

Merrymeeting Gleaners

OCTOBER NEWSLETTER



Left to right: Brassicas growing on the shores of Merrymeeting Bay at Six River Farm; volunteers baking cornbread for the Community Kitchen Open House using cornmeal donated by Fairwinds Farm; a gleaner works through a 700 ft bed of brussel sprouts at Crystal Spring Farm.

A WORD FROM THE GLEANING COORDINATOR

BY DAVE BAECHER

I tend to be selective about the signs that I read into with a definite bias for the positive.

With that in mind, what should be made of the fact that I started as the Gleaning Coordinator in May and it has pretty much been raining ever since? Depending on who you ask, this has been the hardest growing season for farmers since at least 2009. And for fruit growers, who have contended with the devastating combination of early blossoms and late freeze, there is an argument that there hasn't been anything like this since the 1800's. What do we make of this?

On the one hand, there is no getting around the negative realities of it. Yields are down, diseases are striking earlier and more often and some crops have been lost all together. And those are just the concerns that are specific to this year. Bigger picture, a litany of other challenges loom on the horizon or- in the case of the emerging problems of

PFAs and Jumping Worms- the next crises may be lying dormant in the soil.

But remember, I'm glass half full by nature! Even if that particular glass is half full of rain water, I'm going to do my best to find the positive in it!

For those of you who don't know, I used to work at Six River. I started there in 2014 at a time when the previous most rainy summer (2009) was still fresh in their minds. They were a new farm in '09 and Nate told me that their crops suffered quite a bit with the conditions, but I remember that he had a surprising take away from the experience. He said that the challenging weather served as a welcome stress test for their business and that it gave them proof-of-concept for their markets and farming systems in a way that ideal growing conditions never could have. In other words, it made them more confident that their business was viable regardless of yearly weather variations.



I'm choosing to go with a similar line of thinking here: I believe this crazy, wet, Murphy's law of a growing season has only served to highlight the resiliency of our gleaning efforts. Produce volumes are a bit down from years past, but volunteers have displayed unwavering levels of dedication, flexibility and grittiness in the face of downpours, flooded farm lanes and the accompanying scheduling headaches. Every shift that has been postponed for weather has been made up within the same week

and, not only have we served all the recipients that we set out to, we have actually taken on a few new ones in the process! And, perhaps most impressively, we haven't skipped a week with any of our recipients. Sometimes deliveries went out on different days or in different ways, but every single recipient has received their veggies every single week! Now, what can we accomplish in a normal growing season?

GLEANNING STATISTICS

37,508 lbs

2023 TOTAL

7,962 lbs

SEPTEMBER TOTAL

(through 9/27)

FOUR MONTH FLASHBACK

Since I have been accumulating photos all summer but I am only starting a newsletter in October, I thought it would be fun to share some older photos. Here is a selection from June:



Left to right: A mountain of napa cabbage harvested at Growing to Give; a tray of Goranson Farm strawberries headed for the Community Kitchen Freezer; a gleaned cucumber captured mid-flight at Six River Farm.