteer activities. I agree to certify that my minor children are in excellent health and have no physical, mental or emotional problems which may affect participation in any activity. I also agree to respect the privacy and property of gleaners who allow distribution sites to be located at their residence, to abide by any rules set forth by them and to treat them with respect.

It is my intention that this GLEANING RELEASE FORM (this "RELEASE") shall bind me and the members of my family, if I am alive and my heirs, assigns and personal representative, if am deceased. I acknowledge and represent that I have read this RELEASE. I fully understand it, and I sign it voluntarily as my own free act. This RELEASE shall apply to all gleans I participate in during the calendar year set forth in the date line below.

Signature of Participant or parent guardian if under 18)

Date

Name of Participant (Print)

Appendix E - Harvest tips for common produce

Broccoli - pull down the leaves from around the head and make sure the heads are firm, there are no brown or damaged spots, and the individual florets have not started to open. Hold the head in one hand and with a smooth motion of a knife cut the head off leaving a stalk of about four inches. Smaller heads and florets are just as tasty as a large head.



Cauliflower - cut the stem of the cauliflower just below the head leaving some of the leaves to protect the head. If the outer leaves of cauliflower are tied up double check to ensure it is fine to harvest them as this normally indicates the farmer has wrapped the head to protect it from being sun burnt and turning yellow. You can see there is a little spot on the right side of the cauliflower in the picture. This is easy to trim off for cooking.

Cabbage - squeeze the head and, if firm, cut with a couple inch stem. Firmness of the head is more an indicator than size that the cabbage is ready to be harvested. Cut the cabbage high enough to remove damaged leaves but leave a few healthy wrapper leaves to protect the cabbage in transport.

Potatoes - potatoes are normally left behind by the harvesting machine. It is important to harvest potatoes as soon as the farmer is finished his harvest. This is because light turns the potatoes green and increases glycoalkaloid toxins. It is best to leave green spuds in the field unless there is just a spot or two that are easily be cut out for cooking.



Carrots - farmers prefer that the whole carrot be pulled and not broken off because pests and disease can overwinter in the stub left in the ground. Carrots store much better and longer if intact. It is good to take a garden fork to harvest carrots just in case they are solidly rooted, especially if the soil is dry. If you see worm tracks or extremely hairy rootlets or rot, leave the carrot laying on top of the soil. Essentially the same instructions apply to beets, radishes, summer (white) turnip and parsnip although these crops should be less trouble to pull from the ground.

Rutabagas -these are often amongst the last of farm crops to be harvested since they are very frost-hardy. Frozen rutabagas can be used immediately but rutabagas that are still in the ground are higher quality and will store better.

Appendix F - Information sheet for gleaners

Welcome and thanks very much for joining us. We hope you have fun, learn a lot and enjoy your share of the harvest. Please take a few minutes to read the important points below:

- ✓ You will need to bring your own container so you can take home your share.
- ✓ The Harvest Manager ensures no damage is done to the farmers' fields: please follow his/her instructions at all times.
- ✓ Identify the first aid person/location of first aid kit before you start gleaning.
- ✓ There are no bathroom facilities at the farm available to gleaners. Please respect the privacy and property of farmers.
- ✓ Neither ask for nor take any produce other than what has been specifically identified. If in doubt, ask the harvest manager.
- ✓ Please come prepared – bring water, snacks, rain gear, rubber boots, sun protection, gloves, hand sanitizer and dress for the weather.
- ✓ Please arrange to car pool if possible.
- ✓ Gleanings normally last for two hours.
- ✓ Please sign the waiver form before you start gleaning.
- ✓ Before you leave please record your hours on the harvest sheet.
- ✓ Please don't over exert yourself. Find a buddy to share a heavy load and ensure you use proper lifting techniques.
- ✓ If using a knife, ensure the blade is always pointed away from you.
- ✓ Please leave your animals at home.
- ✓ Some gleanings are child friendly; please inquire in advance.