

Merrymeeting Gleaners

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER



Left to right: A wagon load of Rhubarb from Growing to Give in late May; along with the volunteer who drove it, this particular truck was a huge asset at Six River this summer; a lettuce mix harvest kicked off the summer gleaning season at Goranson Farm.

A WORD FROM THE GLEANING COORDINATOR

BY DAVE BAECHER

Over the last couple months, I've used this platform to share many of my words, thoughts and ideas about gleaning but, in doing so, I feel that I run the risk of overstating my role within the program. The Merrymeeting Gleaners, of course, came about long before I was involved. The gleaners came about organically and they came about with great thought, effort and sincerity and they continue to grow based off of an energy of their own making.

An unneeded analogy: If the gleaners are a canoe on a river, you could say that I occasionally dip an oar in the water, but the direction was long since provided by the channel and the momentum stems from the existing current. If the gleaners were a rocketship you could say ... okay, really, that's enough out of me.

Without further digression, let's hear from some of the dedicated volunteers who make this all happen:

WHY I GLEAN

"When we conceived of the idea of a gleaning program in 2016, I was on the Food Security Committee of the Merrymeeting Food Council, and we wanted to address the issue of food insecurity in our local communities.

We knew that farmers usually had surplus produce in the fields that was not being harvested, and that there was a generosity among farmers that was evident. Many of them already brought produce to food pantries, and expressed a willingness to give

more. One of the issues for them was the labor to harvest the excess produce. We decided that a gleaning program that would partner with local farmers, and distribute healthy produce to those who need it was a good way to not only address the issues at hand, but increase awareness of the issue of food security and promote community engagement. This became the Merrymeeting Gleaners, and we started gleaning in the summer of 2016.



Merrymeeting Gleaners at MCHPP

What I enjoy about gleaning is the ability to meet interesting and community-oriented people, not only the potential volunteers but the staff at the organizations we collaborated with as well. So many people are out there doing good work and the enthusiasm is infectious (and motivating!) Getting to know the farmers has been wonderful as well, who are so generous and willing to help out even more than expected.

I also love being out in the field and seeing where my food comes from, feeling connected to the land, and being part of a program that is doing good in our community. All this, in addition to being part of a healthy local food system, "feeds" my soul.

-Michelle Rines

"My friend Michelle was one of the original gleaners, so I had heard about all the hard work that went into getting the program up and running. It took a lot of dedication from the original few to get it to the point where it is today! Many people have no idea that it went through several iterations before it became a well oiled part of MCHPP.

I started gleaning a couple weeks after I retired and have not looked back. I love the idea that the recipients are getting fresh healthy food and not just relying on processed and frozen foods. My

ulterior motive is that it gets me outdoors and is often good exercise. Plus I have met really lovely people. It is a great volunteer gig because you can sign up way ahead or just a day or two before. That way it is much more flexible than the standing commitment required by many volunteer opportunities. Working at a farm is my favorite, but sorting, working in the kitchen and doing deliveries are also very satisfying. I hope anyone reading this will give it a chance."

-Peg Duhamel

"I've been part of gleaning since the program began with Merrymeeting Gleaners. Besides trying to alter people's perceptions that I was volunteering to clean houses, I realized that I was actually helping to "clean" farmer's fields of excess produce! Initially my activity was a way to be involved in my community following retirement - but what has kept me coming back year after year are the farmer's, the friendships with other volunteers, being outdoors in beautiful surroundings and feeling good about our efforts to glean healthy produce. Yes, it can be really muddy (summer 2023), sweaty and dirty - but there's a great satisfaction at the end of the day. I'm grateful to be part of this program in midcoast Maine!"

-Sue Elsaesser



Left to right: Leeks and head lettuce getting packed up for one of our 24 recipient organizations; muddy farm lanes and poor vehicle access made for occasional tough sledding at Six River Farm; a winter glean at Goranson yields impressive variety (and weight).



NEW RECIPIENT SPOTLIGHT

BATH FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

We started working with the First Baptist Church in late summer of 2023 thanks to a connection fostered by one of our volunteers. The produce we provide to the church gets cooked and distributed as part of their new Meal and Warming Center.

"We are so grateful to have Merrymeeting Gleaner produce available to prepare our meals and for our patrons to take home."

-Dave Pecci, First Baptist Church Representative



GLEANNING STATISTICS

2,782 lbs

JANUARY TOTAL