

Merrymeeting Gleaners

MARCH NEWSLETTER



Left to right: A volunteer immerses herself in the process of blending tomato sauce; oven-baked chips were one of our most recent efforts to utilize the weekly bounty of gleaned potatoes; volunteers rapidly peel Goranson Farm sweet potatoes in preparation for boiling and mashing in the tilt skillet.

A WEEK OF WINTER GLEANING

BY DAVE BAECHER

A (somewhat) frequently asked question: What do the Merrymeeting Gleaners do in the winter?

Great question!

As currently constituted, the gleaners neither hibernate nor relocate the whole operation to southern climes for the winter, in fact the gleaning goes on all year in its own unique way. To fully unpack what the “offseason” looks like, let’s take a moment to chronicle a week of winter gleaning.

GORANSON FARM GLEANING

In a lot of ways the gleaning week starts on Saturdays when volunteers go to Goranson Farm for the only winter shift that actually takes place on a farm. Working in the Goranson’s processing barn, the gleaners go through stacks and stacks of root vegetables, squash and onions that have been set aside for quality or over production reasons.

Yes, some of the potatoes will have you seeing green and your finger may go through a soft spot in a butternut squash or two and, sure, there is a certain, say, juiciness to some of the onions. but within the literal tons of donated produce there are plenty of near-perfect veggies that we feel incredibly grateful to have access to.

A given morning at Goranson farm yields anywhere from 500 to 1,000 pounds of produce and, like pellets to a stove, this weekly infusion is what makes everything we do in the winter possible.

Fun Fact: January and February were the 6th and 7th most prolific gleaning weeks of 2023, easily outpacing the likes of April, May and November.

DELIVERIES TO RECIPIENTS

Of our 24 or so recipient organizations, roughly 10 stay on throughout the winter to receive our more root veggie-centric offering. We spend a chunk of time every Tuesday packing curated boxes for recipients- prioritizing diversity and quality as we pull from the produce that newly came in from Goranson farm. A volunteer delivers some of these boxes directly to recipients that day, while some organizations come and pick up directly from the Food Bank (see *list of winter recipient organizations at end of newsletter*).

SHARING TABLES

Like a pop-up food pantry for produce enthusiasts, Sharing Tables are anonymous, unstaffed tables of free fruits and vegetables taking place at various community centers throughout the week. The gleaners provide produce for four individual Sharing

Tables throughout the winter (see full schedule at end of newsletter).

In the harvest season, the Sharing Tables are almost entirely stocked with gleaned produce, however, in the winter we supplement with some fruit and other veggies from the Food Bank in order to diversify our offerings.

Gleaning volunteers deliver the produce, set up the tables and gather statistics on their use and effectiveness. Each Sharing Table serves anywhere from 15-30 guests a week.

COMMUNITY KITCHEN SHIFTS

We have kitchen processing shifts every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, with the primary focus being on utilizing local produce, yes, even in the very midst of winter. This means a fair number of potato and sweet potato-based projects (hash browns, latkes, potato chips, mashed sweet potatoes, oven baked french fries), more than a little dicing of onions and butternut squash, as well as the requisite shredding and chopping of carrots.

These shifts also serve as a great time to brighten up the winter a little bit by pulling out and packaging some frozen products from the summer (sweet peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, corn, green beans etc.). Vacuum sealing has a particularly high approval rating amongst volunteers as the process, best I can tell, seems to scratch some kind of universal itch. What is so satisfying about it? Honestly, words can't quite capture it - you have to try it!



Most of the food the gleaners process in these shifts goes to the Food Pantry as our best attempts to mimic the frozen vegetable and "time-saver" sections that you may see at the grocery store.

So that's a week of winter gleaning in summary! But much like the vacuum sealing process, words alone don't do it justice! Come give it a try for yourself!

GLEANNING STATISTICS

3,063 lbs

FEBRUARY TOTAL

5,845 lbs

2024 TOTAL



Vacuum sealing seemingly gives every product a little extra shine.



Sharing Tables

2024 Schedule

Brunswick – Curtis Memorial Library

Tuesdays, 11:30am-1:30pm

Bath (2 locations):

Patten Free Library – Tuesdays, 12-3:00pm

Bath YMCA – Thursdays, 9:00am-11:45pm

Topsham – Topsham Public Library

Wednesdays, 12:30pm-2:30pm

The Sharing Tables are unstaffed tables of free produce available for anyone to take from anonymously.



RECIPIENT ORGANIZATIONS



Village Clubhouse



DaySpring Integrative Wellness

