



Gleaning in Lane County 2005

What is Gleaning?

Gleaning is the ancient practice of harvesting, collecting and gathering leftover or unsold produce from farmers' fields. Every year tens of thousands of pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables are tilled under the field or left to rot, usually after the commercial harvest. Gleaning recovers this highly nutritious food, reducing waste and providing food for people who need it. Farmers, backyard gardeners and commercial growers may invite a gleaning group to harvest their surplus produce.

How Does it Work?

The basic principle is simple. Gleaners (low income, able bodied volunteers) organize themselves into gleaning groups. Gleaned food is divided among the group's participating members, including "adoptees" - members who are elderly, disabled or otherwise physically unable to work in the field. Adoptees often contribute to their group by assisting with phone calling, transportation or sharing food preservation skills, among other gifts. Gleaners also share with food banks, group meal sites, and other local non-profit hunger relief programs. More than 10,000 individuals access food through gleaning groups operating as part of the Oregon Food Bank statewide network. This organizational model for gleaning groups is unique to the West, primarily Oregon. Nowhere else in recent history have so many low-income people worked together so consistently for so long.

What Makes Gleaning Groups Unique?

Gleaning groups are unique in that the people involved in procuring and distributing the food are also the ones who receive the food. Every demographic is represented within the gleaning community. Households are mostly families with children, but also include single seniors; many of whom take great pride in keeping the endangered "art" of home food preservation alive. For most gleaner households, participating in the group is the best way for them to access surplus food while maintaining their dignity. A strongly held value among gleaners is that they be active participants in the process of feeding themselves and their families.

How are Gleaning Groups Organized?

Many gleaning groups engage in gleaning activities informally, while some choose to form tax-exempt, non-profit organizations. In the early 1970's in Oregon, many gleaning groups partnered with local food banks as vital links in statewide efforts to address hunger, food insecurity and to minimize food waste. Throughout the statewide food bank network, 30 gleaning groups have worked successfully to develop their own non-profit grassroots organizations. Successful gleaning groups are self managing. This includes being responsible for coordinating the day-to-day functions of the groups' food recovery and distribution activities, maintaining good records, following best practices for safe food handling and fiscal oversight. It also includes developing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure equitable access to food and fair treatment of all group members.

Gleaning groups that are part of the statewide network can either file for tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service, or enter into an "umbrella" agreement with a sponsoring agency that has its own 501 (c) 3 status. Some gleaning groups have found an umbrella agency to cover them on a

temporary basis while waiting for their IRS application to be completed, a process that can take up to 12 months.

What Does an Umbrella Organization Do?

The sponsoring non-profit organization has a letter of agreement with the gleaning group that outlines mutual responsibilities of the two groups, oversight responsibilities, and reporting requirements. The mission, goals and activities of the gleaning group should be consistent with the mission and purpose of the non-profit organization that umbrellas them. As the holder of the tax exempt status, the umbrella organization has the ultimate legal responsibility for ensuring the gleaning group follows best practices for non-profits.

How do Gleaning Groups Work with Food Banks?

FOOD for Lane County, a member of the Oregon Food Bank Statewide Network, supports gleaning as one way that food banks, local growers and people with limited incomes can work together in support of a more food-secure community. Gleaning encourages self-reliance by supporting the initiative of limited-income families to meet their own food needs.

Throughout Oregon, many gleaning groups choose to apply to become member agencies of their local food bank. This relationship affords them access to food resources as well as technical support and assistance, trainings and other tools that support them in being effective partners in addressing hunger in their local communities.

Brief History of Gleaning Activities in Lane County

In the early 1980's, members of The Lane County Gleaners & Gatherers gleaned food and shared food preservation skills. In 1984, FOOD for Lane County (FFLC) was organized to coordinate the distribution of USDA food in Lane County. Out of this grew the "full service" food bank we have today, which supports and manages varied programs, partnerships & hunger relief efforts. Throughout the 80's and early '90's individuals continued to glean independently and through grassroots community based groups. FFLC sponsored four gleaning groups beginning in 1997. Since then, many people have worked hard to harvest field produce, and distribute food from the FFLC warehouse.

As part of FFLC's commitment to ensuring equitable and effective programs, and in support of the self reliance gleaners value, in 2003 it was determined that FFLC would transition the program from being internally sponsored to a member-agency structure. Food banks and gleaning groups can work together to help meet the needs of an increasing number of people struggling to make ends meet.

FOOD for Lane County values the unique role that gleaners fulfill. We look forward to working in partnership to create a sustainable model locally that ensures safe and equitable distribution of food; fosters mutual responsibility; is aligned with the statewide gleaning model and FFLC's organizational goals, and provides an opportunity for renewed partnerships with gleaning groups in Lane County.

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