

Merrymeeting Gleaners

NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER



Left to right: A pause in the lettuce mix harvest at Goranson Farm; a colorful haul of peppers from Harvest Tide Organics; gleaners comb for sweet potatoes in a thick fog at Goranson Farm.

A WORD FROM THE GLEANING COORDINATOR

BY DAVE BAECHER

As the harvest season starts to wind down, I'm spending more time looking at the accumulating data and, with that in mind, I thought this could be a good time to go over some gleaning statistics from the year! And if gleaning statistics sounds like a painfully dry subject to you, well, let's just go ahead and call it gleaning trivia! What could be more fun than that?

Have you ever wondered what crop we harvest the most of by weight? What about in terms of market value? Or, on the flipside, are there certain staple crops that we rarely bring in from farms? All these answers are right there in the data or, I mean, the trivia!

The leading crop in gleaning weight likely comes as no surprise. A favorite of doomsday preppers, its versatility and storage capacity have helped build civilizations, while its occasional failures have spurred famine. It is, of course, the potato—taking the top spot at 6,050 pounds, or 13% of our total gleaning yield. As for the runner up? Well that just happens to be its more tropical counterpart, the sweet potato—weighing in at 5,320 pounds.

The top 10:

1. Potatoes
2. Sweet Potatoes
3. Greens (includes lettuce)
4. Summer Squash (includes Zucchini)
5. Carrots
6. Tomatoes
7. Cucumbers
8. Winter Squash
9. Beets
10. Eggplant

Zooming in and nerding out, your monthly leaders are as follows:

- January: Potato
- February: Sweet Potato
- March-May: Potato
- June: Greens
- July: Summer Squash
- August: Cucumber
- September: Summer Squash
- October: Sweet Potato

Nothing unusual here, though I will note that the salad turnip was a spirited runner-up in June and tomatoes nearly took the top spot in September.



Of course weight is just one way to measure the produce that we bring in, and a relatively imperfect one at that. When it comes to hunger prevention, it is likely the most telling statistic, but looking at it from the farm's perspective- the time, labor and resources that go into producing the crop- total market value is probably the best way to quantify their donations.

Using our gleaning data with the information from UMaine Cooperative Extension's Farmers Market Price Report, I am able to tell you that the broad category of greens (head lettuce, lettuce mix, spinach, arugula, mustards etc.) takes the top spot in market value. This year we've harvested 4,600 pounds of greens and, due to the high market values for these crops, it just barely exceeds potatoes for total value.

Finally, what staple crops are we not gleaning very much of? Looking at the data, the ones that jumped out to me were broccoli (31st rank), cauliflower (30), corn (21) and green beans (23). Much of this isn't surprising: beans are labor intensive and don't yield large weights, most of our partner farms don't grow corn, however, the broccoli and cauliflower numbers were very interesting to me.

So what do we make of all this? Is there value to this data beyond the trivia? I believe the numbers give us some perspective as we are setting priorities or making decisions during harvest. Even more crucially, MCHPP buys produce from these same partner farms on an annual basis and I think that this data can be a really valuable tool when it comes to making informed purchasing decisions.

GLEANNING STATISTICS

46,271 lbs

2023 TOTAL

7,224 lbs

OCTOBER TOTAL

FOUR MONTH FLASHBACK

As the weather really start to get cold, I'll leave you with a couple of photos from July:



Left to right: A forest of Whatley Farm Cauliflower heads for the freezer; volunteers make zucchini fritters and cole slaw mix in the Community Kitchen; A cultivating tractor admires its work at Phil's Farm in Bowdoinham.