

Merrymeeting Gleaners

DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

A WORD FROM THE GLEANING COORDINATOR

BY DAVE BAECHER

With the spirit of Thanksgiving still fresh in our minds, I thought this could be a good time to show some appreciation for the local farms that make our work as gleaners possible. So for those of you who don't already know, let's go one by one through our partner farms, highlighting what makes each one unique.



Six River Farm



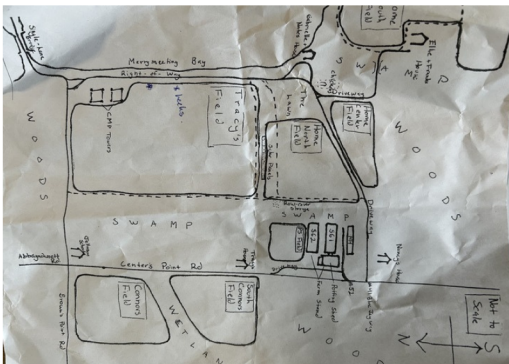
Six River Farm

2023 GLEANED PRODUCE TOTAL: 6,892 LBS.

Where it all began. That's right, Six River was the first partner farm for the gleaners and their commitment to the program provided an important proof-of-concept for the long term viability of the effort.

Six River is primarily a market farm and they have a local reputation for maintaining lofty quality standards- an emphasis that very much carries over to the near-perfect produce they make available for gleaning. In particular, the head lettuce is a spectacle to behold: bonafide bouquets of green, purple and red filling the trunks of gleaners cars and bursting above the lids of harvest crates. Head lettuce was a weekly staple of Six River gleans, yielding more than 1,000 pounds over the course of the season.

Finally, if we were giving out superlatives, I must say that Six River provides volunteers with the best harvest maps you'll ever see. Straight out of the opening page of a fantasy novel, these hand-drawn maps are so aesthetically pleasing and detailed that the cursory note that they are "not to scale" reads almost like false modesty.



Top: Lettuce harvest at Six River Farm. Bottom: An artist's depiction of Six River Farm.



Merrymeeting Gleaners at MCHPP



Cabbage harvest at Goranson Farm.

Goranson Farm

2023 GLEANED PRODUCE TOTAL: 19,847 LBS.

Old reliable. Gorason is a generational, family farm that started in the 1960's as "Goranson Potato Farm" and though they now grow mixed organic vegetables, the root vegetable connection remains strong. In fact, we gleaned 6,300 pounds of potatoes, 5,400 pounds of sweet potatoes and 1,900 pounds of carrots from Goranson this year- far and away the highest totals of any of the farms we work with.

Incredibly, Goranson has made a commitment to hosting gleaners throughout the year. In the winter months, they set aside storage crops for gleaners to go through every Saturday morning and they are the primary reason that we are able to deliver vegetables to some recipients every week of the year. In a lot of ways, it is due to Goranson Farm that the Merrymeeting Gleaners continue to have work to do throughout the winter!



Morning at Growing to Give.

Growing to Give

2023 GLEANED PRODUCE TOTAL: 9,179 LBS.

Gleaning paradise. Where the zucchini are never oversized, the rows are never too long and the root vegetables never come in dirty.

Growing to Give is a non profit organization and farm that donates the food it grows to hunger relief organizations. Since the farm is largely driven by and catered to volunteers, it is a great place to try gleaning for the first time. We gleaned twice a week at Growing to Give in the summer and, throughout, they provided us with large volumes of certain crops that we rarely had access to at other farms such as peas, green beans and tomatoes. The tomatoes in particular were an incredible boon, as we harvested 1,470 pounds over the course of August and September, which amounted to 70% of our total tomato yield across the gleaning program.

Growing to Give also makes a concerted effort to grow foods that are culturally significant to our New Mainer population including: amaranth, sweet potato vines, pumpkin leaves and african eggplant.



Merrymeeting Gleaners at MCHPP



Ginger and turmeric from Whatley Farm.

Whatley Farm

2023 GLEANED PRODUCE TOTAL: 5,475 LBS.

Organic veggies with a whimsical twist. If you go shopping at Whatley Farm's stand at the Farmers' Market, you will be able to find many of the local staples, but what will really catch your eye are their unique and aesthetically unusual offerings. This includes produce that usually doesn't thrive in this climate (ginger, turmeric, lemon grass), produce that has dramatic flavors (assorted hot peppers, dandelion greens, radicchio) and familiar produce in unfamiliar forms (black radishes, cylindrical beets, long-stemmed cauliflower).

Above all else though, I want to emphasize how uniquely generous Whatley has been with their produce donations. They meet us much more than half way in the process- taking care of all the harvest, washing and packing on their end such that the gleaners are simply responsible for picking up the donations once a week. This arrangement makes it so one volunteer is able to bring in an amount of produce that usually requires four or five people if we were harvesting ourselves!



Harvest Tide Organics

2023 GLEANED PRODUCE TOTAL: 1,637 LBS.

The hidden gem. Harvest Tide is a little off the beaten path and we only went there every other week throughout the season, but they definitely hosted some of the most memorable and enjoyable gleans of the season. The fall season was especially prolific, with literal acres of pepper and paste tomatoes as well as a whole high tunnel of cherry tomatoes made available for harvest. In general, Harvest Tide gleans were always highly colorful and satisfying with one experienced volunteer commenting that it was "the most fun they ever had while gleaned"!

Cherry tomato harvest at Harvest Tide Organics.

GLEANNING STATISTICS

48,765 lbs

2023 TOTAL

2,495 lbs

NOVEMBER TOTAL